

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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September 1995

Dear Member,

"Very hot on the Welsh border", such was the weather forecast for July 24th, the day of the Society's walk in the Bredwardine area. In fact the skies were grey and a cool current of air was distinctly felt; in sharp contrast to the weather of preceding days. Some 40 members were present. The tree-lined approach to the church, usually very quiet, was full of traffic, for as members arrived so a fleet of cars of bellringers was leaving. Though denied the welcome of a peal of bells, members, as they unpacked their picnic lunches, were given a warm reception from four plump hens, one of which was so friendly as to leap onto the lap of a Brecon member and offer to help him eat his lunch.

Mr Ron Watts was again the leader of the walk. Members were given a map of the area showing the sites of the various farms and cottages mentioned in the diary. This was based on the 1881 census research done by Mr Graham Middleton. Using a minimum of cars, the party made its way to Arthur's Stone, and then parked on the open ground on the ridge. The high hedgerows en route would have afforded Kilvert botanical pleasures - great white 'plates' of elder flower, honeysuckle, dog roses, foxgloves and red campions - as they did to the company. While the farms and some of the 15 cottages survive, several are now low masses of stone overgrown with brambles. Among these latter are those of such memorable characters as Jack my Lord and Priscilla Price. Mr Watts at various points read relevant passages from the diary.

In addition to organising the walk, Mr Watts had arranged for tea to be taken at Bredwardine Vicarage, to members' very great pleasure. Hitherto, sighting of the vicarage has been confined to either the distant view from Bredwardine bridge or the narrow side view from the lane. It was thus with very great pleasure members anticipated the prospect of actually entering the building and enjoying the garden. The sun shone on the lovely view from the sloping garden to the Bridge and the Wye. I could not but think how tempting it could have been for Kilvert, in this his first home and in such a beautiful setting, to lead a life of ease. But no! He regularly walked in all winds and weathers up to Crafta Webb, where the gradient in places is 1 in 4; or the three miles to Middlewood via Old Weston.

Mr and Mrs Vane-Percy, the owners, do not normally cater in this way, though they offer Bed and Breakfast. An excellent cream tea was laid on and pot after pot of tea was consumed. They told members of the history of the house and gave members free access to the rooms at the front of the house. It was a memorable venue. Our grateful thanks go to Mr and Mrs Vane-Percy, and also of course to Mr Watts who had undertaken the whole programme, so much appreciated by the members, and to Mr K. Finney for the following snap.



On the other side of the hill, Peterchurch was the venue for the summer commemoration service the following day, thanks to the Vicar. Revd P Williams who conducted the service. The Rt. Revd J R. Oliver, Bishop of Hereford, gave the address, which was much admired, conveying his deep appreciation of the Diary. (He has kindly given permission for it to appear in a future newsletter). The lessons were read by Mr Harley Dance and Miss J Bonnett. The church choir gave an anthem, and great encouragement to those in the nave; and Canon D T W Price performed the Act of Remembrance, and for, I think, the twentieth time had prepared the form of service! Not only is the society very grateful to all of them, but also to the ladies of the parish who received members so cordially with a sumptuous tea.

Members will be interested to know that Mr Golesworthy, owner of the site of the Old Soldier's Cottage and member of the Society, has kindly permitted the placing of a plaque to indicate the location. The plaque has been made by our Committee member Mr Colin Dixon. The site is up the narrow lane off the Hereford-Brecon A438, on the right as one proceeds through Bronydd(which Kilvert spells "Bronith") towards Clyro. The Society's thanks go to both gentlemen.

WEEKEND OF SEPT 23rd 24th

Saturday 23rd, a walk from Clyro to Llowes led by our chairman, via the Upper Noyadde, home of Florence Hill. Meet at midday opposite Baskerville Arms, Clyro. Picnic lunch.

Sunday 24th. Service at Glascwm church at 3 pm by kind permission of Revd A Piercey (priest in charge). Address by Revd. P .B. Barnes (Vicar of Bredwardine).

The village is remote. At Clyro members should take the Newchurch road and in that village take a left hand turn - one of the old drovers' roads - to a T junction. Here the left turn leads to Glascwm. (The right turn leads to Colva whose little primitive church, visited by Kilvert, deserves a call if time permits). This road is very narrow, but offers some of Radnorshire's best scenery, and there is a very steep descent into Glascwm.

A small coach (Smiths of Ledbury) has been hired. It will pick up members at Hereford Town Hall at 12.30 pm, and will proceed via Kings Acre, Moorhampton, Kinnersley, Hay then Clyro, so that other members may be picked up en route. Names and picking up points to me, please. Phone (01989) 562994.

Yours sincerely,

E J C West

OBITUARY

We regret to announce the deaths of the following members:-

Lady Golding, widow of the famous novelist, (Tullimaas, Cornwall) a member since 1989.

Miss E Wertheimer (Moreton in Marsh), life member since 1966.

Revd R Reffitt (Swaffham, Norfolk) life member since 1981

Mr A J Brain (Bristol), a member since 1983

Mrs G M Rooke (Hereford), a member since 1977. She is survived by her husband, Revd George Rooke, who for several years served on the committee of the society.

The Very Revd N F Rathbone (St.Margarets, Hereford), Dean Emeritus of Hereford Cathedral, a Vice President since 1969.

Mrs D Stephens (Romsey) a member since 1992.

THE PITCAIRN LINK

By Mr I. Pitcairn (Suffolk)

I was intrigued to read in the newsletter the article from John Hodkin - "Could there be a link", between Kilvert and Parson Woodforde, because I can show he is quite possibly right in his conjecture, although we will probable never know for sure.

At the time, 23rd March 1774, my great-great-great-great grand father, Revd. James Pitcairn was Rector of Compton Bassett and West Kington (both in North Wilts, and not far from Bath and Hardenhuish) and aged 58. He was also a Prebendary of Exeter cathedral. He was the first of the main Pitcairn line to come South of the border, and did so because of the confiscation of the family's land following the Jacobite Rebellion of 1745 (250 years ago this year).

His son, Revd Robert Pitcairn, eventually became vicar of Englishcombe, just outside Bath. On the date in question, he was aged 29 years and would have still have been minister of the Spring Gardens Chapel in London and one of the six "Select Preachers at Greyfriars". (Should any readers have information about these two posts, I'd be very grateful for clues!). He apparently did not occupy the living of Englishcombe until 1786 and died there 6 years later.

Here then are two direct ancestors of James and Nelly Pitcairn who became the brother-in-law and sister-in-law of Kilvert. Further, it is not inconceivable that the Revd James and the Revd Robert were acquainted with Kilvert's ancestors, Squires Coleman and Ashe. It should be mentioned that Robert had 2 brothers, William (b.1756) and James (b.1757), but I fear I know nothing of them.

In an exchange of letters with me, John Hodkin is of the opinion that "it was probably the younger man at the inn that night. The older man, particularly if he had had a busy day, would probably prefer to get to bed in good time that night rather than spend the night socialising and supping with Woodforde". Who can argue with that?

(Mr Pitcairn, the grandson of James and Nelly's brother Charles, is responsible for the UK branch of the Pitcairn Heritage Society. Membership is open to anyone who has an interest in the Pitcairn family. His address: 10 Farmerie Road, Hindon, Sudbury, Suffolk, CO10 8HA)

THE LOGAN STONE

(The following article, an abridgement of a longer one in "Cornwall Down the Years", is reproduced by permission of the editor. It came to me not from that county, but from our members Mr and Mrs R W Wood of Perth (Western Australia). It was in that city, members will recall, that the Kilvert Family Bible turned up at an auction, and Mr and Mrs Wood were greatly instrumental in the Society's acquisition of the item. Kilvert visited the "Logan Stone" on 27 July 1870).

The return of erosion by the elements over the centuries and indeed the millenia has left large sections of granite outcrop so delicately poised as to be movable by the comparatively

feeble power of human beings. These rocks are known as Logan rocks, Logan stones or merely rocking stones are found most notably in Scotland, Yorkshire and Cornwall, the most famous one being a few miles from Land's End. Estimated to weigh a massive 70-80 tons, this rock had been referred to in articles and in guide books for centuries as "the celebrated Logan Rock".

In April 1824, what can probably be described as one of Britain's earliest cases of vandalism took place. A revenue cutter "HMS Nimble" under the control of a Lt. Goldsmith (Nephew of Oliver Goldsmith the famous poet and playwright) was sent by the Admiralty to moor a warning buoy at the treacherous Runnell Stone reef, following several disastrous wrecks. After completing this task, the cutter sailed along the shoreline to inspect the famous rock, and, to quote a letter written by Lt. Goldsmith, "to look for some contraband suspected hidden in the nearby caves and cliffs". This could well have been a quite legitimate detour for the revenue vessel at a time when, as is now well documented, the area was a favourite haunt of smugglers.

Actually, the men and their implements got the rock swaying so as to dislodge it from its natural pivot. Had it not been for a convenient projection in the cliff face, the rock would have fallen into the sea.

Neither Goldsmith and his family nor the Admiralty officials could have anticipated the angry reaction from local M.P's, mine owners, property owners and people of Cornwall. It resulted in an order to Goldsmith that he replace the rock at his own expense or suffer the loss of his commission. A junior officer of limited means, he managed to receive assistance from Plymouth Naval Headquarters - hoisting equipment, hooks, and ladders - and with the help of local labour, the rock was replaced in November 1842.

Although the rock never rocked with the same ease and amplitude as before, crowds increased, due mainly to the widespread press publicity and local curiosity, stimulated by the publication of dramatic drawings of the lifting equipment. Later, the Great Western Railway cashed in on this unique attraction. Horse-hauled vehicles negotiated the rock strewn lanes and hills west of Penzance to see and actually move the Logan Rock.

As for Goldsmith, he died at sea in 1841, still carrying the rank of Lieutenant. Despite help from family and friends he was said to have been financially ruined by the incident. Yet he evidently felt a pride as a result of his act of vandalism, for he had painted as an additional identification of "HMS Nimble's" transom the words "Logan Rock".

(The bill of costs for the replacement of the Rock is also included in the article, the total being £130 8 shillings and 6 pence. Workers paid from one shilling to three per day. Five men working for one day earned 5s 6d, and drank beer to the value of 4 shillings. The most intriguing entry is "To Mr William Charnhalls for 60 St Just men who did nothing but drink beer to the value of 13s 6d").

LOOKING, LISTENING, TELLING

(I am very grateful not only to our valued New Zealand member Miss L Hancock for drawing my attention to this article, but also to the editor of "The New Zealand Listener" for permission to use it. It is one of an occasional series entitled "Personal Best", to which eminent writers, in this case Mr Dennis McEldowney, are invited to contribute.)

I swithered between three or four candidates for this confession of influential reading. The choice became inevitable when I realised that to produce an article about any of the others I would have to do a certain amount of re-reading and reading around, whereas I could write about Kilvert's Diary off the top of my head. It wasn't just conservation of effort or laziness that motivated the decision (it was partly that, no doubt), but this proof of how deeply Kilvert had penetrated.

I discovered this diary of a Victorian English curate when I was about 21, although it was actually my father who made the discovery. He brought home from the Christchurch public library, in rapid succession, the three volumes in which the diary was first published. About that time I began, partly in emulation, a diary of my own. I had been hooked on reading diaries for years, since, at the age of 15, I bought myself a Pepys, in a heavily expurgated Nelson Classics edition. Although I recognised that Pepys was the greater diarist, Kilvert

soon displaced him in my affections. Francis Kilvert was born in 1840, and wrote his diary through most of the 1870s. during which time he was a curate and later a vicar in Wiltshire and in Herefordshire, close to the Welsh border. Unlike Pepys, he never participated in any notable or historic events, and mentions such events only when he has read of them in the newspapers. His comments on them are conventional and without interest. But when he describes his own world it is a different matter. "Sunday, Christmas Day 1870. As I lay awake praying in the early morning I thought I heard a sound of distant bells. It was an intense frost. I sat down in my bath upon a sheet of thick ice which broke in the middle into large pieces whilst sharp points and jagged edges stuck all round the sides of the tub like chevaux de frise, not particularly comforting to the naked thighs and loins, for the keen ice cut like broken glass. The ice water stung and scorched like fire. I had to collect the floating pieces of ice and pile them on a chair before I could use the sponge and then I had to thaw the sponge in my hands for it was a mass of ice. The morning was most brilliant. Walked to the Sunday school with Gibbins and the road sparkled with millions of rainbows, the seven colours gleaming in every glittering point of hoar frost."

Kilvert was not entirely untutored as a diarist. He was devoted to Dorothy Wordsworth's journal, and that first quotation shows her influence; but in writing about people he was out on his own. "Saturday, June Day [1878]. At Priscilla Price's, Mary the idiot made signs that she was very ill and going to die. She pressed her hand on her side and said, ".Puff, Puff." Priscilla interpreted for her. "That means 'die', " she said. "Bom, Bom, " said the idiot. "She means the great bell will toll over her grave, " said Priscilla. The idiot rose and curtsied profoundly. "That is, " said Priscilla, "that after she is dead she will rise and curtsy to everyone who has been good to her." "Yes, yes, " said the idiot. "She is not willing for me to die before her, " said Priscilla. "No, no!" exclaimed the idiot. "Poor Prissy. " "The will of the Lord be done," said Priscilla. "Amen," said the idiot."

Kilvert's sensibility was sharpened by being constantly in a state of frustrated love and desire. He was a gentleman, but, while he was a poor curate, he could not maintain a lady in the state to which she had been accustomed. Meanwhile, he fell in and out of love with women both suitable and unsuitable, the younger the better.

"Shrove Tuesday, 13 February 1872. When the concert was over rain was pouring and there was a long way to go to the carriages. Daisy took Lechmere's arm but they had no umbrella and were standing in the porch waiting for one of their party to come back with an umbrella. She was dressed entirely in white, a white dress and long white cloak, and she looked so pretty standing there with her fair golden head uncovered. I ran back into the room, got Cooler's umbrella for them and accompanied them to the carriage. "Thank you," she said gratefully. When we reached the door of the school yard their covered waggonette was standing in the middle of the road. It was very dark. "Where's Daisy?" said Henry. "Oh here you are, I was just coming back for you. I'll carry you to the carriage." "Can you? " she said. "Yes, put your arms round my neck." She clasped her arms round her brother's neck, and he took her up in his strong arms and carried her safe and dry to the carriage. It was the prettiest sight in the world and reminded me irresistibly of Huldebrand carrying Undine through the flood."

The poignancy of that carefully observed scene lies in the fact that Kilvert is deeply in love with 19 year-old Daisy, but has been forbidden by her father to court her, because of his lack of prospects, and warned to keep his distance. Its effectiveness is enhanced by the absence of verbal breastbeating. Kilvert seldom analyses himself: his focus is outwards, but he knows that this way of describing conveys his feeling.

It was not until he was in his late thirties that he was made vicar of a good living. He married within a couple of years, but not to Daisy or to any of the other young women who had crowded his diary, and died a month later of peritonitis, on September 23, 1879. Little is known of his wife; much of his diary from the time he met her early in 1879 is missing, presumably destroyed by her.

In the 1930s, Kilvert's diary, in 22 note books, was shown to the poet and novelist William Plomer. who was reader for the publisher Jonathan Cape (and incidentally a pen-friend of Frank Sargeson's). Plomer published his three volume selection, amounting to about a third of the original, in 1938-40. In 1944, it was further pared down into one volume, and this is the form in which it is best known today.

It quickly became a recognised classic, and Kilvert almost became a cult figure. I have made

my own pilgrimage to the church at Langley Burrell in Wiltshire, where Kilvert was curate to his father, and have picked wildflowers from his father's grave.

Part of the attraction of the diary is its picture of a rural life, rural crafts and customs, now long gone. But at a deeper level, and more usefully to a would-be diarist, it shows how anyone, in any society or landscape, can look about and listen with wide-open eyes and ears and an open heart; and it gives the example of clear, lively and limpid prose.

A MUSICAL CONNECTION

By John Hodkin (Cumbria)

Little did I think when I recently listened to a series of radio programmes on the music of those great French organists Charles Widor and Louis Vierne that there would be a Kilvert connection. After all, what could there be in common between the world of the awesome instruments these two men played and that encompassed by the Langley Burrell harmonium?

The first programme had not been underway for half an hour, however, before I realised there was a link. The presenter, Mr. Richard Langham Smith, said that Widor studied under the Belgian organist Jaak Nikolaas Lemmens. He does not appear in the diary, but his wife, Helen Lemmens-Sherrington, a famous singer, took part in the Handel Festival at the Crystal Place in 1874, which Kilvert attended on Friday, June 26th. Kilvert reports that the duet "The Lord is My Strength" between Madame Lemmens-Sherrington and another soprano Madame Otto Alvsleben was lovely - "Madame Lemmens" voice pierced like lightning".

I gave some details of Madame Lemmens-Sherrington's career in a previous article, so suffice it to say that she was born Helen Sherrington in Preston, Lancashire, in 1834 and died in Brussels in 1906 aged 71. She married Lemmens in 1857, and in the 1870s formed part of the vocal quartet most in demand for festivals with Janet Patey, Sims Reeves and Charles Santley. Lemmens (1823-1881), 11 years her senior, studied at the Brussels Conservatory where he won first prizes for piano and for organ and composition. He was appointed professor of organ at the conservatory in 1849 at the age of 26. He resigned from the conservatory and moved to London in 1869, after which he and his wife made several concert tours. He returned to Belgium in 1878 and spent the last three years of his life trying to raise church music standards. Lemmens's famous pupils, as well as Widor, included Alexander Guilmant. Lemmens himself was especially renowned for his pedal technique and skilful registration.

Finally, how lucky we are to have this report of the Handel Festival of 1874! On October 24th the previous year Kilvert attended a performance of "The Messiah" at the Bristol Musical Festival. We are told of the scrimmage before it started but of the actual music-making, Plomer writes "Here follows a long account of the Messiah". What wouldn't we give to be able to read this long account!

LANGLEY BURRELL RECTORY

(The following is taken from a letter written by our member Mrs. J. Yeardye to our Subscriptions Treasurer, Mr. Lawrence Jackson)

"We travelled to Langley Burrell to do some sleuth-work concerning the once lovely old rectory. The entrance was well and truly padlocked but we noticed a car parked at the end of the long drive. Looking across the fields we noticed gaps where there were stiles, so we decided to go 'out of bounds' to where the car was parked. We then had to scale an ancient piece of machinery before we could continue up the rest of the drive, going past the yew tree on the lawn (blown down in the 1987 gales) and so up to the house.

"Here a young man emerged, who turned out to be one of two surveyors there assessing the awful conditions of the interior. The two young men allowed us access, but of course as far as they were concerned we weren't there!

"My husband managed to video a lot of the upstairs rooms, the kitchen, staircase and hallway, but the downstairs rooms were too dark, being boarded up. There was dry-rot everywhere. The roofs looked okay and the outside walls of 1739 were in fairly good condition. He also videoed the small stable (for about 3 horses) at the back; also an old outhouse cluttered up with hundreds of used wine bottles, and a smaller outhouse containing a very large water purifier still bearing the Victorian makers name. A trip down into the kitchen was quite an eye-opener. We managed to wedge open the back door leading into the garden, so that the light came through and showed up the old kitchen range and sink etc.

"We came away from it all, feeling chastened to have to have witnessed such terrible decay of a once-fine residence, and very saddened indeed, asking ourselves where there might be a kindly benefactor to take it all on and restore it once again".

THE TOP OF THE POPS (conclusion)

By E.J.C. West

Continuing my attempt to answer the question of the most frequently quoted entries from the Diary, I turn to essays and articles. One of the earliest and best appears in "In My Good Books" (1943) by V.S. Pritchett, now Sir Victor. He quotes Priscilla Price and her idiot stepdaughter, claiming the entries show Kilvert at his dramatic best. Another full entry is 8 June 1873, which begins "How delightful it is on these sweet summer evenings to wander from cottage to cottage, from farm to farm, exchanging bright words and looks with the beautiful girls at their garden gates and talking to them kindly sitting at their cottage doors" - this, he says, would be easy to mock; "we have lost the art of rendering pure sentiment, and a feeling for such a tenderness as Kilvert's". On the anecdote about Mrs. Prodgers (15 Feb. 1875) he comments, "Doubly immortal Mrs. Prodgers to be done both by Kilvert and stained glass!" No Father Ignatius, Solitary or Easter Eve, though!

Much the same is the long chapter on Kilvert in H.J. Massingham's "The Southern Marches" (1952). Easter Eve is absent, and the other two are only briefly referred to. The fullest extract is that of the Moccas Oaks.

"Electric Delights" (1978) is a selection of William Plomer's writings, edited by Sir Rupert Hart Davis. Included is the lecture on Kilvert given to the Royal Society of Literature in 1972, the year before his death. The following entries are used:- Llanleonfel church (6 August 1873), "Why do I keep this Diary" (3 November 1874), Mrs. Dew's misadventures shopping in Hereford (14 August 1872), Revd. Moule's reminiscences of Dorset church practices in the early 19th c (30 April 1874), the Black Mountains in snow cloud and sun (14 March 1871), the "imagined" account of Mary Williams waking and preparing for the day ahead (11 July 1870), the appearance and dress of Ettie Meredith Brown (6 September 1873) - **and** part of Easter Eve! No Father Ignatius, no Solitary!

There have been several books on the areas of Britain associated with writers. Of these I recall only "A Writer's Britain" (1979) by Margaret Drabble. There is a fine colour plate of Clyro church and the entry included is that of Kilvert wandering among the graves in the churchyard (24 March 1871). The entry of ten days earlier, referred to in my preceding paragraph, she terms as "dramatic and grandiose". On the other hand, this is the only extract from Kilvert to appear in Lord Denis Healey's anthology of favourite writing! (I am on the Lord's side!)

As for articles, I can recall extracts used regarding travel by both rail and coach, the 19th c. practices of doctors, dentists and veterinary surgeons, on country customs and crafts, on superstitions. All to no avail, because of the ultimate futility of trying to answer an impossible question!

A NEW CORNISH HOLIDAY

Most lovers of Kilvert will agree that one of the finest parts of the Diary is its record of his Cornish holiday in August 1870, when he went to stay with his friends the Hockins at Tullimaar, near Falmouth, from which he and the rest of the party made a series of memorable outings to local beauty spots, including the Lizard and Land's End. Most fortunately, this record has been preserved in full, in one of the three surviving volumes of the Diary, which was published in full in 1989, edited by Dr Richard Maber and his wife, Angela Tregoning.

Laurence Le Quesne (the author of 'After Kilvert'), his wife Mary, and the Mabers are hoping to organise a coach trip to Cornwall next summer to follow in the footsteps of Kilvert's Cornish holiday of 1870. The trip will take place at the end of August, will last a week, and will be based in the Falmouth area (Tullimaar, alas, is not available). A full programme, with prices, will be available in the autumn. Would all those who would like to receive these details when ready please write to Mr. Laurence Le Quesne, 22, St John's Hill, Shrewsbury, Sy1 1JJ, enclosing a stamped addressed envelope?