

## THE KILVERT SOCIETY

Formed (in 1948) to foster an interest in the Rev. Francis Kilvert,  
his work, his diary and the countryside he loved.

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The Lady Delia Venables-Llewelyn

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FEBRUARY 1989.

Dear Member,

The Clyro Festival must surely take pride of place in this letter. Never has Kilvert been thus remembered and commemorated, and the Rev. Martin Reed and his parishioners are to be most warmly congratulated on the magnificent results of their hard work and enthusiasm. Our New Zealand member Miss Hancock's impressions are included in this issue. For myself, it was a great pleasure to meet members and enrol new ones; to take tea at Cae Mawr and view the superb staircase at Clyro Court; and especially to hear the young harpist at the Penny Reading play the beautiful Welsh folk tune (called, I think, "Gathering the Wheat") noted by Elgar and used in his music.

Our service was graced by the presence of our President, the Lady Delia Venables-Llewelyn and Mr. R. Livsey (M.P. for Brecon and Radnor). They read the lessons, and the memorable sermon was given by our Vice-President, Rev. D.N. Lockwood. Much of it is reproduced in this issue, with his kind permission.

### PROGRAMME FOR 1989:

A.G.M. and Social Evening: Friday, April 28th. at 7. 00 p.m. at the Bishop's Palace, Hereford (by kind permission of Mrs. B. Easthaugh). The speaker will be our member - Rev. D. Tipper - many will remember with great pleasure his talk a few years ago. No parking in the grounds of the Palace.

Walk : Saturday, April 29th. Meet at the Baskerville Arms car park, Clyro, at 12. 15 p.m. Mr. R.I. Morgan will lead a walk in the Aberedw Rocks area. "Be prepared" he writes, "for rough and possibly wet walking". Picnic lunch.

One Day Meeting: Saturday, May 20th. at the Burnt House, near Bredwardine (3 miles west of the village, take the B4352 towards Hay, and then a left-hand lane just beyond the Castlefield Arms). Meet at 11. 00 a.m. Our Chairman has offered to speak - perhaps members may also wish to contribute. After lunch a walk to a place or building associated with Kilvert. (Members who would care to contribute a paper should let me know by 31st. March, and bookings can be made at the A.G.M. or by letter to me).

Summer Service: Sunday, June 25th. at Draycott Cerne (near Chippenham) by kind permission of Canon J. Poarch.

Autumn Service: Sunday, September 24th. at Abbey Cwmhir by kind permission of Rev. N. Hall.

Further information regarding these last two events will appear in later issues for 1989.

Publications of great interest to members are expected for this summer. The notebook called the "Cornish Holiday" will be available, in its entirety, from Ms. Alison Hodge, Publishers and Book Distributors, Bolsulval, Newmill, Penzance, TR20. 8XA., who tells me that it will be copiously illustrated, and the cost approximately £7. 50. (The transcription of the notebook has been done by our member, Dr. R. Maber and his wife).

The "Third" Notebook, purchased by the National Library of Wales, is also being published in the summer, edited by Mr. Dafydd Ifans, who was also responsible for the second notebook (1982).

I shall hope to have more information regarding these two most interesting publications for the June newsletter. Meanwhile, I can report that many members have expressed their pleasure in the Radio 4 broadcast on Kilvert in September last; and lastly, that Mr. Richard Adams (author of "Watership Down" and other novels) in a letter to our Florida member, Mr. W. Cummings, stated that he had read the Diary more than once, and found it "tender and evocative", with which we surely agree!

Yours sincerely,

E.J.C. West

Hon. Secretary.

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OBITUARY

We regret to announce the death of Mrs. Orion Watkins (Clyro) a founder member of the Society; Miss Prescott (Bockleton, Herefordshire); Mr. E.P. Foster (Lechlade).

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FROM THE CHAIRMAN:

Some members may recall that in the Newsletter for June 1988 I sought the opinions of the membership on a number of points - (1) Should the A.G.M. be held on the Friday of a Bank Holiday weekend?; (2) Should the A.G.M. be held on the same weekend as one of the Commemoration Services?; (3) If we keep to the present pattern of keeping the A.G.M. and the Service distinct, would you prefer the Service sometimes to be held in the morning rather than in the afternoon?; (4) Do you favour the concept of a residential annual weekend at a different place each year (perhaps from Friday evening to Sunday afternoon), to include the A.G.M., talks, walks, a Dinner, and a Service? Would you attend?; (5) If three members of the Committee are to be elected in rotation each year, how should the mechanics of the election (nominations and voting) be conducted?

Of the 40 members who replied, 36 wrote that they wished to see no basic change in the pattern of our activities, although a number expressed an interest in attending an occasional day-school on Kilvert. Eight favoured a residential weekend from time to time. Hereford as the permanent venue for the A.G.M. was approved by all but two respondents. Five wished to avoid a Bank Holiday weekend; most of the remainder were positively in favour of continuing with the Bank Holiday date. There was a strong feeling that vacancies on the Committee should be filled by election at the A.G.M. and that there should be no fixed number of members of the Committee, so that new members could be added without involving the resignation of existing members. (In fact four members of the Committee have resigned during the past year, so we have plenty of room for new members).

My clear impression was that the great majority of those who responded were content with our present annual programme, ('don't rock the boat' as one member wrote) although a little experimenting would probably be accepted, on the understanding that it is not necessary for members to attend every event. The point was also made that it is possible to visit places of Kilvertian interest and to pursue Kilvert studies individually. Not everything has to be organised by the Society.

Useful observations by individuals included the desirability of meetings arranged locally by enthusiasts in particular areas (as is done so splendidly in the Chippenham area), and the possibility of short tours of areas of Kilvert interest.

It has been my experience in other matters (mainly academic and ecclesiastical) that those who are in favour of changes tend to be more vocal than those who favour the status quo. If that is generally true, then I can only conclude that the desire for change in our Society is very limited.

I suggest therefore that we continue to work largely in our traditional ways, but that we innovate from time to time, the innovations being for the most part in addition to our customary events, not in place of them.

So, in 1989 we will have services in Wiltshire and Radnorshire (but both breaking exciting new ground in being in churches we have never visited before!) together with an additional and new venture, a study-day in Herefordshire. Then in 1990, the sesquicentenary of Kilvert's birth, we can concentrate our activities on the vicinity of Hardenhuish, with (if members in that part of the world can take the lead in organising it) a residential weekend.

It is, of course, not too late for other members to comment on the matters listed at the beginning of this note. How else can we know your wishes and seek to act upon them?

(Revd) D.T.W. Price, Chairman of the Kilvert Society.

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#### PROPOSED CONSTITUTION

(To be discussed at the A.G.M. in 1989. Comments may be sent to the Chairman (who is not an expert at writing constitutions!!) before the A.G.M. The reason for allowing a large maximum membership of the Committee is to allow as many people as possible to take part in the management of the Society).

1. The Society shall be called the Kilvert Society.
2. The objects of the Society shall be to foster an interest in the Revd. Francis Kilvert, his work, his diary, and the countryside he loved.
3. The management of the Society shall be vested in the Executive Committee, which shall consist of the following: the Officers and not more than 15 members.
4. The President, Vice-Presidents, and Officers of the Society shall be appointed by the Annual General Meeting, and they shall hold office for as long as the Annual General Meeting shall wish or until they determine to resign. The Officers shall consist of the Chairman, the Secretary, the Treasurer, the Subscriptions Treasurer, the Publications Manager, the Archivist, and such officers as the Annual General Meeting may deem necessary for the efficient management of the Society. The Officers of the Society shall act in an honorary capacity.
5. Members of the Executive Committee (other than the Officers) shall be elected at the Annual General Meeting. Members of the retiring Executive Committee shall be eligible for re-election and their names may be proposed at the Meeting without previous notice; in the case of other candidates a proposal must be sent or given to the Chairman at the Annual General Meeting before the beginning of the Meeting. The Executive Committee shall have power to co-opt not more than five additional members to serve on the Committee for the year.
6. The Annual General Meeting shall have power to elect Honorary Life Members of the Society.
7. The subscription of each member shall be paid on election and thereafter annually, save for Honorary and Life Members, to the Subscriptions Treasurer. If any member's subscription shall be in arrears for two years, he or she shall be regarded as having ceased to be a member of the Society. The rate of subscription shall be determined from time to time by the Annual General Meeting.
8. No alteration shall be made in the Constitution of the Society except by an Annual General Meeting.

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#### REV'D. LOCKWOOD'S SERMON

(Texts - Ecclesiastes III v. 1 and St. Matthew XI v. 17)

First of all, I must express a sense of honour, even of awe, that I am here in this pulpit on this great occasion. I must add that I had just written the word "awe" when I was startled by a loud thud on the window of my summerhouse. It was a thrush that had flown into the glass. I took it as a good omen that it was only stunned and not killed. I thought it a very Kilvertian happening - he would have noted it in his diary.

From the Spring onwards I have been questioned about the diarist. Some questions I could answer, some I found very difficult, but they have all made me think about him very much more. One question was, "Do you think he would have been happier had he been born today?". The first reaction was and still is that fundamentally he was a happy and contented man. It is that very quality that makes him a joy to read. Many diaries are self-engrossed, bitter and unhappy. Kilvert is rather an exception - we all remember that wonderful remark: "It is a positive luxury to be alive". Would he have been happier today? It is unanswerable, for he was very much a product of his time - we all are - and to transpose us to other ages would make us all misfits. But still, I have pondered and pondered upon it. I read through the three volumes looking for clues, and I found no real answer, but I found other things and some thoughts were further buttressed. What sprang up



obviously and rapidly, especially in the Clyro days, was his quick sympathy. It was his great and divine gift. As Ecclesiastes says, he knew, "the time to weep, the time to laugh". He was alive to the wants of others and their own particular "season under the heavens". With children particularly he had a magnetism and they "danced when he piped, and wept when he mourned". This was partly his nature, but also a tremendously large part of his belief, simple, natural and almost profoundly untheological.

No, Kilvert with his particular talents and avocations was born at the right time for him to develop and use those gifts. The Church had been awakened by the Oxford Movement of John Keble and John Newman; the Church that Kilvert came to minister to was very aware of its functions. There were many parishes, and there were many, many priests. So it was they usually stayed for long periods in one locality, which meant they came to know it deeply and intimately, knowing the immediate world around them far more vividly, I hazard to generalise, than you know yours. He meditated on his own world and there he found a microcosm of the universe, as we all do when we study something with penetration. As Blake said,

"To see a World in a grain of Sand  
And a Heaven in a Wild flower,  
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand  
And Eternity in an hour".

Kilvert had quite a stern standard and set of principles, natural adjuncts of his faith. They were general to his time, and I think his character, intellectual processes and his feeling are never better shown than in the entry for the 10th. October 1870. There we have first of all the observer, then the upright man of God; then there comes the gentler man of sympathy, enlightened by understanding of their fears, apprehensions and insecurity.

The sympathy was not only given to people, but to things and landscape: "Cwm of wanon Wood is being murdered"; the indignation in his description of the Cornish tin-mines (21st July 1870); The Rook Shoot (17th. May 1871). It is good that Kilvert was, as we say today, "his own man". He was never a part of the herd, even when by birth and education that herd was his own. It is, of course, because he could be alone, we remember him today when the members of the shoot are all forgotten.

So seeing this man of sympathy, I am still bothered by the question, purely hypothetical - would he be happier today, what would he be like?

Well, his horizons would be wider. The man who used trains so zestfully would use airports with equal alacrity. The purely imaginary young Kilvert of today would have done Voluntary Service Overseas. His feeling, his response for the poor would be used in some part of the Third World, I think. Why not Liverpool or St. Paul's, Bristol? For the same reason he did not minister in the Black Country or the East End in his own day. He was a countryman and understood best people with their feet in the soil. He would be a keen conservationist in his middle age. He was so alive to history, whether in buildings or in linking old people with times past.

Thinking of Kilvert as a man of sympathy, aware of the importance of the environment, I found myself linking him with someone else. Early this summer I heard these words uttered with a fervent, even poetic, enthusiasm: Forests are groaning under the axe, millions of trees are being destroyed, the homes of wild animals and birds are being despoiled, rivers are subsiding, landscapes vanish never to return, and all because lazy man hasn't sense enough to stoop down and pick up fuel from the ground, he takes not peat but wood. Man is endowed with reason and creative powers so that he may increase what has been given to him, but up to now he has only destroyed. Wild life is becoming extinct, the climate ruined and every day the earth gets poorer and uglier. When I walk by a peasant woodland which I have saved from being cut down, or when I hear the rustling of young trees which I have planted, I realise that the climate is in my power, and that if a thousand years hence mankind is happy, I shall be responsible for that in a small way".

This was not said by a member of Green Peace or the Woodland Trust; it was Chekhov putting his own thoughts and experiences into Dr. Astrov in his play "Uncle Vanya". Chekhov on his small estate did all those things as well as tend the sick. He seems a long way removed from Kilvert as much as Moscow differs from Bredwardine. He was born exactly 20 years later than Kilvert, and lived to be only 6 years older - he was 44 when he died. He kept a diary on his arduous and self-imposed journey to the Tsarist penal colony of Sakhalin, an island north of Japan. He was appalled by its degrading helplessness and it was symbolised for him on his arrival by "on the right bank a forest of fire. The dense green mass belched scarlet flames. The

conflagration was enormous, but all round was quiet - even tranquil; nobody cared that the forests were being destroyed". Then, with irony, he wrote: "Obviously the green wealth belongs to God alone".

These two men shared important things : a penetrating view of life which they were able to describe accurately and minutely, sympathy and understanding. The difference was that while Kilvert's education was classical and literary, Chekhov's was scientific - he was a medical doctor. Both men were not satisfied entirely by their professions, they needed another outlet for their abilities, so they both wrote. The various settings of Kilvert's Diary have many links with those of Chekhov's plays. The poor people Kilvert described and loved are mirrored in Chekhov's stories of peasant life.

The last time William Plomer stayed with us he went through my books, not a polite scanning but a perceptive search. He made many comments and then came to my very modest collection of Chekhov. He pounced upon a book in French. Every free moment he read it - he always woke very early and before breakfast he finished. I discovered then that he admired and revered Chekhov more than almost any other writer. He said, "I hope you'll understand what I mean when I say 'he was a good man', it is something so deep I can hardly express". I did know what he meant. Chekhov was not what we so loosely and superficially call a saint; but he was a singularly good man. That also applies to Kilvert. Plomer loved them both, and one he discovered.

In this secular world of the end of the 20th. century, we "culture vultures", make journeys to the places of writers and painters with the same enthusiasm that mediaeval people made to Santiago, Rome, Jerusalem, Canterbury. We are culture pilgrims. But I like to think the admirers of Kilvert have also a spiritual dimension. We don't just look at Ashbrook House, charming though it is. We also go to church, because Kilvert was "a man of God".

I hope we go away as pilgrims should, resolving to be better. There is much in Kilvert, Chekhov too, for us to emulate, first and foremost in having sympathy to everything of God's creation, people, places and things. And for everyone dismayed, disheartened, even depressed, that Kilvert's words written in the autumn of 1873 still apply - "it is a positive luxury to be alive".

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#### KILVERT COUNTRY AND THE FESTIVAL : A VIEW FROM AFAR

by Miss L. Hancock (New Zealand)

"We read fine things but never feel them to the full until we have gone the same steps as the author" ----- John Keats (Letter, 3rd. May 1818)

One can read the Diary, follow it on large-scale maps, search out background books on the area, even check the meanings of Welsh place-names - and yet what a difference there is in actually being there!

Last year I was able to plan a trip to Britain to coincide with the Kilvert Festival in September. The Clyro area was new to me and a week there wasn't nearly long enough, but for a few days of that time I was fortunate in having a most knowledgeable guide in Edward West. I drove, he chose (mostly), and much was thus accomplished in a short time. From Llanthony to Arthur's Stone, from Moccas to Llanigon to Painscastle and more, we followed in "the same steps as the author" but by rental car, the modern equivalent of shanks's pony.

Many Diary places and scenes, even quite minor ones, are still relatively unchanged and "came alive" for me. I shopped at Horden's unmodernised stationery shop in Hay-on-Wye, as Kilvert did; I saw how quickly the River Wye can run high and discoloured, as he described it; I found the tiny spring high in the woods of Mouse Castle (although there wasn't a sign of his genii loci on the now overgrown ramparts).

But it was the churches of the Diary that particularly impressed me. All of them - even remote little Llandewifach with its only access across the fields - were so very well-cared-for, and so unexpectedly bright with flowers. At Clyro, Llowes and Bettws, much creative hard work had gone into beautiful Harvest decorations with different themes as part of the Kilvert Festival.

I think of Bredwardine under a lowering sky, with its dark interior and the

light coming through "the great south window". Of Llanbedr, with fresh flowers lying on The Solitary's grave in the big circular churchyard. Of the "grey owl" of a church, tiny Capel-y-ffin. And of Colva at twilight, when a young man and I tested the echo according to Kenneth Clew's instructions and raised not a whisper, alas. (Damp stonework and an encroaching tree were likely reasons, I was later told. But on a second visit I was partly compensated by trying out the acoustics inside the empty church when I sang an old Maori hymn about peace and love, "Tama ngakau marie". The ancient walls had probably never heard the like!).

Bettws Chapel, too, is a special memory. It didn't matter to me that it was completely rebuilt soon after Kilvert left Clyro, for the Chapel field and the long uphill walk and the views of the Black Mountains are still there, unchanged. I was hoping to find the grass billowing against the Chapel walls as on that summer Sunday in 1871 - but the grass was short and dry and full of cowpats on my first visit, and the next time the rain fell for Harvest Evensong and cars churned the field into mud. Oh well, I can now better imagine the warm wind and grassy billows!

The Festival was a fitting end to my week. Guided walks around Clyro, church services using the 1870s liturgy, tea parties, a Penny Reading, and scenes from the Diary acted most creditably by the Rhos Goch school children. Flowers everywhere, and many local people in Victorian dress. Exhibits of Clyro and Kilvert interest, too.

By the time the Clyro ladies had served their last cup of tea in the village hall, and the Rev. Martin Reed's marvellously clear voice was understandably starting to feel the strain, then the Festival ended with a calm and lovely "Kilvert by Lamplight" service and readings in Clyro Church.

Much money was raised for the Church roof repairs, much pleasure was given to all those who were present. Thank you, everyone, for so many good memories. (P.S. I now know why, according to Newsletters, every Kilvert Society outing ends with everyone heading for The Burnt House!)

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A WILTSHIRE WALK IN THE STEPS OF KILVERT  
by Gwen Ball (Swindon)

On Saturday afternoon, 15th. October 1988, a mixed company gathered at the village hall, Langley Burrell, all eager to set out in the steps of Kilvert. Thirty nine of us, all ages from a stalwart one-year-old in red wellies to the hearty over seventies, and from diverse places in Wiltshire and further afield.

Mr. Jim Hall, a cheerful and knowledgeable farmer led the way past Langley Common where football, hockey and other games were once played on Sunday afternoons to the chagrin of Rev. Samuel Ashe (4th. Feb. 1873).

We walked on Maud Heaths Causeway toward Chippenham until we turned into a lane to Barrow Cottages. Here the Rev. John Day read extracts from the diary (3rd. May 1875 and 10th. August 1875) one happy, one rather grim. On to Barrow Farm so often visited by Francis Kilvert. John read the entry of 12th. February 1874 of old John Bryant "snugly ensconced in bed like a marmot in his burrow".

The going now became very muddy. Little "red wellies" had a shoulder high lift; we others squelched along to Birds Marsh. Here on 18th. May 1874 a jolly picnic was held. John Day read the delightful extract from the diary. It would be lovely to take this walk again in the spring time when the oaks are green and bluebells carpet the woodland. Jim Hall was able to take us to the exact spot where the keeper's lodge stood, now alas! just a mound of earth. Although late in the year and the trees almost bare it was most pleasant in the wood in spite of the swampy mud underfoot and thorny brambles hampering one's progress.

From the Marsh we entered Jacksons Lane and came to Jim Hall's farmhouse. This is where in December 1874 Kilvert's sister Dora was told by the then farmer George Selman, the story of the rat in the chimney. We stood on the lawn whilst John Day read the story most graphically to us in the true Wiltshire dialect. In retrospect, I feel that many of us will believe we really did witness the demise of that rat.

Mr. Hall kindly led us across his fields, whence we had a delightful view of The Ridge; then into the meadow where we had read to us from 2nd. July 1874 the account of poor John Couzens and his wrestling with the devil. Rather hard to imagine in such a peaceful spot, where certain of the walkers were refreshing themselves with some late blackberries from the hedgerows. Incidentally, there are many



references to John Couzens in the diary, and, would you believe, we had a John Couzens in the party.

Like Kilvert (18th. March 1876) we lingered at the "Poet's Gate" before setting off across the fields to the main road, past Langley Burrell churchyard where Kilvert's parents lie, to reach Maud Heath's Causeway again, the path to Langley village hall.

Here Mrs. Renee Payne and her willing helpers were waiting for us with the oh so welcome cup of tea and delicious home-made fare. So very much appreciated after our long, enjoyable and interesting walk. Here, too, was Mr. Kenneth Clew, having travelled all the way from Surrey to greet us and support the Wiltshire Kilvertians.

Our sincere thanks to the Rev. Derek Copeland of Chippenham and Langley Burrell for his help, to Rev. John Day and his wife for coming from Pewsey to enlighten and entertain us. And to Mrs. Payne for the organisation, and Mr. Jim Hall for sharing his knowledge of the Wiltshire countryside. We look forward to the next walk, as he has promised to guide us again in Kilvert's footsteps, hopefully in the not so far distant future.

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THE HOCKINS AND THE BRITISH CHURCH  
by Barry Smith (Truro)

In his Diary for 5th. August, 1870, Kilvert writes:-

".....Leaving Mrs. H. in the carriage to drive on to Gwythian Churchtown, H. and I struck across the down to see the British Church buried in the sand.

We came to the place suddenly and without warning and looked down into the church as into a long pit. The sand is drifted solid up to the very top of the outside walls. The walls are about four feet high measured from the inside. So far they are almost perfect. The material is granite with a good deal of pure felspar, of which I brought away a pretty pink piece. The church is quite a small building, oblong, a door and window place still perceptible, and the faint remains of the rude pillars of a chancel arch are still to be made out. Within the memory of persons still living the altar was standing, but the place has got into the hands of a dissenting farmer who keeps the place for a cattle yard and sheep-fold and what more need be said. I do wish that some people of influence in the neighbourhood would bestir themselves and rescue from utter destruction and oblivion this most interesting relic of the earliest British Christianity, that which came to us direct from the East.

Probably there was a Christian Church at Gwythian before St. Augustine landed in England to bring us the Roman version of Christianity.

These sand hills are very restless, always shifting. They overwhelm ancient buildings and then reveal them after they have been hidden for centuries. The sand passes on in its progress to form hills elsewhere and gives up its prey. Suddenly the monument and relic of an olden world and more primitive ancient simple religion is revealed.

The sand and the centuries have been kinder than the dissenting farmer....."

For many years, the layman's knowledge of this site has rested largely on Prof. Charles Thomas' fine little booklet "Gwithian". More recently, and somewhat unexpectedly, an appendix to W.H. Pascoe's "Teudar - A King Of Cornwall" has augmented the account which was given earlier by Thomas. Also, old numbers of the Phillack Church magazine add to our knowledge of the site. (Gwithian today, as Thomas points out, "is not a full ecclesiastical parish. It is sometimes described as a chapelry dependent on Phillack, the mother-parish of Hayle").

The building which Kilvert visited and describes to us is widely known as St. Gothian's Chapel or Oratory. Gothian - sometimes Gwythian or Gwithian - was, by tradition, an Irish missionary martyred in the area. He may have been one of the large band of Irish "missionaries" sent to minister to the Cornish, who possibly landed at nearby Hayle as early as the 5th. Century but probably did so in the late 6th. or early 7th. century. Eventually, Gothian became the patron saint of the present Gwithian and as early as 1846, an antiquary was referring to the patron saint of the ancient oratory as St. Gwythian.

Of the oratory or chapel which Kilvert visited, Thomas writes:- "This little building with its surrounding graveyard, now both hidden below the sands, served as

the church and cemetery for the nearby settlement of Conerton until the present Parish Church was founded in the 13th. Century". He adds:- "The mediaeval Conerton would, like so much in the area, have been slowly overwhelmed by blowing sand from the 13th. century onward".

The nightmare of sand, which Kilvert so graphically describes, was a continuing one. When Norden came map-making to the area in 1584, he observed that "Gwythian was a parish standing nere St. Ives baye, muche annoyde with the sea sands, which flyeth at a lowewater with the winde out of the choaked haven into the Lande, swallowinge up much of the Lande of the inhabitants, to their great impoverishment". Indeed, there are traditions of whole villages buried beneath the sands.

Thomas, himself a well-known professional archaeologist, confirms the antiquity, as well as the complexity, of what Kilvert readily recognised to be a most ancient site. He conjectures that the first tiny oratory commemorating the martyrdom of St. Gothian - or conceivably built by him before his martyrdom - may have been of wood, following Irish custom at that period. He then suggests the following sequence of events at the site:- "...first wooden oratory (?) and burials, 6th. or 7th. centuries; first stone chapel, 6th. or 7th. centuries; a period of blowing sand; construction of a second chapel at a higher level, with more burials alongside it, late 9th. or 10th. centuries; and the addition of a chancel in the late 10th. or 11th. centuries". He continues:- "We may add, from historical reasoning, the abandonment of the chapel due to further influxes of sand in the 13th. century, the ruins still visible about 1540, covered by sand about 1750, re-exposed by digging in 1827, and now covered by sand again".

The year 1827 draws us back to the Kilvert story or rather the family - near and extended - of the ubiquitous "H", who piloted Kilvert round so much of Cornwall, including, as we have seen, St. Gothian's Chapel or Oratory. Diary readers will recognise "H" as William Hockin who, with his wife Emma, was Kilvert's host at "Tullimaar" during his stay in Cornwall. (The tree of the relevant branch of the Hockin family is admirably sketched by John Hockin in the Kilvert Society Newsletter of June, 1984). Of direct relevance to the story of St. Gothian's Chapel is William's uncle, Rev. Frederick Hockin, who was rector of Phillack with Gwythian from 1853 to 1902. A widower, residing at Phillack Rectory, his housekeeper around the time of Kilvert's visit to Cornwall was his second sister, Susan - "Miss Hockin".

Sadly, in Plomer's edited version of the Diary, Kilvert's visit to Phillack Rectory of 21st. July, 1870 - just a few days before his visit to Gwythian - is not recorded. Fortunately, it is preserved in the Plomer manuscript, in the University of Durham Library. Kilvert did not, alas, meet that day the redoubtable Frederick Hockin. "Miss Hockin", Kilvert tells us, "was waiting breakfast for us and we fell to our second breakfast at 9. 45 in a comfortable old-fashioned room with a most delightful deep bow-window. Miss Hockin was alone in the house, her brother the Rector and his nieces being away on visits". They later explored the locality in her company, had a lunch with her of "ducks, green peas, grapes and other fruit" and were driven by her down to St. Michael's Mount.

Who would have guessed that our "dissenting farmer", who had first laid bare the ancient Oratory and had turned it into a cowshed, was a member of the Hockin family?! We return to the year 1827 and Thomas's account of events:- "It (the Chapel) was re-discovered in 1827. Richard Hockin, then farming the Churchtown Farm, had set his men to dig a pond which was to be fed by the stream running across the Green towards the Red River Bridge. In so doing, they encountered the eastern end of the chapel below the turf, found various skeletons and other remains, and finally met the water-table at a depth of fifteen feet. The chapel itself was dug out and Hockin, a practical Methodist, set about re-roofing it and converting it into a cowshed. It is a pity that local opinion did not prevent this abuse. The walls of the chapel were seven to eight feet high at the western (seaward) end, and rather lower at the other end; but even the masonry altar was still more or less intact".

It was not unusual to be a "dissenter" in those parts, in those days. For example, in an ecclesiastical census of 1676, Gwythian is shown as having 130 "Conformists", that is, members of the Church of England, and 11 "Non-Conformists", probably Congregationalists.

Wesley does not record preaching in Gwythian village. In 1757, however, he rode through Gwythian in the company of Thomas Harris of Rosewarne, Camborne, who told him that his family had lived there until the whole of the area to the east of the village was overwhelmed by the sand-houses, church and all. This was Conerton - mentioned earlier - and Wesley said, when he saw it:- "It is now only a mountain of sand!" (Thomas Harris was of the family of Mary Harris of Rosewarne, whose insanity



led to her eventual tutelage by the rumbustious Captain Parker of Kilvert's Diary!)

A Methodist Society was formed in the Parish in 1782. The present Chapel was opened on Christmas Day, 1810. In 1827, the Rector of Phillack reported to the Bishop that there was no house in the Parish without a Methodist. By 1851, the Gwithian Methodist Chapel had a morning congregation averaging 60 and an evening one of 80.

If it was not difficult to be a dissenter in Gwithian, it was not difficult either to be a Hockin! A record as early as 1613 shows that most of the Parish's inhabitants were called either Cock or Hockin. Richard Hockin, the "dissenting farmer" it appears, was unequivocally a scion of the Rev. Frederick Hockin's family, however. The two were third cousins, once removed! Born on 9th. April, 1780, Richard died on 22nd. July, 1854. At the time of the 1851 Census, when he was 71, he was recorded as a farmer of some 300 acres. He fathered ten children of whom one, his son Charles, was farming the land containing the Oratory at the time of Kilvert's Visit in 1870.

The significance of Richard Hockin's discovery was not fully appreciated for some twenty years or so, when antiquaries began to take an interest in the site, both visiting it and writing about the remains. The earliest of these was Rev. W. Haslam, whose account in 1846, drew upon what he had personally gleaned from Richard Hockin. Thereafter, the picture grows murky about the state of the site: also, who, and when, had occasioned the ignoble cow-shed!

Sketches by the Rev. E. Evans in 1861, just nine years before Kilvert's visit, show the entire roof timbers still in place, yet mounds of drifted sand against the outside wall of the building. Edmonds, however, in "Archaeologia Cambrensis" of 1863, laments:- "The walls may still be seen, although externally the sand is level with their tops..... The two or three old beams resting on them are, I grieve to say, the remains of a roof placed thereon many years since, when the building was used for a cattle-shed, by the farmer who owns it".

Kilvert, writing in August, 1870, said, as we have seen:- ".....the place has got into the hands of a dissenting farmer who keeps the place for a cattle yard and sheep fold and what more need be said". Yet Richard Hockin had died in 1854. Had Kilvert got his tenses wrong, perhaps? As, in his words, "it is unclear how he thought the beasts could have got in or out!

Dunkin, writing in "The Antiquarian" only ten months after Kilvert's visit, explains that since its discovery, "the building has been gradually going to decay, undergoing many vicissitudes, at one time being converted by a tenant into a cowshed..... A visitor to the spot more than a year ago describes the interior as having rough pieces of wood and stones lying about, and, being a shelter for cattle, it was very dirty and unpleasant in its appearance".

A fortnight after Dunkin (14th. June, 1871), the Rev. Frederick Hockin himself ventured into print with an article for the "Cornish Telegraph". He titled it "The Ancient Oratory of St. Gothian at Gwithian". He confirms, like Kilvert, that ".....externally the sandbank is level with the top of the walls, and in one place has thrown down a portion of them". On the story of the site, he is suitably discreet:- ".....about the year 1829 (sic), a farmer, having occasion to sink for water, came upon some ancient walls". There is no mention in this article of any dirty cow-yard or dissenting farmer, and certainly no indication that a Hockin had been involved! One suspects that neither he nor his sister looked back very favourably on the efforts of this distant, dissenting, relative of theirs! Yet history, perhaps, has given the practical Richard a worse "press" than he really deserves.

Returning to "Kilvert's Diary", it is always intriguing to guess whether many of the places which he visited in his travels were simply tourist attractions or whether there was any particular significance in them for him. In the case of the Oratory, I would suggest that the interest of his host's family in this particular site was what stimulated such striking interest in him and led him to write his "purple passage" of 5th. August, 1870.

The Rev. Frederick Hockin had clearly "lived with" the saga for years, as witness Edmonds' account:- "The farmer who discovered this ruin found several skeletons near it, as he stated to the Rev. Frederick Hockin, the rector of the adjoining parish of Phillack, whose church is the mother church of that of Gwithian. Mr. Hockin.....saw it a few years after its discovery, when less dilapidated than at present".

In May 1867, some three years before Kilvert's visit, Gwithian Parish Church was re-opened after a major re-construction, most of the cost of which was borne by Frederick Hockin, as Rector. "Between the several services of re-dedication", W.H. Pascoe tells us, "many visitors took the opportunity of going to see the old Oratory in the sands - one of the very earliest examples of Christian architecture existing in the country. By early 1871, interest in the Relic, as it was called, seems to have been re-kindled.....".

The Phillack Church Magazine was not to be left out. Its number for June, 1871, speaks of "The Gwithian Relic", which it describes as "One of the oldest, if not the oldest, ecclesiastical edifice in the kingdom. "Commenting on the dis-interment of the ruin by Farmer Hockin, the Magazine goes on:- "This exposure threatens to be its destruction, for since it has been opened out, it has gradually been crumbling away, and if it is to be saved at all, something must be done at once to preserve it".

It then reports:- "A number of influential gentlemen resident in Hayle and the neighbourhood have been exerting themselves in devising measures to have this valuable Relic of the past preserved. In pursuance of this object, a meeting of a Provisional Committee was held on Monday evening, May 22nd., in the Public Rooms, Hayle". (What an "echo" of Kilvert's words:- "I do wish that some people of influence in the neighbourhood would bestir themselves and rescue from utter destruction and oblivion this most interesting relic of the earliest British Christianity"!)

Amongst dignitaries present at this "rescue meeting" there was, we read, "Rev. F. Hockin, Rector of Phillack and Gwithian and Rural Dean of Penwith". But the Hockin involvement does not end there. "At the meeting", recounts the Church Magazine, "some very interesting particulars respecting the Oratory were mentioned. Among others the following:- Three skeletons were found at the east-end of the building, where the Altar stood, by the father of the present proprietor of the land, Mr. Charles Hockin. The Rector, the Rev. F. Hockin, remembered seeing, a few years since, some stone seats within the building. An Altar stone of blue slate, with one or two crosses on it, was found by Miss Hockin, of the Rectory. This, unfortunately, is lost".

The Provisional Committee began with serious intent, and according to Edmonds, "The Rev. F. Hockin, Rector of Gwithian, has consented to act as chairman.....". Moreover, a plan of action was conceived:- "As preliminary work it is intended to clear out the interior of the building, and 'also to sink a few trial-pits in the vicinity in search of bones or other relics, under the superintendence of one or two archaeologists'".

Yet a mysterious silence soon subsequently descends and W.H. Pascoe says we are forced to conclude that "the matter must have been allowed to relapse once more into obscurity." However, for a number of years at the beginning of this century, "due reverence" was paid to the site in the form of annual services or "pilgrimages". An interesting account of one has come down to us in the "Phillack and Gwithian Church Monthly" for September, 1906. Not only does it tell us the precise number of coins in the collection but reveals the preacher echoing, albeit unknowingly, some of the thoughts of Francis Kilvert!

It reads:- "We venture to think that those who took part in the Open Air Service on the site of the old Gwithian Oratory on Sunday, July 19th. will long remember it. It is said that a Service was held there eighty years ago, and we shall be glad if some of our readers will tell us anything they have heard about it.

On the present occasion, the procession of clergy and choir with members of the congregation headed by the processional cross, started from the Parish Church and walked to the site of the Oratory, singing hymns 215, 532, 604. The form of Service used was drawn up for the occasion, and sanctioned by the Bishop of S. Germans, being a shortened form of Evensong with special psalms and lesson. The singing, which was entirely unaccompanied, struck us as being singularly impressive, and was heartily joined in by the people present, who numbered between 300 and 400.

The Rev. Chancellor Worlledge gave a most appropriate address. He pointed out that the Oratory had been there for over 1,450 years. In that place the same Gospel had been preached and the same Sacraments administered as by the Church now, and that without ceasing. Cornwall, having once received, had never lost Christianity, as other parts of England had under foreign invasion. He bade us remember that we had to carry on S. Gothian's work in our own day, by giving ourselves in thankful service to God, and by helping through self-sacrifice to advance Christ's kingdom

at home and abroad - to 'tell it out among the heathen, that the Lord is King'.

After the Service, many of those present returned in procession to the Church, singing on the way Hymns 538, 540, 534, 242, 243. In the Church the Te Deum was sung, followed by the Vesper Hymn. The collection amounted to £2. 10s. 8½d., and contained 336 coins".

The magazine account ends, ironically, with a "codicil" which echoes the wish of Kilvert himself:- "We hope that one result of the Service may be that more attention may be called to the Oratory, and that funds may be provided to enable the spot to be preserved in a fitting manner, with the permission of the owners, who we hear are not unfriendly disposed".

The hope proved to be a forlorn one! "On a visit c.1935" writes Pascoe, "the sand had already started to cover the walls again and now it has returned completely to its pre-1827 natural state." Farmer Richard Hockin had laid bare the site's secrets but the sands had once more reclaimed them. As the Rev. Haslam wrote of this ancient place in 1846:- "It is little known and frequented; the dead rest in undisturbed security beneath the rich green turf which now covers the cemetery".

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Acknowledgement: I am most grateful to my friend John Hockin of Swanage, for his help with the Hockin "family tree" and for his perceptive comments on a first draft of this article.

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#### THROUGH KILVERT'S EYES? - LOOKING AT CHURCHES

by John Dunabin

The conversation swung briefly to Kilvert's view of churches, meaning their physical presence, not the institutions, and it seemed a potentially rewarding exercise - the thought had lain dormant for a long time - to collect evidence of this from the Diary. Significantly perhaps, in retrospect, no purple passages sprang immediately to mind, few familiar lines even, quoted in addresses and greeted as such. More scrutiny was clearly called for, and here came the surprise.

There are many ways of looking at churches. To the most devout Christian this might seem a questionable statement, since all have been erected to the glory of God, but the emotions aroused when first glimpsing the plain rectangle of Capel-y-Ffin are hardly the same in every respect as those deriving from an enthralled upward look into the lantern of Ely Cathedral. The interiors of Kilpeck and St. Mary Redcliffe, Bristol, cannot be described in similar phrases, nor can rewarding comparisons be drawn between them. As the late Sir John Betjeman wrote: "The Parish Churches of England are even more varied than the landscape".

Some churches in their building were surely seen as purely functional, meeting the needs of their time, but one cannot explain the grandeur of Durham Cathedral, the majesty of York Minster, the grace of Patrington, 'Queen of Holderness', or the dignified small-scale opulence of London's St. Mary Woolnoth in these terms alone. How did Francis Kilvert, whose gift for descriptive prose so far transcends one's own, see the churches with which he was familiar?

Here, repeating the words ending the first paragraph, came the surprise. Kilvert was a Christian churchman, acutely observant, and a lover of beauty in many forms, an admirer of works of art. His upbringing, training, and vocation took him into many churches, but his observations on them were sparing, his comments on their aesthetic appeal even more so (using the word in its uncorrupted sense: belonging to the appreciation of the beautiful). What are we to make of the entry for Thursday 1st October 1874? "After a heavy storm the weather cleared and we



projected a visit to St. Mary Redcliffe on my way to the Station. Adelaide, Kathleen ('Kathleen Mavournean'), Ella and I went down in a cab, a merry laughing party. The Church is still under repair, the roof of the nave being now nearly restored". And that in essence was that. He visited the great Cathedral of Strasburg, but we learn more from him about the woman who kept a photograph shop nearby than anything else.

This dismissive attitude cannot have stemmed from philistinism, a charge no lover of the Diary would accept. One can safely infer that Kilvert had more than a superficial knowledge of architectural styles; a casual reference he made to 'Churchwarden Gothic' reinforces the view. Just what can be identified as such I am never sure, but the words were used in a derogatory sense, meaning something aping the best in the Gothic Revival but not succeeding. One must not forget that this was a very real issue in Kilvert's day. His unenthusiastic reaction to the new Keble College makes the soundness of his taste clear. Its 'public convenience Gothic' style has found few admirers in the intervening century.

The years spent at Oxford may well have been Kilvert's most impressionable ones. Did he visit Iffley, essentially late Norman and a gem but perhaps lacking in warmth (Piper and Betjeman describe it as "a show place and rightly so"), the splendid Abbey Church at Dorchester nearby, and the varied city churches? Alas, his Oxford diary, if he kept one, is not available to us, but perhaps here there were detailed first impressions of visits to some of the great church of England. Were they already familiar to him by the time 'our' Diary commences in 1870? One sometimes senses that this was so.

An early entry (25th January 1870) records a visit to Westminster Abbey for the consecration of the Bishop of Oxford. Kilvert's description of the ceremony, the music, and his own discomfort (the Abbey was crowded) are very graphic, finishing with one or two acerbic comments, but there are no eulogies about what must be the most visited church in England, by natives and others from all over the world. Perhaps though such an occasion had too much of a secular air to permit quiet appreciation of the Church itself, but at least the tourists he so disliked would be excluded.

Nowadays every great church has them in many thousands (the writer included), but a century or so ago Bath Abbey, Salisbury Cathedral, and Wells Cathedral must have been able to fulfil their original functions without too much unseemly hubbub, with opportunities for quiet contemplation.

The city of Bath formed part of Kilvert's background from early years - an entry for 16th May 1874 tells us that he walked there and back, around thirty miles, ten years earlier, and some of his most lyrical passages record his impressions of it: "I think I never saw the beautiful city looking lovelier than this morning in the early summer morning's dress, with the blue encircling hills climbed by crescents and terraces and the great Abbey towering above the river and looming across the river meads" - (6th May 1871), and again, in the autumn this time - (8th September 1873): "It was a lovely morning, the clear shining after rain, and in the strange gauzy sunlit mist of the morning Bath looked like a beautiful mirage with a weird strange unearthly beauty, like an enchanted city". By contrast, when describing his visits there he is almost dismissive about the Abbey itself, on 7th October 1873 for example, and 22nd January 1874, with not a word about Gilbert Scott's restoration (1864-1873), including the stone vaulting of the nave, surely one of the finest things done to a church fabric in Victorian times.

We know Kilvert visited Wells Cathedral, a building of great beauty inside and out, but of his reactions to it we are ignorant, the Diary editor merely stating in parentheses - "(visited Wells Cathedral)" - (6th September 1872), and again a year later, "(Another visit to Wells and Glastonbury is described)". Here the nagging doubt, overlaid, comes to the surface. Was Plomer selective in ways we have hardly suspected? Were his fondnesses essentially Kilvert's encounters with human beings and nature, passing over other matters? This I doubt. After writing tentatively of Kilvert's aesthetic sense, I came across a passage of Plomer's own writing. "One of the things I most believe is that art is important and valuable. I am, if you like the word, an aesthete. I do not state it either boastfully or apologetically (W.S. Gilbert earlier had made it almost a term of contempt); I

state it as a fact".

Kilvert knew other great churches too. On the 11th July 1874 he revisited Salisbury after an interval of twenty three years, noting that the Cathedral spire appeared to lean slightly (I think he was mistaken). His words, "great size, roominess, airiness and lightness", are not unfair, but dispassionate. He went on to note that the Choir was under restoration, and "will be very grand", the nave "poor, bare, dirty and neglected". Scott's 'improvements' must have been in progress at the time, reversing changes made with similar intent by Wyatt.

Where were Kilvert's emotions aroused by the church buildings themselves? Colva is one answer, "poor humble dear little white-washed church among the large ancient yews". On a visit I made there in the late nineteen fifties, there was evidence that the organist was a person of small stature, a pile of copies of 'The Queen' nearly half a century old on the organ stool. Would something of this sort have prompted a Diary entry? Bettws Chapel, only visited, and hurriedly, to my shame, last September, is small, plain, even austere, but manifestly it occupied a place in Kilvert's heart, as the familiar entry for 25th May 1872 reveals, but he had his practical side even here. In May 1876, nearly four years after what he had thought would be his last visit, he noted " - within how things were changed and improved. A little vestry under the old gallery, a new harmonium - ".

Not very long after this, in late June, come two entries running counter to my developing theme. Shortly after attending service in St. Pauls, an occasion which obviously gave him pleasure in a number of ways, Kilvert went on a train pilgrimage (his own description) to Canterbury. Two aspects of this visit were noteworthy. One was his declared admiration for the Cathedral, the other that he was one of a party of some 50 people, with a guide! Tourists?

If this entry had not appeared, one could have led more easily to speculation on Kilvert's own changing attitudes over the period covered by the Diary; the enthusiasm displayed by his father and mother over house, garden, and Church at Bredwardine, the former showing interest in the Norman work familiar to many of us, finds no echo on Kilvert's own part. This though has been explored by others - was diary keeping becoming a chore? - and is only mentioned to lead smoothly to a step back. As I have already mentioned regretfully, we have no record of his Oxford days, but accounts of two return visits help to make good this lack.

Kilvert stayed there briefly in May 1874, and the pleasures this gave him were many, afternoon sun streaming glorious through the great west window of New College Chapel, outside "the old scene bright and busy which has been going on ever since I left Oxford" etc., but even here we find the terse "went to see the improvements in the Cathedral". Then came an enthusiastic reference to the 'Head of the River' boat race! As another rare exception, a week later, back in Wiltshire, he actually enthused over two churches, Broad and Little Somerford, but with a revealing comment on the latter, "reminding me strongly of a Welsh Church".

Again, in May 1876 we have pages of the delights of returning to the city - "There is nothing like Oxford" - boat races, dining at High Table in Wadham, admiring a beautiful Alderney calf, a roll of the organ at Merton, and finally "a long last lingering look and farewell of the beautiful Slave girl" (in a shop window of course). Almost the only reference to the stones of Oxford, but quickly repeated, mentions New College Chapel cloisters, green and grey. Oxford though provided other experiences, including one which through his words reveals more of the adult Kilvert.

A very well-filled day (Ascension Day 1876) included service in Merton, beating the bounds, uproar in the quadrangle at Oriel, then evensong in New College Chapel etc., with his friend Mayhew he was part of a great congregation in the new (1869, brick) Church of St. Barnabas. Very clearly, with its "incense bearers and a great gilt cross, thurifers and acolytes", "the last priest in the procession wearing a biretta and a chasuble stiff with gold", this was as unlike Clyro practice

as is conceivable; "pure Mariolatry" was Kilvert's description.

In response to Mayhew's question as they left the service, "Well, did you ever see such a function as that?" Kilvert's reply, "No, I never did and I don't care if I never do again", gives us our answer. Beauty in all its forms appealed to him, but grandeur in church buildings, meretricious displays and ostentatious ceremonials, the first making the other two easier to indulge in, had no attraction for him. The unpretentious churches of Radnorshire and places nearby, with few architectural features to admire, no ornate furnishings, no elaborate memorials, graceful arches or soaring pinnacles, were Kilvert's natural home.

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#### PROPOSED COACHING HOLIDAY

If sufficient members would enjoy a holiday on the Isle of Wight in 1990, May 7th. (May Bank Holiday) to May 11th. (Note: A.G.M. - May 4th. 1990) the estimated cost would be, (Dinner, Bed and Breakfast plus Transport) - £100.

Probable route: Cinderford, Monmouth, Hereford, Gloucester, Chippenham, Salisbury to Lymington. Members will doubtless appreciate that we must book now. Single rooms are scarce, if possible book double or twin rooms. Friends are welcome.

Bookings with £30 deposit per person to Hugh Dearlove - cheques returned if too few bookings received.

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#### THE THIRD NOTEBOOK

In his most recent letter, Mr. Dafydd Ifans - editor of the 3rd. Notebook, suggests that prospective purchasers could write to the library to reserve their copies and then they will be contacted by the library with a request for payment nearer the date of publication. (Address - The National Library of Wales, Penglais, Aberystwyth, Dyfed. SY23 3BU).

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"IS YOUR SUBSCRIPTION (£3. 00) DUE?"