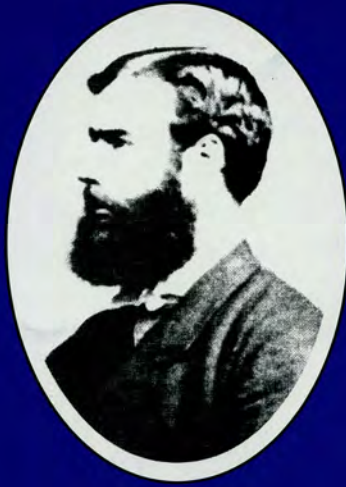




THE  
JOURNAL  
OF  
*THE KILVERT SOCIETY*



# THE KILVERT SOCIETY

*Formed (in 1948) to foster an interest in the Revd Francis Kilvert,  
his work, his diary and the country he loved*

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**The Reverend D.N. Lockwood M.A.**

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*Front cover: Draycot Lake. Photo by John Hockin*

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Number 15 September 2004

### From the Editor

Could this be the last *Journal* you will receive? I very much hope not, but I have been asked by our treasurer to remind life members that unless they take out an annual subscription (£12 or £15 – and don't forget that the Society now qualifies for Gift Aid\*) then as from January next year, instead of three issues of the *Journal* (in March, June and September), they will receive just one brief Newsletter in February outlining the Society's programme for the year.

I trust that all life members will choose to continue receiving the *Journal*, otherwise I could perhaps be out of a job!

It occurred to me last Sunday (24 July) as I was walking a modest stretch (less than half of that walked by my wife!) of the Kilvert Pilgrimage that it is indeed a privilege to belong to the Kilvert Society, not only for the access that it provides to Kilvertiana but also for the unusual, instructive and enjoyable excursions that come one's way.

Last Sunday's Pilgrimage, the sixth, although not organised by the Society (it is the brainchild of its leader, our member the Revd Dr Humphrey Fisher of Newchurch) was one such excursion. It gave those of us who took part, and we were by no means all Society members, an opportunity to walk through the tranquil beauty of the Radnorshire Hills and to worship, on the same day, in four remote and now alas, little-used churches, so well known to Kilvert: Newchurch (morning coffee and matins), Bryngwyn (harp music, poetry, meditation and lunch) Llanbedr (tea) and Llanddewi Fach (evensong). It was an uplifting (and health-giving!) experience.

As I walked I thought too of the interesting locations of other recent Society events: Dulwich, Moccas, Aberystwyth, Bath and of the range of knowledge and expertise displayed by our guides on those occasions (see *Journals passim*). I remembered also the weekend at Monnington in June, again an opportunity to follow in RFK's footsteps and to appreciate the skill of our guide on the Saturday, Gordon Rogers, and then to take part in a BCP evensong on the Sunday in the calm and ancient surroundings of another little-used Kilvert church, St Mary's. The tiny church was full.

Moreover, there is always, of course, a restorative tea to enjoy at the end of any visit!

We KS members are therefore, in my view, inordinately well blessed. So, I conclude as I started, in the hope that you will all not only wish to continue to support KS activities but also, and more importantly as far as the editor is concerned, that all life members will wish to continue reading about them, and about much else besides, in the pages of the *Journal*.

**\*Please give your immediate attention to the inserts relating to Gift Aid and to other important matters enclosed with this issue.**

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### From the Secretary

At our committee meeting in May Michael Sharp thanked John Wilks and the finance sub-committee for their work regarding subscriptions and charitable status. He said that the annual dinner had been a success. Kilvert's Hotel which had agreed to host the evening at very short notice, had been very welcoming and had provided a good meal. However, committee members generally felt that the dining room was rather small. Next year's dinner will be held at the Swan at Hay on Saturday 22 April and the AGM on the previous evening, Friday 21 April, in the Bishop's Palace, Hereford. Michael said that this year's February trip to Bath had been a great success and letters of thanks had been sent to John Day. There was a discussion regarding future winter events and whether there should be an alternative itinerary to cover the possibility of inclement weather.

The secretary gave details of a proposal by a resident of Hay to facilitate the revival of the old Welsh tradition of the 'Mari Lwyd' performed sometime during the twelve days of Christmas. Kilvert referred to the tradition in a letter to his niece, Essex Hope. It was agreed that the secretary would obtain further details from the Museum of Welsh Life at Cardiff and the committee would then decide if the Society wished to be involved in the project.

The finance sub-committee considered the contents and distribution of the new Newsletter as well as a number of other changes sanctioned at the April EGM/AGM. The events sub-committee met in August in order to plan the events for 2005-2006.

There was further discussion on the Kilvert showcase. An alternative venue was being considered. The committee felt strongly that the Society must retain ownership over the entire collection wherever it was ultimately housed. Security was also of paramount importance. At the time of writing the secretary had received a letter from a member suggesting another location for the showcase. This was being considered.

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## **FORTHCOMING EVENTS**

### **September Weekend**

Saturday 25 September: 1.45 p.m.

Assemble in the car park Brobury Gardens, Bredwardine, admission to the gardens is £2.00 per head. After this visit we will continue to the remains of Snodhill Castle, a car ride of about 15 minutes. Parking at the site is limited and so car sharing is strongly advised, this will be organised prior to departure from Brobury. The Snodhill site is up a short climb which can sometimes be wet and slippery so please bring appropriate footwear. The walk will be led by Colin Dixon. Tea will be provided at Moccas Village Hall at about 4.00 p.m. **for those members who have pre-booked.**

Sunday 26 September: 3.00 p.m.

Evensong at St Andrew's, Bredwardine, followed by tea at Oakchurch **for those members who have pre-booked.**

### **The Winter Event 2005**

We will be visiting Oxford on Wednesday 23 February 2005. The tour will begin at 10.30 a.m. at a venue in central Oxford. It is hoped to hire a tour bus if a reasonable price can be negotiated and those attending will be asked to contribute to the cost. If this is not possible the tour will be on foot. We will be visiting some of the places mentioned in the *Diary* and it is anticipated that the tour will take between one and two hours. Members will be free to make their own arrangements for lunch. In the afternoon we shall visit Wadham College. It is hoped to conclude the day with a short service in the College Chapel. It is anticipated that the event will end between 3.30 and 4.00 p.m.

This is a broad outline of the day and an exact itinerary will be sent to participants in January 2005.

A coach will be run from selected points in Herefordshire and Worcester city to Oxford. If you intend to travel by coach please indicate your preferred pick-up point on the booking form.

It is strongly recommended that those members using their own transport use the Oxford park-and-ride facility, as parking in the city centre is difficult. Details of the five park-and-ride venues will be sent to participating members.

Please complete the enclosed booking form if you wish to attend this event and return it to the secretary by Saturday 9 October (at the latest). **Members travelling on the coach to Oxford must send a deposit of £10 per head with the form.** Please make cheques payable to the Kilvert Society.

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## **THE JUNE WEEKEND**

**By Peter Beddall (Great Witley)**

### **Visit to Monnington**

I went to bed on Friday evening 25 June very content knowing that tomorrow would bring another enjoyable day, meeting with friends, exploring Monnington-on-Wye, another Kilvert landmark. 'Oh no', I mumbled, as I woke up to hear the rain lashing at my window, 'it can't, please not on a Kilvert excursion day!' My wife said 'They'll never go walking in this.' I disagreed 'Oh yes they will, Kilvert Society members are a very tough breed indeed.'

When we arrived at Monnington Court our secretary David Elvins was already there to oversee the parking, making sure we did not damage the smart grass verges. When we had all assembled on the car park there were thirty-nine of us, including Sylvie Surget, a friend of Pam and Jeff Marshall, all the way from Paris! Also it was great to see members from Wiltshire and our former chairman Ron Watts and his wife Joan joining us again.

Gordon Rogers was our guide and mentor for the day and what a splendid job he did. He invited us first to visit the church of St Mary's, which is adjacent to the Court. As I passed the Court I could see what a great historical house it is. The house includes

a Moot Hall completed in 1230, rare for its size and still intact. The rest of the Court was built in two sections, in the 1400s and the 1600s. The lake has ornamental ducks, geese and a rare black Australian swan. The gardens have large and small sculptures, works by Angela Conner, the wife of the present owner, Mr John Bulmer, of the cider family fame.

To the west of the porch entrance of St Mary's lies a stone slab reputed to be the grave of Owain Glyndwr, a belief that has existed since at least 1679 and even Kilvert mentions it as fact in the *Diary*. Research has since proved that this is not true and confusion has arisen because of another Monnington in Herefordshire which is the more likely resting place, Monnington Straddel.

Once inside the church Gordon ascended to the pulpit, a correct and proper place from which to address the Kilvert Society! He told us that the Society had last visited here in 1981 and 1992 and mentioned that a 1981 Newsletter contained an article, by Reg Morgan (former publications manager) describing Monnington Court.

High up on the south wall of the church hangs the Royal coat of arms. It is beautifully carved in wood and hand-painted. It is the Royal Stuart arms and the initials C.R.2 bravely stated the owners of Monnington Court's loyalty during the height of Cromwell's power. From 1874 until 1889 William Smith was the parish priest here, he had married Kilvert's sister Thersie. William and Thersie had four children, Hastings, Perceval, Florence and Essex and, of course, we should be forever grateful to Perceval who submitted the *Diary* for publication in the 1930s.

Kilvert Society luck again, for as we left the church the rain eased off; we were ready to commence our walk, after a brief pause to visit the facilities which gave the curious (like me) an opportunity to visit the inside of Monnington Court!

Our stroll was along the Monnington Walk, made famous in one of Sir John Betjeman's films and famous too for being mentioned in *Kilvert's Diary* as *a noble avenue of Scotch firs bordering a green ride, stretching from Brobury Scar to Monnington Court*. The walk was designed and planted by Thomas Tomkyns in 1623 to celebrate his election as the Member of Parliament for Leominster.

As we walked along it was possible to see the orange bark that Kilvert describes when the sunlight glinted upon it. Gordon gave two *Diary* readings during the walk related to Kilvert's visits to Monnington. We could also just see the garden of the Rectory once the home of William and Thersie that backed onto the walk. We ended our stroll at Brobury Scar, (see p10) a wooded sandstone cliff with the Wye running far below, in the distance Dorstone Hill was shrouded in mist.

Returning to the Court some of us went to look at the horses in their stables. The farm belonging to the Court is the foundation farm for the Morgan Horse of Great Britain.



*Gathering outside Monnington Court. Gordon Rogers chats with David Elvins.*

The Morgan is the only living sample of the horses made famous by painters and sculptors of the past as the mount for Royalty and leaders.

We left the Court to drive the half-mile to Oakchurch garden centre where tables had been reserved for us. Over an excellent tea we all agreed that the afternoon excursion had been most enjoyable and interesting. Thank you very much Gordon.

### Sunday 27 June

We all met once again at Monnington Court at 3.00 p.m. the following day for evensong at St Mary's. Using the same car park we had to traverse the gardens of the Court to enter the church. Here the



*Tea at Oakchurch.*

aforementioned black Australian Swan took a fancy to my wife Carol and chased her until she reached the sanctuary of the church. I would have rescued her if I had not been laughing so much.

The service was conducted by our member the Revd Clive Edmonds. Introducing his sermon Clive pointed out how little the church had changed since Kilvert's day and indicated that the lighting was by oil lamps only. (It crossed my mind that the Society could hold a very atmospheric Christmas carol service here). He also told us about the flood which Kilvert mentions, where a boat was used to paddle up the aisle.

We sang four hymns and the one *Immortal, Invisible, God only wise* is a favourite of mine. The first lesson was read by our chairman and the second by our editor.

The president of the Society the Reverend David Lockwood, in the Act of Remembrance, gave thanks for the life of Francis Kilvert. He spoke of all the admirable qualities of the man we have come to know through his *Diary*.

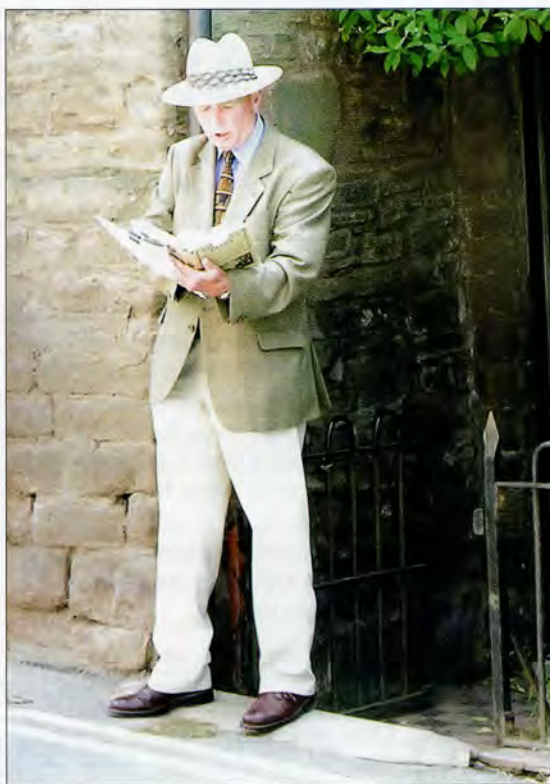
After the service we paid our second visit in as many days to Oakchurch garden centre. The tea was just as good the second time around, although I could only get my hands on two of the delicious cakes as Carol was watching too closely. I always feel rather low when our very enjoyable excursions come to an end, but never mind, there's always the next one to look forward to with great anticipation.

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### **KILVERT'S HAY**

**By Ann Dean (Hereford)**

On the Wednesday of the Hay Festival week which ran 28 May to 6 June, the Kilvert Society organised a short guided tour around the town. Michael Sharp, Society chairman, led the walk, pointing out along the way various places mentioned by Kilvert in the *Diary*. There were about twelve people in the gathering and the weather was gloriously sunny.



The group was taken to see the old railway station frequently used by Kilvert, closed in the 1960s and now a busy commercial yard. During a reading by the riverbank a new 'member' of the Society, Milly, tried to tag along but the spaniel's mistress eventually caught up with her and took her home. Michael read a piece from the *Diary* which referred to Mr Meredith, a clever man with whom Kilvert had many interesting conversations. Mr Meredith's house still stands, very near to Hay Bridge.

The party stopped outside the Kilvert's Hotel which was once the home of Dr Clouston and Michael read the *Diary* entry for Sunday 27 August 1871 which describes the bolting horse passing his house and the injury to young Hopie Morrell.

The final stop was St Mary's church, for a welcome cup of tea and slice of cake!

*Michael reads from the Diary outside Meredith's house.  
Photo by Ann Dean.*

## **A VISIT TO ST JOHN'S CHAPEL, HAY-ON-WYE**

**By Julia Yeardye (Chesham)**

At the conclusion of the morning seminars on 24 April last, during the AGM weekend, about 25 KS members crowded into the confined space of St John's chapel to view the interior of this fine old building.

According to our guide, Karl Showler, St John's in Lion Street, is reputedly one of the oldest sites in Hay and it is therefore a building with a very chequered history. This very small chapel may have been founded in 1100 when the first motte and bailey castle was built in Hay by the Normans, thus it pre-dates St Mary's church of 1115 and, being within the town it was, possibly, later on, easier for many to attend services there rather than at the more distant parish church.

It was once the chapel of the tradesmen of the Guild of St John the Baptist and like many similar establishments it supported the sick or distressed, lands and capital being given to provide an income. Goods, trade, markets and apprenticeships were regulated by the Guild and priests held services for workers.

However, charities such as St John's ultimately suffered the same fate as the monasteries and abbeys. In 1547, in the reign of Edward VI the lands, revenues and possessions were forfeited to the Crown and so much was lost to the little chapel that it could not function as a place of worship as well as it had in the past.

During the reign of Elizabeth I fortunes fell rapidly and in 1567 the property was leased to one John Vaughan who undertook much-needed repairs. Evidence has shown that services were not conducted here after 1700 when St John's became a schoolroom aligned east to west.

In 1810 the buildings were converted to a lock-up and continued to function as such until 1875; there were two cells, a gaoler's accommodation and a small exercise yard. After 1877 the building had a further variety of uses: shops, another school, a bank and even at one time as a pound for stray animals.

In 1845 the Revd William Latham Bevan became vicar of St Mary's and remained the incumbent there for 56 years, greatly assisted by his daughters Mary, Louisa and Ellen. As we know during his curacy at Clyro RFK was a frequent visitor to the Bevans and another daughter, Fanny, was the inseparable friend of Kilvert's lost love, Daisy.

Mary Bevan shared her father's interest in parish history and directed her sympathy towards the little St John's building.

She married in 1886 and under her married name of Dawson she purchased the St John's site, restored the chapel and its adjacent buildings and proudly presented the whole to the parish on 10 October 1930. She felt that the chapel would be of great benefit to the old and infirm of the parish who may have found St Mary's too far to go – seemingly therefore of the same mind as her predecessors of so many centuries before!

In October 1932 St John's was endowed in memory of Ellen Bevan by her sisters Mary, Louisa Dawson and Frances Emily Lewis Davies and consecrated anew by Edward Latham Bevan, their brother, by then the first bishop of the new diocese of Swansea and Brecon. It was rededicated to St John the Evangelist (St John the Baptist at its inception). It is, happily, still in use today as a place of peace and worship. It is used on Sundays by the local Quakers and morning Communion is offered on Thursday, market days, served by priests of the Church in Wales. There is also a room for group meetings. The need is to ensure that St John's continues to fulfil its varied role as envisaged by Mary Bevan – money has always to be raised for the upkeep of the site.

During our visit Karl had pointed out the fine old communion table, originally, I understand, from the church at Whitney, which had been partly submerged by the Great Flood of the Wye in the eighteenth century, when the river began to change its course.

The oak table with its handsomely carved legs had been rescued along with many other treasures and carried to the Boat Inn at Whitney where it remained, apparently, for 200 years! Eventually purchased by Miss Jane Dew of Whitney (Mary Bevan's cousin) it was presented to St John's in time for the events of 1930.

Finally, the chapel is adorned by an ancient two-part oak panel which serves as a reredos. This is of secular and domestic origin and is probably from northern France. It once belonged to Archdeacon Bevan.

This was a most enjoyable short tour and a fitting end to the morning's events – our thanks to Karl.

### **The Guild Chapel of St John**

A note from Karl Showler

The site of St John's Chapel is one of the oldest identifiable ones in the town. It is not mentioned by Francis Kilvert in the surviving portions of his *Diary*. The Hay Church Wardens' accounts mention repairs to *Church Evan* in 1780 but in 1810 the building was taken over by Henry Wellington of Hay Castle to accommodate miscreants formerly housed in the castle dungeons.

In Kilvert's lifetime, the Revd Hugh Bold writing in the *Brecon County Times*, 7 April 1874, said it was not known how Henry Wellington acquired the old chapel but the site was disposed of in 1875 when the new police station and magistrates court was opened in 'Heolydwr'.

Following the purchase of the site by the daughters of Archdeacon Bevan in 1934, the area to the rear of the two-storey section, the pound, was roofed over to form a small chapel constructed with a north to south alignment, old *Chapel Evan* had followed regular Anglican practice of running east to west. The 'cells' were put together to form a public room, the St John's Room, similar in size to the new chapel with the space between being a service area and kitchen. One section of the cell bars is still visible in what is now an inside wall. It is possible that when the building was decommissioned from a lock-up it was extended into 'St John's Place' to make it a more usable property. The present building is somewhat larger than that shown on the plan in Fair's *History of the Hay*, 1972. On the first floor is now one large room and behind it a small parish office.



*Saint John's Chapel and Rooms, Hay-on-Wye, December 1996.*  
Sketch via Karl Showler.

### **KILVERT AND VENABLES** **Further and final contributions to the Great Debate** **(See Journals 10-14)**

**From Laurence Le Quesne (Shrewsbury)**

I hope I am not too late to make a contribution to the great Venables debate which has had us all on the edge of our seats for the last three numbers of the *Journal*, and in doing so to help it forward a little. I ought to make it clear that in general I am on the side of what I suppose we can call the defence (of Mr Venables' reputation, and the orthodox view of Kilvert's attitude towards him) put forward by Rosalind Bolton and John Borron. Like them, I think that Mr Toman's interpretation of the *Diary* for the period of Venables' absence from Clyro in the summer of 1870 is misguided: I think that, on a natural reading of the text, there is nothing at all in it to support the idea that Kilvert strongly resented the length of his vicar's absence, and saw him as neglecting his clerical duties and unfairly exploiting his curate.

But I think it would be a pity if we stop there, for I do think that Mr Toman has done us a service, and one that points suggestively to some aspects of Kilvert's relations with his vicar which have been neglected in the past and which are very typical of the age and the society in which Kilvert lived. In particular, he has drawn our attention to the dream which Kilvert recorded in his diary on 14 October 1872 – a very lurid dream indeed, in which Kilvert first dreamed that Mr and Mrs Venables were trying to poison him, and then that in revenge he murdered Mr Venables himself with a pickaxe. It is the longest description of a dream in the *Diary*: Kilvert describes very vividly, and at considerable length, what was obviously a very alarming experience indeed for him, from which he awoke still convinced that he was on trial for the murder and was about to be hanged.

It is a very remarkable passage indeed, and in retrospect it does seem strange that none of the previous commentators on the *Diary*, myself included, have had anything much to say about it, perhaps because we did not know what to make of it. Mr Toman, though, puts a lot of emphasis on it – and with good reason, for it is much the strongest piece of evidence he produces to support his argument that Kilvert strongly resented Mr Venables' treatment of him (in fact, the only substantial evidence: it is the only passage in the *Diary* expressing open hostility to Venables). Rosalind Bolton in reply has pointed to the ambiguity and unreliability of dreams as evidence. This is perfectly true, and I agree with her that Kilvert's account of his dream is quite inadequate to bear the weight that Mr Toman has placed upon it. Still, I do not think we can ignore it entirely: I think it is *some* evidence that somewhere in Kilvert's attitude to Mr Venables there was a stratum of resentment and hostility, and if so, I think that is an interesting and significant fact.

I said a stratum of resentment – but if so, in all probability a deeply buried and perhaps a thin one. It is surely just because it was so deeply buried that Kilvert finds the dream such a disconcerting experience – it is suggesting something to him about his attitude to his vicar that he did not know was there, and that he deeply disapproves of. As Rosalind Bolton herself puts it, 'his subconscious rose up'. I think this is precisely right, and it is important to emphasise that, whereas Mr Toman would make the stratum a much thicker one than I have done, and put the resentment against Venables firmly in Kilvert's *conscious* mind, I think it was confined to his subconscious. I do not think Kilvert was aware of harbouring any dislike, or any resentment, towards his vicar: if asked to say what he thought of him, I think he would have said he greatly respected and admired him, and would have meant it. That certainly is the impression that a natural reading of the *Diary* gives the reader. I am not sure whether Kilvert would

have said that he was *fond* of him – I don't think Venables was a man who readily evoked *affection* in those who knew him, very unlike Kilvert himself – though I am sure he would have said it of his attitude to *Mrs Venables*: Mr Toman's efforts to include her among the objects of Kilvert's disapproval strikes me as particularly bizarre.

But how do we account for this buried stratum of resentment that I have suggested may legitimately be read into Kilvert's account of his dream? I see no reason at all to attribute it to any supposed indignation on Kilvert's part for Venables' neglect of his duties. There is no evidence for it: moreover, if that was the root of it, Kilvert would probably have expressed it openly (as he makes very clear his disapproval of Walter de Winton of Maesllwch for his neglect of his tenants). I think a much more probable explanation is to be found in Mr Venables' personality.

I think there is no doubt that Mr Venables was a strongly authoritarian figure. His own diaries convey the impression of a very disciplined and ordered personality, with little capacity for spontaneous human relationships and little concern with what other people might think of him; but much stronger evidence can be found in two passages from Kilvert's far more expressive and descriptive diary. The first is from the entry for 21 September 1871, describing a visit with Mr and Mrs Venables and other friends of theirs to inspect the works then going on in Mr Venables' house at Llysdyman.

*Evans (the Llysdyman gardener) was full of complaints of the workmen. They had turned the dining-room into a workshop, put a carpenter's bench into it, and fastened the door with a stick on the inside so that Mrs Evans with her key could not get in. Then they had lumbered up the premises and filled every outhouse with their materials and rubbish so that Evans had not so much as a place to put his onions even. When we reached the house all this was altered. The master went to the dining-room door, shook it strongly, and imperiously ordered it to be opened. The carpenter within in his white cap unfastened it instantly and was sternly warned never to fasten it again. Then orders were given to clear all the outhouses.*

The other passage comes from the entry for 25 September 1872, shortly after Kilvert had left Clyro for Langley Burrell, which describes a meeting with the Bevan family of Hay Castle at Chippenham station, where they were changing trains on the way to Weymouth:

*Mrs Bevan told me of the terrible mistake at Bettws Chapel one Sunday afternoon, when Irvine (Kilvert's successor as curate of Clyro) sitting in the desk and ready to begin service saw the door darkened by a portentous shadow and heard the terrible voice of Mr Venables saying, 'Are you aware that there is no one at Clyro Church?'*

Irvine described himself as so unnerved by what had happened and the sudden and dreadful apparition of Mr Venables that he could hardly go through the service.

These passages are fine examples of one of Kilvert's greatest talents, his ability to make his readers share his reactions to his experiences. Note his choice of words to describe the impact of Venables on these two scenes – 'the master', 'strongly', 'imperiously', 'sternly', 'terrible', 'portentous', 'terrible' (again!), 'dreadful'. It is the picture of a man who expected to be obeyed, and was obeyed, immediately and unquestioningly. Very clearly Venables was a man who could be terrifying to an erring subordinate, and I do not think we are likely to be far wrong in surmising that Kilvert had on occasions felt that terror himself.

That, however, is not the case on these two occasions, at which Kilvert is an observer, not a victim, and it seems to me (I should be interested to hear if others agree) that his reaction, though not described directly, is one of admiration at a man of authority in swift and effective action – slightly nervous admiration perhaps! It is not a role which Kilvert had ever had much chance to savour for himself, and there may even be a slight undertone of envy in them (as well as of identification with the unfortunate Irvine!)

It is therefore not surprising that a note of awe, of authority recognised and accepted, runs through all Kilvert's references to Mr Venables in the *Diary*. But the ability to extract admiration and awe from subordinates is very close cousin indeed to a tendency to arouse resentment: few people *enjoy* recognising the superiority of others. I think this was particularly true in Victorian society: a strongly hierarchical and patriarchal society, in which fathers in particular were expected to exercise an unquestioned authority over their families, to whom children owed an undeviating reverence and submission – an obligation which many children, especially male children, found irksome, however dutiful they were and however hard they tried to repress their resentment (two classic documents of this are Samuel Butler's *The Way of All Flesh* and Philip Gosse's *Father and Son*). I suspect there was something of this in Kilvert's attitude to Mr Venables. Of course Venables was not his father, but as his vicar he was in a position of strong moral authority over Kilvert not dissimilar to that of a father, in Venables' case reinforced by a powerfully authoritative personality. Kilvert, always a dutiful son, to all appearances accepted and internalised his subordination to Venables totally, with a deference and even admiration which can be sensed in the two passages I have quoted from the *Diary*. But such a deference exacts a price, and I suspect Kilvert may well have harboured something of the same sort of resentment that eventually led both Samuel Butler's hero and Philip Gosse himself to kick vigorously against the pricks. In Kilvert's case it never went so far, remaining well below the level of consciousness; but far enough, perhaps, to provide the fuel for that famous dream.

This was a purely temperamental reaction. Kilvert never criticised Mr Venables, either openly or secretly, never felt any need to do so, and was never aware of any resentment against him; and if he had been aware of it, he would have been deeply ashamed of it: his respect for him was far too deep for that. To that extent I agree with Rosalind Bolton and John Borron. But I do think there probably was a spark of resentment buried deep in Kilvert's subconscious, which found expression in the dream: to that, lesser, extent, I agree with Mr Toman, though not with his explanation for it; and I think he has done a useful service to Kilvert studies, in pointing us to the possible presence in Kilvert of an element which we had all previously overlooked.

In closing, I would like to add that I agree with Mr Borron on another point – that it is important to remember that Mr Venables was a generation older than Kilvert, and that the fairly relaxed view he may have taken of his duties as a clergyman was entirely normal and acceptable to that generation and should be seen in that context rather than as grounds for moral condemnation. The whole concept of what clerical life involved was about to be transformed by the keen competing blasts of Evangelicalism and the Oxford Movement. The influence of that transformation on Kilvert himself is a very interesting line of investigation, which I would like to follow up some time; but not now.

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## JUST GIVE ME THE FACTS By John Toman (Bristol)

The responses in the last issue to my *Love and Realism* leaves me in a difficult position. John Borron (JB) counsels me to ‘concentrate on the facts’ and avoid preconceptions and Rosalind Bolton (RB) insists that I make no statements whatever that cannot be proved. I am not allowed to write ‘This was because’ but must write ‘In my opinion, it was because’; to do the former is to ‘assert’, to do the latter somehow is not. Of course, what I assert is my opinion – it is superfluous to point it out, and in presenting a case, one is bound to assert. Assertion without evidence is unproductive but I submit that in recent *Journal* articles I have given my evidence, and on issues which for too long have been hedged around by unexamined preconceptions. The only preconception I brought to the relationship between Kilvert and Venables was that it was happy and harmonious – which, of course, it very largely was. However, having once noticed the drift of sermon texts chosen when Venables was away, I began to ask questions.

The idea that study of any kind – history, literature, biography, science – is simply a matter of stating ‘the facts’ is clearly misguided. It is precisely because there are so few undisputed facts that scholars continually write books examining and re-examining them. What a dull and meaningless world it would be if we endlessly reiterated things known to be true. That *Kilvert’s Diary* is a highly complex text that requires interpretation in order to understand what it means is exemplified perfectly by the edition of his *Cornish Diary* with its admirably detailed and suggestive editorial notes. Its editors set out to explore that text in the light of its social, religious, literary, topographical (etc) context, with the result that the reader has a much richer reading experience. That is what I tried to do in *Homeless Heart*. That is the approach I adopted to the relationship between Kilvert and Venables. A relationship is a complex thing and only when the few ‘facts’ about it have been stated, does the real work of understanding it begin. In that endeavour facts are inseparable from interpretation and conjecture. It is a truism that the so-called ‘facts’ of history, for example, are usually those that someone (generally the political or military victors) choose to present and comment on. Furthermore, the view taken of events, personalities, movements in history changes over time so that they require reinterpretation by succeeding generations.

To take some examples from the *Diary*. It may seem reasonable to assume that we could agree on the kind of churchman Kilvert was but look at these assertions (none qualified by ‘perhaps’ or ‘in my opinion’). Laurence Le Quesne asserted that Kilvert was an Evangelical, though ‘not an extreme case’<sup>i</sup> but David Bentley-Taylor stated it would be wrong to call him an Evangelical.<sup>ii</sup> The Rev William Price described him as ‘an old-fashioned High Churchman.’<sup>iii</sup> To David Lockwood he ‘was not a high churchman’.<sup>iv</sup> And finally William Price declared that ‘in churchmanship Kilvert was very much a moderate Anglican.’<sup>v</sup> Should these commentators heed JB’s advice and ‘stick to the facts’? Of course not, the idea is absurd; what is required of them is argument, assertion, evidence but not ‘proof’, which is inappropriate and impossible. And what about Evans’ violin-playing? It is a ‘fact’ that Kilvert, faced by a man singing and playing in praise of God, came close to laughing out loud. But how do we interpret that? What does it *mean*?<sup>vi</sup> It is also a fact that Kilvert dreamt he killed his vicar. It is also a fact that he found the dream deeply troubling, that he said it was ‘true’, that Evangelicals generally took dreams seriously, and that the *Diary* shows Kilvert took dreams seriously. Now I am curious about that dream and made an effort to see it in the context of the relationship between Kilvert and Venables.<sup>vii</sup> I did not offer it as the sole evidence that the former was critical of the latter’s ministry, as RB claims; I offered a lot of evidence about the relationship to ‘explain’ the dream. It is easy, because it means we do not have to do any work, to dismiss it as ‘only’ a dream that cannot represent ‘real feelings and attitudes’. Try putting an alternative case; that Kilvert had recorded a dream in which Venables officiated at Kilvert’s wedding. Would we be inclined then to dismiss it as ‘only’ a dream in which no meanings could be discerned? Or would we not be tempted to see it as further ‘proof’ of their ‘happy and harmonious relationship’?

It is a misunderstanding that leads JB to assert that I picture Kilvert as a ‘left-wing’ clergyman of the present day. Quite the contrary: I spelt out in my book just how right-wing he was. I assume by ‘left-wing views’ JB refers to Kilvert’s critical stance towards Venables’ ministry. His stance was the *radical* one of Evangelicals and *they were radicals*. (i.e. they believed that faith and saving souls and care of others were of utmost significance). They did not find it easy to overlook their own or others’ spiritual faults but had to accept that they could not always voice criticism. David Lockwood accurately pictured Kilvert’s situation when he said that he could not always communicate with those around him and that included his peers: ‘the Bevans, the Crichtons, even the Venables, were all enclosed in that thin carapace of conventional respectability. Most would have listened but the corners of their mouths would have turned down in a wry smile. It is as though Kilvert .... made a truce with society.’<sup>viii</sup>

It is another misunderstanding when RB writes : ‘It is hard to believe that Kilvert felt so strongly about his vicar .... without it spilling over into what he wrote’. But it *did* spill over (that’s what my articles have been saying!) – in his sermon texts, in his comments on Mrs Venables’ parish visit, in his dream, in his uncharacteristic anger towards the elderly couple he married....Could inability to recognise this proceed from being too wedded to a preconception, namely what RB calls ‘the traditional view’ that the relationship between Kilvert and Venables existed without flaw? It is right that traditional views are questioned; we must not panic when they are.

### Some footnotes for RB

1. The 'seven year' agreement was a factor in Kilvert's decision to leave Clyro but there were others. Grice noted: 'His own comments are guarded and a note of uncharacteristic obstinacy comes into his voice when he speaks of his decision' and 'he speaks obscurely...' <sup>ix</sup>
2. RB continues to stress the length of Kilvert's holidays, hours he worked, services taken, and ignores the main thrust of my case: his disquiet over Venables' inadequate pastoral care.
3. RB has no answer to my evidence on Kilvert's sermon texts and their themes.
4. Vicar's Hill was part of the glebe but Venables father 'bought' it by foregoing tithes (Rev Williams, *History of Radnorshire*, pp 251-2) May I suggest (not an assertion!) that that is why it was called 'Vicar's Hill'?
5. So Kilvert was 'cheered and encouraged' simply by the 'pleasant little talk' he had with Mrs Venables ... Why then does he, immediately afterwards, write: 'It was like meeting an angel in the way'? Do angels owe their reputation to the 'pleasant little talks' they provide?

### And some facts for JB

1. Victorians *did* display emotion in public. Has JB not noticed that Kilvert did?
2. In the *Diary*, Kilvert praised a variety of clergymen but he *never* praised Venables and hardly ever his sermons (the only one I can recall being on the National Society, vol. 2, p 21)
3. JB states, probably as a 'fact', that a 'study of Mr Venables is much needed'. In my research for *Homeless Heart*, I did undertake such a study, reading his book, hundreds of letters by him and to him from the 1830s to the 1880s, his fictional fragment and his diaries. I also read reviews of his book and newspaper reports of his and his family's doings. My view of the relationship of Kilvert and Venables is informed by that study. If JB thinks additional study is needed, I look forward to reading his contribution in a future edition of the *Journal*.

<sup>i</sup> L. Le Quesne, *Kilvert and Woodforde – The Diarists Compared*, Kilvert Society *Journal* No 12, September 2003.

<sup>ii</sup> D. Bentley-Taylor, Kilvert Society Newsletter, February 1984.

<sup>iii</sup> Quoted in F. Grice, *Francis Kilvert: Priest and Diarist*, p 24.

<sup>iv</sup> D. Lockwood, *Francis Kilvert*, p. 70.

<sup>v</sup> D.T.W. Price, *Francis Kilvert as a Clergyman*, in *A Kilvert Symposium*, Kilvert Society 1975, p 9.

<sup>vi</sup> There is (in my opinion!) suppressed anger in the entry and I am bound to ask why. The late Edward West, in conversation with me, said that he had always believed that the entry indicated Kilvert's anger and contempt and he (West) was intrigued to know the reason.

<sup>vii</sup> In 50years of Kilvert Society Newsletters and *Journals* no one has written about the dream: I thought it about time someone did!

<sup>viii</sup> Lockwood, op cit, p 56

<sup>ix</sup> Grice, op cit p 28.

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## THE PRESIDENTIAL MEDIATION

From David Lockwood

*So all day long the noise of battle roll'd.* (Tennyson, *Morte d'Arthur*.)

It is, I think, time that I descended from the Olympian heights of the presidency to the battle plain within the *Journal* of the Kilvert Society and I will not proclaim:

*A plague upon both your houses.*

For there are valid points on both sides in the present controversy. John Toman has fixed upon the *Diary* a keen and analytical eye for which we should be grateful. As an intelligent and intellectual Society we cannot merely sit in a misty and rosy contemplation of the past. Sometimes we tend, and I most certainly do, to be too nostalgic and view a Golden Age that never was. Kilvert can be read in that light, but it is an unfocussed reading, there are many glaring instances of injustices between rich and poor in the *Diary*. There were generally woeful injustices in society, they appeared in the Church and penniless curate, and there were many of them, who were victims. Both curates and governesses held an anomalous position in nineteenth-century society. Think of the Brontës. John Toman has highlighted some of these attitudes in key characters of the *Diary*, notably in the Venables. I accept that there was a certain hardness in Richard Lister Venables. He was almost the antithesis of his romantic curate, ironically, they were complementary to one another in the running of the parish. Personally I do not think Venables was making obliquely any statement by absenting himself from participation in services and presentations to Kilvert on his farewell; he may indeed have been allowing Kilvert to have undivided attention. More likely he was thoughtless.

I see Venables as a typical country gentleman of his time, disguising any emotion beneath a stiff upper lip and, as Toman shows, careful to maintain his place in the social scale, not to say eminence. He was far from imaginative, but having said that, he had the virtue of loyalty and he never forgot Kilvert and had him to stay at Llysdyman frequently. He advised him to accept the living of Disserth if offered, it was not. He helped him to the living of St Harmon, no doubt aware of its imperfections, but knowing that it was necessary for him to have incumbent status. Without that he might not have been considered for Bredwardine. I believe Venables had a paternal feeling for his curate. I find much amused affection in his remark when Kilvert returned from a reconnoitre of St Harmon, 'Well, you are an adventurous young man'. I would add that often curates are critical of their vicars and sons are not unquestioning of their fathers!

Rosalind Bolton's spirited defence is gallant, bold, full of intuition and very well-informed. She understands the clerical aspect of it all better than most. Then there is John Borron's wonderful entry into the fray with some trenchant objections. I find myself agreeing with much that both of them have to say. We have to thank John Toman that he has alerted these doughty warriors.

My overall feeling is that some of us are a little too hurt. The *Diary* is not a sacred text. We should remember that sacred texts have for long been regarded as no longer sacrosanct. All that is written is open to interpretation. Kilvert will live as long as English literature lives and very oddly Richard Lister Venables will also be granted remembrance, and in far greater depth and detail, than his own more material ambitions would have secured for him.

This fascinating battle shows that the Society has achieved maturity. It has room within its confines for debate, has the ability to explore and to welcome lively minds of readers who have sharp perception as well as love.

So let us resolve to be kindly even in controversy and beware of being over-emphatic. We can take Kilvert as our example, he was not fond of argument and was in most things motivated by love of mankind and the beauty of the world and his Maker. Yet, I must add, he was not a saint, like his vicar he was a man of his time with some of the blindnesses of his time. There is one entry when Kilvert arouses my anger. Setting out to climb Cader Idris into the empty streets of Dolgellau, shortly after dawn, the hearty and happy young man rattled his stick along the bars of the cage where the lion slept. Wombwell's Menagerie was set up in the middle of the town. He made that unhappy abused creature roar! I must be one of the few left that saw that menagerie. A small child, I visited it as it made its last progress on its way to Whipsnade. I shall never forget my uncle's seething anger at the cramped conditions of those poor animals.

When I joined the Society in the early sixties, I earned the disapproval of the secretary at that time, Oswin Prosser, making a mild criticism of the Diarist. I do not think I was ever entirely forgiven. We have moved on.

Longer still in the past, in an Existential period of my life, I came across words by most probably a seventeenth century Metaphysical poet:

*There is nothing wholly good, or ill alone  
Comparison the only measure is  
And Judge Opinion.*

They still hold a truth.

PS If any reader can identify these lines, which I may have misquoted slightly, and could let me know, I should be abundantly grateful.

*As John Toman indicates in footnotes ii and v there is further discussion of the nature of Kilvert's Christianity by David Bentley-Taylor in the KS Newsletter for February 1984 and by the Revd William Price in the Society's publication A Kilvert Symposium.*

**This debate is now closed (ed.)**

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### **FROM THE ARCHIVES**



*High Town, Hay. (date unknown)*



*Brobury Scar from Moccas.*

## KILVERT AND THE ALABAMA

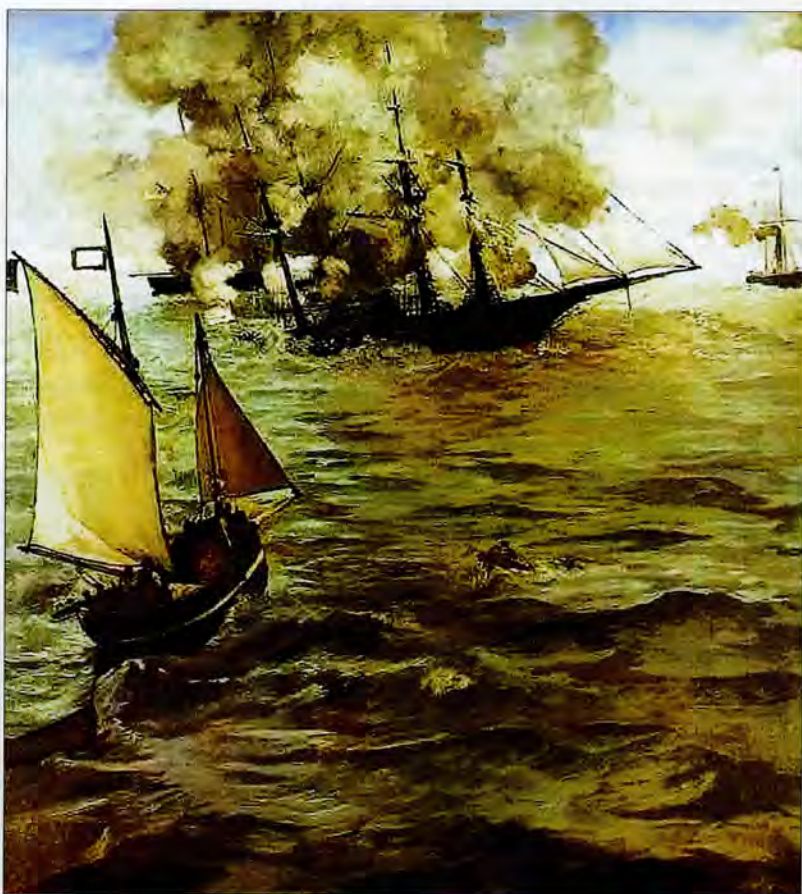
By C.J. Williams (Wrexham)

Two passages in *Kilvert's Diary* for 1872 relate to the *Alabama*, the Confederate ship that played a vital part in the American Civil War. For neither passage did William Plomer provide any details of the extraordinary story of this vessel, although even in 1939, when the second volume of the *Diary* was published, most readers would probably have been unfamiliar with it. Yet the controversy over the short career of the *Alabama* might have led to war between Britain and the United States, and it marked a pivotal point in the relationship between the two countries.

In August 1861 a Liverpool agent of the seven Confederate states, that had broken away from the Union, secretly ordered a ship of nearly 1,000 tons from the shipyard of Laird Brothers at Woodside, Birkenhead. The wooden vessel was to cost £47,500, and was powered by engines as well as sails. It soon became clear that Lairds were building no ordinary ship, but a warship for the Confederate navy. There was then considerable support in Britain for the breakaway southern states. W E Gladstone himself, whose first government was to resolve the *Alabama* crisis, in a notorious speech at Newcastle on Tyne in October 1862, declared that 'Jefferson Davis [the president of the Confederate states] and other leaders of the South have made an army; they are making, it appears, a navy; and they have made what is more than either, they have made a nation.'<sup>1</sup> Feeling in this country had run high in November 1861 when, shortly after the start of the Civil War, a Union (northern) warship stopped a British mail boat, the *Trent*, and took off two Confederate envoys on their way to Europe. This act violated Britain's neutrality in the war, and there was furious anger on this side of the Atlantic. Palmerston, the Prime Minister, suspended arms exports to the North, and sent reinforcements to Canada. War with the northern states even seemed possible. Eventually the Union government climbed down, apologized, and liberated the two envoys.

The new warship, known only by its yard number, 290, was launched by Lairds on 14 May 1862. After fitting out, it sailed on a trial run, accompanied by a tug, on 29 July, suspicion of its warlike purpose allayed by the presence of a number of guests, including well-dressed ladies. But once the ship was in Liverpool Bay, the tug came alongside, and the passengers were transferred into it and returned to Birkenhead. On the very day that 290 sailed, the British government had made up its mind to detain it, but was just too late. The ship anchored off Anglesey, where she took on warlike stores, and on the following day the tug returned from Birkenhead with a crew. They were evidently Confederate sailors, for the US consul had earlier heard them singing *Dixie* to fife and concertina accompaniment in Canning Place on the Liverpool waterfront. When the ship reached the Azores its captain opened sealed orders, and now known as the *Alabama*, it began to sink any vessel flying the flag of the United States. Single-handed, she almost cleared the Atlantic of Union ships, destroying or capturing sixty-eight before herself being sunk by the USS *Kearsarge* off Cherbourg on 19 June 1864.

Once the Civil War was over, the United States government sought compensation for the damage done by the *Alabama*. By this time, public opinion in Britain had swung round to support the victorious Union government, and it was clear that the United States was on its way to becoming a major economic power. Disraeli's Conservative government, which held office for much of 1868, agreed to a convention in London to settle the claims between the two countries. This made it easier for Gladstone, who became Prime Minister in December 1868, to continue on the same course. Unfortunately, the US Senate, for internal party reasons, refused to ratify the convention, but in 1871 a treaty signed in Washington paved the way to a negotiated settlement between arbitrators who met in Geneva in the following year. The path to the settlement was not an easy one, for some fantastic claims were advanced in America, particularly by Charles Sumner, the influential chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Despite his friendship with Gladstone, whom he had actually visited at Hawarden in 1857, he advocated claiming for the delay in the Northern victory caused by the activities of the *Alabama*. In one speech in the Senate he put forward a figure of £400 million compensation, about six times the size of annual British public expenditure at this period. On another occasion he seriously suggested that the British should cede Canada to the United States – the USA had bought Alaska from the Russians for \$7,200,000 (about £1½ million) in 1867.



The Battle of the Kearsarge and the Alabama, 1864, by Edouard Manet (1832-1883). A pilot boat approaches the sinking Alabama to pick up survivors. Manet, often known as the Father of Impressionism, painted the scene, his first major seascape, after seeing the Kearsarge in harbour in Boulogne after the battle.

This was the background to Kilvert's first reference to the *Alabama* in his diary in February 1872, when he talked about the vessel with Daisy Thomas of Llanthomas. His biographers have discussed the sad and frustrating course of his love affair with her at length,<sup>2</sup> so only a brief summary of it is given here. He had fallen in love with Daisy in September of the previous year. After a painful interview with her father (*an ever memorable day in my life*) on 13 September, Kilvert received a letter from Mr Thomas (23 September) which told him to give up *all thoughts and hopes* of Daisy. Kilvert met her on three occasions in November, after which he did not see her again until 13 February 1872, when he attended the Rifle Volunteers Concert in the National School in Hay, and sat beside her. In his diary he gave a detailed description of their conversation. One of the things they talked about was the *Alabama*, and Daisy asked him whether he thought that there would be a war with the United States. (Both Disraeli and Gladstone had just made strong attacks on the wilder American claims.) Kilvert said that he thought not; if the British government *was firm and steady* the Americans would probably give way. He reminded her of the *Trent* case ten years before, which she was almost too young to remember. Kilvert turned out to be right, for the arbitrators, who met in Geneva in June, awarded the US a settlement (September 1872) of about £3¼ million. This was an enormous sum at that time; in his 1995 biography of Gladstone, Roy Jenkins estimated that the equivalent modern figure as a proportion of the budget would be £150 billion.<sup>3</sup> Although opposition papers attacked it, *The Times* defended the settlement, and the Liberal government supporters hailed it as a major victory. In his monumental *Life of Gladstone* John Morley concluded his chapter on the *Alabama* as follows:



The *Alabama*.

So ended what has been called the greatest of all arbitrations, extinguishing the embers that could not have been left to smoulder without constant peril of a vast and fratricidal conflagration. The treaty of Washington and the Geneva arbitration stand out as the most notable victory in the nineteenth century of the noble art of preventive diplomacy, and the most signal exhibition in their history of self-command in two of the three chief democratic powers of the western world. For the moment the result did something to impair the popularity of Mr Gladstone's government, but his association with this high act of national policy is one of the things that give its brightest lustre to his fame.<sup>4</sup>

Before the negotiators assembled in Geneva, Kilvert met Daisy again (11 March), and danced with her at the ball held at Clifford Priory on 5 April 1872.<sup>5</sup> On the following day he recorded:

*To-day I feel good for nothing, from the reaction after the excitement of the ball last night and seeing Daisy. All the old feelings of last September have revived again as keenly, as vividly, as ever. The old wounds are all open and bleeding again and I can rest nowhere in my misery.*

In the afternoon he went to the vicarage to talk over his feelings with Mrs Venables. She urged him to speak to Daisy's father again, but he felt that he was in no better position than he had been six months earlier, and that he could not humiliate himself before Mr Thomas again. Mrs Venables asked him whether, if he saw anyone whom he liked better, he would still consider himself bound in honour to Daisy. He replied that he would. "Yes", I said, "but I don't think I shall ever see any one I like better. I daresay I shall never marry, but if I do marry I shall marry her." From the surviving *Diary*, it seems that he did not meet Daisy again until 12 July, when he went to Llanthomas, and she gave him a rose.

In June 1872, between the Clifford Priory ball and his July meeting with Daisy, Kilvert went to stay for a few days in Liverpool with the Gwatkins, friends of his family. He travelled by train through Shrewsbury and Wrexham to Chester. From there he



Lairds' shipyard, Birkenhead, where the *Alabama* was built; visited by Kilvert on 21 June 1872.



Wrexham General Station today, looking in a southerly direction towards Shrewsbury. Irish Mary and her sister got into Kilvert's compartment from the platform in the foreground as he travelled to Liverpool on 19 June 1872.

continued to Birkenhead, and took the Woodside ferry over the Mersey. (This was before the railway tunnel under the river was built.) At Wrexham two Irish hawking girls got into his compartment, and the younger, Irish Mary as he called her, entertained the company by singing to the accompaniment of a dancing doll. At the General Station in Chester, the girl, seeing that she attracted him, shook hands with Kilvert as she left the compartment, and persuaded him to buy her a bag of nuts. Kilvert gave an account of their conversation, which he thought it best to bring to an end because a porter and some other people on the platform were looking wonderingly on. Nearly three pages of the *Diary* are devoted to his encounter with Irish Mary. He was 'on the brink of a major indiscretion', wrote Plomer in his introduction to the second volume of the *Diary*. *My eyes were fixed and riveted on hers. A few minutes more and I know not what might have happened. A wild reckless feeling came over me. Shall I leave all and follow her? No – Yes – No.* Then the train moved on, and the girl was left behind on the platform.

Mr Gwatkin, with whom Kilvert stayed in Liverpool, was a dealer in wines and ships' stores, and lived in Everton, three miles from the city centre. Kilvert went to see the Liverpool Exchange, and on the two following days he was taken across the Mersey to the Cheshire side. On the Friday 21 June, he was given a tour of Lairds' shipyard, which he was told was the largest in the world and employed 4,000 men. There is a page and a half in the *Diary* describing the yard, Layard's as he mistakenly called it. (Probably he was misled by the Scouse pronunciation of the name that made it into two syllables.) The first half of Kilvert's description is devoted to the *Alabama*. Was his interest stimulated by his memory of talking to Daisy about it, I wonder? He was shown the shed and the slips<sup>6</sup> from which it was launched. The man who tended the boilers told him that there were still, ten years later, plenty of men in the yard who had helped to build the *Alabama*. It was said that those in the yard had no idea of her destination, and only thought that something was odd when the tug came alongside to take off those on board. Significantly, Kilvert's informant said that although the yard was very busy, there were no government vessels being built. The *Alabama* affair left Lairds in bad odour with the Admiralty for many years.

The *Alabama* arbitration was settled in Geneva in September 1872, to the reaction already described above. In his biography of Gladstone, Roy Jenkins, writing from the perspective of a leading European statesman, described the settlement as 'the greatest nineteenth-century triumph of rational internationalism over short-sighted jingoism.'<sup>7</sup> It also, he claimed, marked a break-point in the relationship between Britain and the United States. In the period of nearly a century after the Declaration of Independence in 1776, Britain and the Americans had gone to war twice, and on several other occasions war seemed a possibility. In the century that followed 1872, the United States fought in alliance with Britain in two World Wars, and took the lead in a Cold War conducted by an American-led but partly British-created NATO. For several decades during the latter (and during the Gulf and Iraq wars), some people at least in both Washington and London could even believe in a special relationship.

My main sources are John Morley, *The Life of William Ewart Gladstone* (1903); H C G Matthew, *Gladstone 1809–1874* (1986); Roy Jenkins, *Gladstone* (1995); D Hollett, *Men of Iron. The Story of Cammell Laird Shipbuilders 1828–1991* (1992); and Ivor Wynne Jones, 'America's secret war in Welsh waters', *Maritime Wales*, 1 (1976).

<sup>1</sup> Morley, *Gladstone*, II. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Particularly David Lockwood, *Francis Kilvert* (1990), 86–91.

<sup>3</sup> Jenkins, *Gladstone*, 359.

<sup>4</sup> Morley, II. 413.

<sup>5</sup> His dance card for this ball is illustrated in Frederick Grice, *Francis Kilvert and his World* [1982].

<sup>6</sup> Plomer transcribed the word as 'ships', but 'slips' makes better sense.

<sup>7</sup> Jenkins, *Gladstone*, 356.

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## **JOTTINGS FROM A KILVERTIAN IN LIBYA**

**By Charles Weston (Tripoli)**

Jokingly, I was set the challenge by our illustrious editor to put pen to paper (or should it be finger power to computer?) and write an article on Kilvertian connections with Libya – my country of residence for the past two years. This has proved to be a daunting task as the Libyan coastline in North Africa would have been seen as the gateway to the 'Dark Continent' to the average Victorian and would have been much more inaccessible than it is today.

One can only surmise as to the extent of Kilvert's knowledge about the European exploration of Africa that continued unabated throughout the nineteenth century. As a country clergyman living in an age that pre-dated mass media coverage of world events, he would probably have had limited access to the great newspapers of the day such as *The Times* but almost certainly would have followed the reports of the evangelizing missions into Africa by such organizations as the British Bible Society with great interest.

Libya in the 1840s – 70s was firmly under Ottoman rule and Istanbul saw Tripoli, the main port, as the base from which it might regain its waning influence in the western Mediterranean. In Kilvert's time the Ottoman Empire was prospering from the trans-Saharan trade in slaves. Slavery had been abolished in Tunis in 1846 and in Algiers in 1848 but despite a 'firman' decree which abolished the practice in Tripoli in 1857 it lingered on until the end of the nineteenth century. This was despite the efforts of the British Anti-Slavery Society. It is interesting to speculate as to how much Kilvert was aware of or supported the aims of such a society.

The points of departure for many of the exploratory missions into the Sahara was Tripoli. From the late eighteenth century onwards there was a steady stream of explorers who set off southwards. Their motivations ranged from geographical expeditions in search of the true source of the Niger or Nile Rivers to a romantic desire to be among the first Europeans to reach the fabled

Saharan city of Timbuktu. The old British Consulate in the medina in Tripoli (now open to visitors as a heritage Museum) was a base for many such expeditions – some of which had worthy motives (anti-slavery), others not so benign (colonialist expansion). Kilvert may not have been aware of the details of the trans-Sahara expeditions but he could not have been ignorant of the interest in African exploration that was created by David Livingstone's travels. These continued from 1841 when Livingstone was ordained and was sent as a medical missionary to South Africa to the time of his death in 1873 in Northern Rhodesia (now Zambia). He was hailed as a great explorer upon his return to England in 1856 after his travels up the Zambesi River and discovery of the Victoria Falls. Kilvert would have been 16 years of age at that time and he would without doubt have followed Livingstone's later expeditions with interest. Livingstone's disappearance in 1870 caused international concern and led to the despatch of the rescue party led by Henry Morton Stanley and ultimate meeting of the two men immortalized by the phrase, 'Doctor Livingstone I presume!'

Many of the trans-Sahara explorers faced privations as great as those faced by Livingstone and many failed to make the return journey. Kilvert may well have heard of James Richardson who travelled under the banner of the British Bible Society and teamed up with one of the most famous of European Saharan explorers, Heinrich Barth. The Richardson-Barth expeditions were well funded and well resourced. Others were ill-fated and accounts of their disastrous outcomes would have titillated Victorian readers through the 'penny dreadfuls' circulating at the time. One such explorer was Alexandrine Tinne, a wealthy Dutch heiress who, in 1869, arrived in Murzuq in the deep south of Libya with a large caravan and a bodyguard of two Dutch sailors. A Tuareg chieftain promised to escort her from Murzuq to Ghat but a few days into the journey attacked her, slashed off her hand and left her slowly to die!

Although Kilvert's name has not popped up in any of the research I have done into trans-Saharan exploration – hardly surprising! – I have been struck by the fact that it never seems far away in my own personal reading. When I came out to Libya in August 2002 to begin a teaching contract I came armed with a mass of reading material. Imagine my surprise whilst reading Alexander Games' biography of Alan Bennett *Backing into the Limelight* (Headline Book Publishing) on learning of a Bennett interest in Kilvert and a reference to the Kilvert Society. In 1967 a plan was conceived by Bennett and two of his scriptwriter colleagues to turn the *Diaries* into a film for the BBC and maybe even a stage play for the Hampstead Theatre. Alan Bennett's enthusiasm for the idea was, according to Games, based in part upon the fact that the clergyman ... 'was very fond of little girls without realizing what it was all about' ... The Kilvert Society was approached for its views and '... mindful of Bennett's fondness for impersonating clergymen, were not well disposed to the project ...'. Alexander Games quotes from a letter written by Oswin Prosser, the Society's secretary at the time, on 24 July 1967 '... It is so easy to put all sorts of constructions on much of what Kilvert wrote. Victorian sentimentality so lends itself to be turned into goodness knows what ...'. Games made it clear in the following paragraph that he felt Bennett had had a lucky escape when the project was shelved. He refers to the 1978 BBC series and quotes from another letter written by a Kilvert Society dignitary Frederick Grice – the deputy president of the Society. The letter written to the *Radio Times*, complained that the adapter, James Andrew Hall, had taken liberties with the text. Mr Grice wrote ... 'Viewers ought to be warned that if they look through the *Diary* to find the episode in which Kilvert's friend Morrell dyes his hair they will be wasting their time. This incident was pure invention on the part of Mr Hall. It was not only a feeble piece of comedy but an act of deceit ...'.

Several books later I was less surprised to find Kilvert's name emerging in a work of fiction *Landor's Tower* by Iain Sinclair (Granta Books). As an émigré Herefordian the synopsis on the book's dustcover about a writer's growing obsession with the Ewyas Valley as the site of persistent attempts to found or imagine Utopian communities had appealed to me. The book itself proved to be heavy going, written in a sub-William Burroughs stream-of-consciousness style but with some pleasing literary references to the great man. One section that I particularly liked read as follows:

..... 'Bearded Kilvert, seated for ever in a single pose, constructing his novel of provincial life, a fable worked from documentary fragments; underwritten by love of place, this place, the lanes, ruins, stone bridges from which to watch animals swept away in a flood. Kilvert's walks were his sentences, the anticipation of society. The stories he teased from old soldiers, Welsh aboriginals, drunk peasants, wife beaters swaying down untrafficked roads. The mutual embarrassment when he arrived at a farm owned by Rev Vaughan of Newchurch to find Vaughan's agreeable young daughter castrating lambs. Kilvert was a truth teller, a dangerous man whose confessions couldn't disguise the ache of exile, the unfulfilled passion for girl children in village schools, sweet-scented daughters of landowners; anyone, anything that could scratch that itch ...'.

**Charles Weston is the Headmaster of the British School in Tripoli and brother of KS committee member, Richard.**

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### **DISCOVERING KILVERT** **By Pam Henderson (Leatherhead)**

I first met Francis Kilvert on a London bus, although as with many first acquaintances I didn't quite catch the name!

It had been pouring with rain so, dripping wet and loaded with parcels, I clambered aboard, sinking thankfully into a seat. The man beside me was not at all pleased with my intrusion into his space, he gave me a withering look and returned to his book.

As I have always had a passion for books, especially diaries and letters (why would anyone read novels when real life is so much more interesting?) my eye was caught by the part of the cover that I could see – '*...vert's Diary*' it said, immediately awakening

my curiosity. Leaning as far as I dared towards my reluctant companion I caught a glimpse of the entry for 20 November

*I went back with Mrs Venables to the Vicarage to tea and we had a long confidential talk between the lights and far into the dark. I read.*

This was enough to set me on a years' long search for a book with an incomplete title, which of course nobody could identify. Then one day, there it was, a small second-hand paperback staring back at me in a tiny bookshop in Cornwall. I was immediately hooked and thought my search was over.

But it was only beginning for, as the Kilvertian magic grew ever more potent, I grew hungry for more information. The obvious place to go was Clyro, and from there we spent three happy days exploring the beautiful surrounding countryside and following the trail, our only guide being Kilvert himself. We began to understand a little more of the life he led, the huge distances he walked, and how much was expected of the young Victorian curate.

The visit culminated in two further discoveries. The first was in Bredwardine Church where we found the invitation to join the Kilvert Society (guess what? We did!) The second, and true highlight of the whole weekend was in a bookshop in Hay where we found the three-volume hardback version of the *Diary*. I could hardly believe my eyes as I had no idea that such a thing existed. My husband said it was the best investment he ever made, as it kept me quiet for weeks!

I have often wondered – is there somewhere a member of the Society who sat next to a very wet lady on a bus some years ago? If so, my apologies for dripping on your precious book, but my deepest thanks for setting me on such a thoroughly enjoyable journey.

*During a week in June 2004 the new Bishop of Hereford, the Rt Rev Anthony Priddis, made a personal pilgrimage around his new Diocese as a preparation for his ministry there. He had expressed a wish to visit some of the holy and spiritual places, old and new, in the Diocese, and to pray with the local people in each one. As part of that Pilgrimage, which included every Deanery in the Diocese, the Bishop visited St Andrew's, Bredwardine, where, after meeting the incumbent and the local ministry team and praying with them, he went outside to Francis Kilvert's grave.*

Photo by the Revd Prebendary Andrew Talbot-Ponsonby



## **KILVERT – A CROQUET PLAYER?**

**By Roger Jackman (Ledbury)**

The origins of croquet in England are obscure. It is thought the game arrived in this country from France via Ireland in the early 1850s. In the late 1850s *The Field* magazine was answering questions on the laws of the game and the first 'Code of Laws' was published in 1864 by John Jaques. Nevertheless croquet had nearly as many versions as places in which it was played. Less than twenty years after the introduction of croquet into this country Kilvert became curate at Clyro.

Croquet's great attraction was the fact that it could be played by ladies as well as men. This was the first opportunity young ladies had of being able to play a game in the open air in the company of young men. There was also the ulterior motive of hitting the opponent's ball into the bushes especially if your opponent was an attractive young lady. It enabled the young men to assist in her search concealed in a friendly shrubbery away from the eagle eyes of ever-vigilant chaperones. Hitting one's opponent into the bushes and the *Alice in Wonderland* tale of a croquet match gave rise to the fallacy that croquet is a vicious game.

In 1866 *The Field* published the first set of semi-official rules and in 1867 the first championship was held at Evesham. It was won by Walter Jones Whitmore of Chasleton House, on the borders of Oxfordshire and Gloucestershire, who could be described as the Father of modern croquet. This period marked the end of what has become known as 'Crinoline Croquet'.

From that period onwards croquet developed into two separate versions of the game. Golf croquet is similar to clock golf but hoops are used instead of a hole. One tactic in this game is to knock an opponent's ball off the lawn, but there are many other skilful tactics in this game which some participants seem not to appreciate and there is little evidence of this in *Kilvert's Diary*. Association croquet, could be described as a cross between chess and snooker played on grass. There is no advantage whatsoever in knocking the opponent's ball into the long grass or the bushes. Players use all four balls in the game to create breaks to progress through the hoops to the peg. They then leave the balls in such a position that their opponent finds it difficult to do the same. Both games can be played as either singles or doubles.

Although the Welsh borders are not too far from Gloucestershire geographically, in croquet terms, as described in the *Diary*, they would appear to be light-years away. From the *Diary* entries it would appear that the games played around Clyro were a version of golf croquet.

Friday 17 June 1870

*We went to a croquet party at Clyro Court, calling at Cae Mawr by the way. The party divided between croquet and archery. We had a long well-fought game of eight, too evenly matched to be finished in the time, so it was drawn. The players were Miss Oswald, Miss M Morrell, Baskerville and Perch against Miss Edith Baskerville, Alice and Fanny Bevan and myself. (When time is up you cannot have a draw in croquet. The first player to score the next hoop is the winner.)*

Tuesday 12 July.

*The rest were the usual set one meets and knows so well. .... Great fun on the lawn, 6 cross games of croquet and balls flying in all directions. High tea at 7.30 and croquet given up."*  
(Not a serious game, purely social contact with young ladies.)

Monday 18 September 1871

*..... The croquet things were got out, two sets playing on the same ground across from either peg. The girls gradually came out on to the lawn. I began to fear Daisy was not coming. She was the last of all. I was horribly afraid she had been advised not to appear, because I was there. Presently I turned and there she was in a black velvet jacket and light dress, with a white feather in her hat and her bright golden hair tied up with blue riband. How bright and fresh and happy and pretty she looked.*

*We were eight without her, four in each game and she would not play though I wanted her to take my mallet. She stood by me all the game watching us. I talked to her a good deal and she was so nice and sweet....*

*..... Then Dora said she would like to walk back with me and so we could stay a little later after the others had gone home with Mrs Hilton. Daisy was delighted. She took Mrs Hilton's mallet and played with Dora against Charlotte and myself. 'You are my enemy now' I said to her. 'Yes unfortunately' she said.*

*And they won the game.....*

(Originally 2 pegs were set out. One at each end of the lawn. The modern game has just one peg in the middle of the lawn.)

Wednesday 29 July 1874

*Last night the rats most provokingly carried off into their hole the contents of two dishes of apricots, which had been gathered yesterday for our croquet party today and left on a shelf in the dining-room closet.*

*When I went to the farm to drink my whey this morning I told them of our loss. Mrs Knight said that the rats ran about overhead at night like race horses, and Mary declared that the walls of their lower cheese room were lined with rats.*

*The weather this afternoon was lovely not too hot, a gentle air moving the silver birch, and bright gleams of sunshine threw beautiful shadows across the lawn and the meadows. The lawn tennis was a successful diversion and afforded a good deal of amusement....*

*Nellie Andrews looked very pretty and charming in a pink dress.*

(Around this time croquet began to lose its appeal to the social set as lawn tennis became popular)

Thursday 17 October 1875

*..... After luncheon I played golden croquet with the girls.*

This is the final reference to croquet in the *Diary* and like most of the others there is no description of the game. In the September 1998 magazine Mr John Hodkin concludes that Kilvert was not a competitor at any sports, either indoor or outdoor. From the fleeting references to the game and the many references to the players I have to conclude that Kilvert was *not* a Croquet player. He merely took part in the games as a social activity among the set he so craved to join and to have some contact with the many young ladies of the area.

## ALL CHANGE?

References to the *Diary* continue to appear in the most unusual places. A recent edition of *South West Trains' Magazine* contained an item sent in to that publication by Patricia Hope of Whitchurch, Hampshire.

Under the above title she wrote: 'I thought [readers] might be interested to read about a train journey made by the Revd Francis Kilvert, who was famous for his diaries of life in the nineteenth century.'

There followed the *Diary* extract for 18 May 1870 describing the journey through Box Tunnel on the way to the Bath Flower Show.

Patricia Hope concluded: 'I guess transporting millions of people every day will always have its problems.'

The item was accompanied by the photograph of Kilvert that we all know so well.

**I am grateful to Andrew Pitcairn, great-great-great nephew of Dora Kilvert and James Pitcairn for sending the above. With acknowledgement to *South West Trains' magazine* (ed.).**

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## A REMEMBRANCE OF BREDWARDINE

Barbara Robinson of Alstonville, Australia, whose husband Dick died last autumn has written to say how much comforted she was to receive from our chairman, Michael Sharp, a video about Bredwardine.

'I cannot believe my good fortune', she wrote, 'and to think the Kilvert Society gave [the video] at a time when I needed good news as never before.'

Her interest in Kilvert goes back a long way to the time when her sister Joan first sent her the *Diary*.

However, it was the receipt of the video which obviously opened the floodgates of memory and caused her to add to her letter of thanks some memories of life in Bredwardine when, as a member of the Women's Land Army, she was sent there to work – 'My intense interest in this part of Herefordshire was immediate', she says.

**What follows are her memories of those far-off Land Army days (ed.).**

My sister Joan and I arrived from Hull in Hereford and in the good hands of Major Croaker were taken, by Jeep, to Bredwardine, there to be billeted at the Forge by the Red Lion inn. Mr Morris, the blacksmith was shoeing a Shire horse – the bellows operating, sparks flying and the smell of burning hooves was overpowering. He told us to go down the path to the cottage where his wife was expecting us. What struck me especially was the pure white hair and rosy cheeks of the pair of them. She seemed tall and kindly and had a welcoming smile and gracious manner. She showed us up to our bedroom which was filled with a high feather-bed.

That first night a deep humming started outside our open bedroom window and in sailed a number of huge hornets. Joan turned over and slept but I suffocated under the sheets until exhaustion overtook me and I too slept. The first morning we hoed sugar beet and were so inept that we decimated rows of them, eyed by a contingent of gypsies. They worked so fast that we were left stranded. At lunch a farm hand offered us a demi-john of 'zider' and taught us how to swig it from the shoulder! That with Mrs Morris' strawberry-filled sandwiches gave us the energy to carry on.

Later, when we got to know some of the local people, Rosa Jay, a friend of Mrs Morris' daughter, Laura, invited Joan and me to an overnight stay at Monnington Court to meet her family. John, Edwin and George, her brothers, greeted us at a small bridge near the house. John proceeded to pick us up, one under each arm, and carry us inside. We were not used to such exuberance, but it was done with such good humour and honest pleasure that we could not take offence. Rosa escorted us round the old place. She showed us into a room with a wall of intricately carved wood, with acorns and flowers and the date 1669 (?) carved in the centre of it.

Returning to Monnington Court in 1989 with my husband Dick, we arrived just as a truck with a couple of workmen inside was about to leave. I told them that we were from Australia and that I had been a Land Girl during the war and had known the Jay family, whereupon they told me that the house had been sold to the Bulmer family, that they were renovating it for the new owners and that if we were prepared to lock up on leaving we could have a look round. We did! The carving was gone and someone told us later that it had been sold before the Jays left. I believe Kilvert saw this on one of his visits to Monnington Court. (He did! See *Diary* entry for Tuesday 6 April 1875 – ed.)

I have so many more lovely memories and when Francis Kilvert travelled all over Bredwardine and described the beauty that he saw around him I know what he meant. A land that holds magic for those who have spent time there. Now aged 79 I was 18 when I first came to Herefordshire yet the scenes are still imprinted on my mind and I treasure Kilvert and his *Diary* as friends.

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## A MEMORY OF EDWARD WEST

By John Nunn (Cirencester)

I have just finished reading *The Edward West Memorial Booklet* and I thoroughly enjoyed it. As you know I often took Mr West (I always called him that) on excursions to Kilvert Country and beyond. I also showed him places in the Chippenham area he had not visited. He was an excellent companion especially as we shared a common interest in Francis Kilvert and A.E. Housman. I will never forget driving along country lanes with him reciting Housman's poetry. He told me that Housman was his favourite poet, as he is mine. Together we went to Ludlow for a reading of Housman's poetry on 20 July 1996. I remember it was a very hot day. That is when I took the photograph of him near the Memorial Tablet to Housman on the wall of Ludlow church. Most of the photos in the book were taken by me on our various trips. As is well known Mr West was a private man, however I did get a few snippets of information from him from time to time. He told me he had driven when he was in the Services but was never tempted to buy a car.

One of the first things I learned from him was his love of choral music and how he regularly attended the Three Choirs Festival, and once at Hereford he saw Sir Edward Elgar and George Bernard Shaw walking together near the Cathedral. I don't think he approved of my opinion that Sibelius was the greatest of the twentieth-century composers but he did not say so in as many words. I expect Elgar would have been his choice.

The last time I saw him was when I called on him not long before he died. He was very frail and I suggested it might be a good idea if he had an emergency alarm fitted in case of a fall, but he dismissed the idea out of hand. Perhaps he was too independent for his own good.

I will always retain happy memories of him, his good nature, his kindness to me in particular, and his love of life.

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## GOLDEN WEDDING

We congratulate our president, David, and his wife Wilhelmina on the recent celebration of their Golden Wedding.



*The Happy Couple pictured in the Wilks' garden at Cusop.*

Photo by Ann Dean

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## FROM RECENT CORRESPONDENCE

- i) **John Hodkin writes, twice, from Cumbria**, the first time on the back of a postcard showing Furness Abbey in the snow. 'Kilvert would have liked this', he says, 'the Abbey, being so remote, does not get many tourists!' Secondly, drawing attention to a column in *The Times* entitled 'Daily Life' which consists of extracts from famous diaries and journals. So far Kilvert has made three appearances with the entries for 20 January 1870, 7 March 1873 and 1 April 1878. Each daily extract carries a brief introduction which gives some details of its author and sets the scene.
- ii) **Margaret Burgess, Croxley Green** writes that on a recent visit to the National Library of Wales at Aberystwyth she and her husband were able, after some small administrative procedures, to examine the two Kilvert notebooks in the Library's possession. 'Very thrilling to read the words in his own handwriting', she says, 'and interesting to note that he did not hyphenate words which overlapped the end of a line but wrote them down the side of the page instead.'
- iii) **Rosemary Harvey, Bredwardine** writes to express her delight that the mention of Kilvert in the *Journal of the Prayer Book Society* had been noted. (p.14 of June issue). She points out that there is a Hereford diocesan branch of the PBS of which she is a committee member. The branch is thriving and would be pleased to welcome new members. There will be a prayer book service, followed by tea, in the south of the Diocese, in September. Details of that and of the Society can be obtained from her: Merbach Cottage, Bredwardine, Hereford HR3 6DE (Tel: 01497-831555) or from the branch secretary, Stephen Evans, Onny Cottage, Onibury, Craven Arms, Shropshire SY7 9AZ (Tel: 01584-856444).
- iv) **From Rosalind Bolton, Wellesbourne:**  
No, Kilvert did not study Hobbes' *Leviathan* (see page 19, *Journal* No 14); he admired the quotation from it heard in a sermon in Bath Abbey on 7 October 1873. Since the description of the Papacy as 'the ghost of the Roman Empire sitting crowned upon [the grave thereof]' is the second most well-known phrase in the book, his failure to recognise the source means he is very unlikely to have dipped into Hobbes' works. Plomer's indexer has, of course, made a mistake here.

## OBITUARIES

### Sidney Ball (1916-2004)



Sidney outside Christ Church, Gipsy Hill in 1988.  
(See Diary entry for 25 June 1867)

It is with great regret that we announce the death, on 26 May, of Sidney Ball. Sidney, a member of the Society since 1970, was an energetic Kilvert researcher and an enthusiastic contributor to KS Newsletters and later, the *Journal*. His knowledgeable articles and often original views will be much missed. He was especially good, as befitted a Swindon man, on railway connections (no pun intended) in the *Diary*.

Sidney was brought up on a farm in Wiltshire and as a boy was often called upon to help with the milking and other work around the farm. Later, when he gained a grammar school place in Swindon, he cycled there from home, a six-mile trip. In addition to his scholastic achievements he excelled at sport and played in the school's football and cricket teams.

However, he left school at the age of 16 and began work with a firm of auctioneers and valuers at Wootton Bassett.

Early on in the war he volunteered for the RAF and served as a wireless operator. In 1941, he married his schooldays' sweetheart Gwen. In early 1943 he was posted to North Africa.

It was during his war service in Africa that his interest in Kilvert began. He ran an informal library and one of the books donated to that library was *Kilvert's Diary*, which greatly interested Sidney, because, of course, the Wiltshire sections described places he knew well. He sent the book home for his wife to read in 1944.

But that was not the end of the introduction to Kilvert, for in 1954 he and Gwen were on their way home from a holiday in

west Wales when they took a wrong turning and found themselves in Painscastle. They remembered the name from the *Diary* and there and then resolved to return to the Radnorshire Kilvert country for further visits and research.

By this time Sidney had set up his own business as an estate agent in Swindon, which he was to run until his retirement.

It was during the 1960s that Sidney became aware of the existence of the Kilvert Society which he and Gwen joined in 1970.

Henceforth Sidney became one of the Society's most devoted supporters and although he never held office he remained a tireless researcher into Kilvert topics, no matter how tenuous.

He was likewise a very keen historian of his native Wiltshire, active in his local history society and frequently lectured for it and for the WEA.

Unfortunately, in recent years, Sidney had not felt fit enough to attend any KS meetings, although the family was always well represented at these by his brother Eric. Nonetheless he retained his interest, kept up his research, corresponded with other Society members and it was rare that a Newsletter or *Journal* appeared without an article resulting from some piece of S.B. research. (I remember in particular one in *Journal* No. 4, March 2001, when Sidney told me a few facts about my home town! (ed.)).

We send our deepest sympathy to his wife Gwen, daughter Laurel and to all his family and friends.

\* \* \*

### Barry Smith writes:

I imagine that to members who joined the Society only recently, the name of Sidney Ball of Swindon may mean little, if anything. Members of longer standing will remember him as a prolific contributor of articles, often genealogical, to the Society's Newsletters over many years, as well as a 'scene setter' of visits undertaken by the Society, especially to his beloved Wiltshire.

Other members like myself enjoyed a more intense experience of Sidney, largely through a mutually sustained correspondence over the years. We were privileged to enjoy the friendship of a man who was a formidable researcher and probably one who knew more about the minutiae of characters and relationships in *Kilvert's Diary* than anyone living. At the same time, we will remember him as a most wholehearted collaborator in Kilvert research and a generous sharer of materials and findings. Yet he remained a stickler for truth and accuracy, 'rapping a few knuckles' along the way when this seemed called for!

Looking back over my own records, I am amazed to find that my correspondence with him stretched back over nearly twenty years. At times it would be sporadic, years passing without matters of mutual concern. At other times, when we both felt we were 'onto something', correspondence would come in spate.

Sidney's first letter to me in 1984 epitomized so much of what I, and probably others, came to expect of Sidney. He wrote out of the blue to praise an article which I had contributed to the Society's Newsletter, offered helpful comments on the content, yet gently chided me for confusing 'half-relationships' with 'step-relationships'. (He was right, I must say!)

I eventually met Sidney and his wife, Gwen, some time in the 1980s. I appreciated his friendliness towards me as a 'new boy' in the Society and recall his courtesy and quiet humorousness. I was surprised to learn of his work as an estate agent. Given his formidable genealogical knowledge, I had thought that surely he must be an archivist or a professional worker in some record office! Sadly, one saw less and less of Sidney over later years, as bouts of ill-health and increasing age made it difficult for him to attend Society events.

Looking back over my correspondence with Sidney, I am struck by the helpfulness and spontaneity with which he responded to one's enthusiasm and research interests of the moment, sometimes copying to one little gems from his own compendious archive. After a visit to the Isle of Wight to look at Kilvert connections there, I expressed confusion to Sidney over the complexities of the Cowper-Coles' family. What did he do but send me detailed notes on Mrs Cowper-Coles and her nine children, along with the title page of a later book by one of them (Alice), entitled *Old English Country Dance Steps!*

There seemed no part of the country in which Sidney showed no interest or could not find a Kilvert connection. Indeed, at times, it felt as if Sidney was doing all the giving and oneself all the taking! Whilst I was in Cornwall, he opened my eyes to Venables' connections there; coming to Wales, he enlightened me on Mrs Crichton's connections with Penllergaer near Swansea. Even when on holiday, he could not, apparently, rest! Following a visit to Inverary Castle in Scotland in 1992, the mementoes there of Princess Louise and the Marquis of Lorne had reminded him of mention of their honeymoon on page 295 of Vol. I of the *Diary*.

With hindsight, it is regretted that Sidney's vast knowledge of Kilvert and his *Diary* was never realized in a substantial publication for the Society in his lifetime. He was undertaking significant spadework at one time to provide amendments and connections to *Who's Who in Kilvert's Diary*. On another occasion, he toyed with my idea that he could produce his own work on *Who was Who in Kilvert's Wiltshire*. Yet again, whilst informing me of the burial place of Mrs Agnes Venables' father in Boulogne sur Mer(!), he hinted that he might write more widely on last resting-places of Kilvert folk.

My last letter from Sidney was in September last year. Although brief, it was as characteristic of him as the first one which I had received twenty years before. He wished me to let him have the details of two members – to provide the first with information and to offer the second congratulations on an article contributed to the *Journal*. We shall miss him and owe him a debt.

\* \* \*

It is with regret that we also have to record the death of: Mrs M Brown of Sketty, Swansea, a member since 1995, who died on 9 October 2005 and Mrs Dorothy Cross of Leominster, a member since 1986, who died at the end of July.

We offer our sympathy to their family and friends.

### **THE OLD SOLDIER'S COTTAGE**

Restoration work on the old soldier's cottage is going very well. It looks fantastic. On behalf of the committee – and the Society – a big thank you to our member Peter Beddall, for using his precious time and skills to make the restoration possible and to those who helped clear the area. Our thanks too to Mr Angus Graham and the family, owners of the land where the cottage is sited, for allowing us to work there.

**Ann Dean**

## **FOR SALE**

Susan Uncles of Bristol has a copy of the NLW June-July 1870 Notebook for sale. It is signed by the editor Dafydd Ifans. Please contact her direct, telephone 0117-942-6225

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## **CHRISTMAS GIFT IDEA**

Are you worried about what to buy for that Special Relative at Christmas?

What about a gift that will bring pleasure throughout the year? – A subscription to the Kilvert Society.

This will allow that SR to join in the visit to Oxford next February and in the conviviality of the three Kilvert weekends in April, June and September – and, then, of course there will be three issues of the *Journal* dropping through the letter-box – and ALL for only £12 (£15 Joint).

Barry Smith will be delighted to help you with this part of your Christmas shopping:  
25 Prospect Road, Abergavenny, Mon NP7 5DU. (Tel: 01873 857520).

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## **KILVERT DESK CALENDARS**

Desk calendars will be available again this year from Nick Jenkins. They cost £5 including postage. Anyone interested should contact Nick on 02920 890930 (mobile 07876 624185) or e-mail [nick@freespirtimages.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:nick@freespirtimages.fsnet.co.uk) or write to him at 43 Parc y coed, Creigiau, Cardiff CF15 9LY.

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## **THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES** **A.L.S. A.G.M. 2005**

The A.G.M. 2005 of the A.L.S. will be hosted by the Charles Lamb Society, on Saturday 14 May 2005. It will be held at the Swedenbourg Hall, 20-21 Bloomsbury Way, London (4 minutes walk from the British Museum).

### **The Margery Allingham Centenary**

There will be a special Autumn Convention over the weekend of September 17th-20th, 2004, at Writtle College near Chelmsford (speakers will include June Thomson and Ronald Blythe) A.L.S. Members invited.\* Contact: Mrs Marianne van Hoeven, 9 Bailey Street, Castle Acre, King's Lynn, Norfolk, PE32 2AG. 01760 755983 e-mail: [mariannevanhoeven@supanet.com](mailto:mariannevanhoeven@supanet.com)

\* Membership of the Kilvert Society includes membership of the A.L.S.

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## **NEWSLETTERS AND JOURNALS**

Henceforth back numbers of the Society's Newsletters and *Journals* will be available from the Publications Manager, priced at £2 each, including postage. Limited availability.

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Members are reminded that ALL e-mail communications with the Society or its officers should be made via the dedicated website: [www.communigate.co.uk/here/kilvertsociety](http://www.communigate.co.uk/here/kilvertsociety).

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Contributions for the March 2005 edition of the *Journal* should reach the editor not later than **January 15 2005**.

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Opinions expressed in this publication are not necessarily those of the Kilvert Society nor of the editor of the *Journal*.

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The current ordinary subscription is now £12.00 (Joint membership £15.00) and is due on 1 January of each year. Cheques payable to the Kilvert Society should be sent to: Barry Smith, Membership Secretary, 25 Prospect Road, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire, NP7 5DU

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**DATA PROTECTION ACT 1984.** The names and addresses of members are held on a computerised list exclusively for the distribution of the *Journal* and other information about the Society, to its members. If you object to this, please contact the Hon. Secretary. It has been decided that if any member objected, that member would have to **provide stamped addressed** envelopes for the dispatch of their Journals.

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