

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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June 1997

Dear Member,

April 25th, the day of the A.G.M., was remarkable in Herefordshire for the first 24 hours of rain this year. Nevertheless, over 60 members braved the adverse conditions. Apologies were received from Miss E. Bennett, Mrs. M. Burchett, Mrs. Fitzgerald, Mrs. M. Ottaway, Mrs. Talbot, Miss A. Wheeldon, Mrs. B.M. Williams, Mr. & Mrs. Crumpton, Mr. & Mrs. Middlemiss, Revd. & Mrs. Richardson and Mr. & Mrs. Wilkins. Tribute was paid to those members who had died since the last A.G.M. Minutes of that A.G.M. and the financial report were approved and adopted. An amendment to the constitution - that the A.G.M. shall have powers to elect a Vice-Chairman - was unanimously endorsed, and Mr. R.O. Watts was appointed. Re-elected as Committee members were Mrs. C. Fleming, Miss E. Wheeldon, Mrs. M. Stewart, Mr. B. Butcher, Mr. C. Dixon, Mr. M. Reynolds, Mr. B. Smith and Mr. M. White. Mr. G. Rogers was appointed Hon. Auditor (his 24th year) and Mr. L. Jackson Subscriptions Treasurer. (It was a pleasure to meet him again after his long illness).

During the interval there was not only the Ascari catering to enjoy but also a photographic record of the final entry in the Diary, made by Mr. F. Aggas. (It was he who arranged a most memorable Society visit to Brinsop Court some years ago). The sites mentioned in this entry (13 March 1879) and the scenes were displayed, as well as "the grand old Quaker lady". A fascinating and novel exhibit, for which we warmly thank Mr. Aggas.

Unfortunately our guest speaker was indisposed. Instead, thanks to Mr. & Mrs. Dixon, 6 of the BBC's series of episodes from the diary were shown. I remembered "The Solitary" and "Father Ignatius" as being 2 of the best of the 16 or so episodes, and "Daisy" as quite "un-Victorian". The finest image of the set was of Kilvert striding along a hilltop.

Rain was still falling the following day, but 24 members met at Cusop church for the Walk to Mouse Castle, led by Mr. John Wilks. At the church Mr. Wilks pointed out various architectural details, and referred to Kilvert's friend Andrew Pope who was curate there for several years, as well as to the Methodist Martyr buried in the churchyard. The walkers more or less followed Kilvert's route to the summit of Mouse Castle, heard the cuckoo, saw the first swallow and not only Kilvert's primroses and wood anemones but also bluebells and cowslips. One member reported that he would have an abiding memory of Mr. Wilks, one hand holding an umbrella, the other holding the diary, half way up the rampart, reading an extract to the walkers, some of whom were at the top while others, defeated by the slippery, muddy slope, were at the foot! The walkers were invited to Mr. Wilks's home where Mrs. Wilks had laid on cups of tea and a delicious assortment of cake. For the pleasure of the afternoon's walk and the hospitality, we are most grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Wilks! (I use the word "pleasure" deliberately, for I was assured it was!)

Remainder of 1997 events

I must apologise for giving wrong dates in the last newsletter. The weekend, based at Kinnersley is the 28th - 29th June. Saturday, 28th June, walk in the Whitney-on-Wye area. Meet at midday at The Boat Inn, Whitney. Picnic lunch (or bar meal at The Boat). Sunday, 29 June, at 3p.m., commemoration service at Kinnersley church. Address by Revd. R. Birt (vicar of Weobley and priest-in-charge of Monnington). Tea at the Old Rectory, and the possibility of a game of croquet.

Please note that the weekend at Presteigne is the 27th - 28th September. Further details in the next issues.

Yours Sincerely
E.J.C. West

OBITUARY

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

Major Jonathan Cross (Clyro), a member since 1992.

Mr. Tom Palmer (Wellington, Herefs.), a life member since 1967. Born in 1906, he was the grandson of Edward Morgan and Caroline Harris whom Kilvert rebuked for living in sin. They were married in 1871 by the Revd. Venables, who 3 years later baptised Mr. Palmer's mother. She lived until 1967, and with Mr. Palmer attended the first Society Commemoration service at Clyro (1948). He was proud of these links, but remained a modest countryman. Until last year he travelled regularly on the coach to commemoration services, and for many members a chat with him was one of the real pleasures of the day, enjoying his nice sense of humour and his wisdom. In lieu of floral tributes, donations to the Kilvert Society could be made. The amount raised was £210. We are most grateful for this gesture by his family.

As we go to press we learn of the deaths of Mr. Neil Brack and Mr. J. Golesworthy. Tribute to them will be made in the next newsletter.

FROM CORRESPONDENCE

'The Eccentric Solitary of Llanbedr'. Kilvert's Diary Volume Two, pages 225-228 (Wednesday, July 3, 1872) must be one of the better known passages in the diaries, where the Rev. John Price, Master of Arts of Cambridge University and Vicar of Llanbedr, Painscastle and his little grey hut are described in dramatic detail.

I came across a reference to this passage in Francis G. Payne's book 'CRWYDRO SIR FAESYFED Rhan I' Llyfrau'r Dryw - Roaming the County of RADNORSHIRE Volume I. Kilvert refers to the hermit obtaining the services of a 'little girl' who came to make his bed and tidy up four days a week. According to Francis Payne this 'little girl' was a Mrs. Powell from Llandeilo Graban who died around 1958 and never forgave Kilvert for his detailed description of the foulness of Price's hut. In the distant memory of her childhood, Mrs. Powell described the Rev. John Price as 'a lovely clean man.' Incidentally there are several references to Kilvert's Diaries in Francis Payne's work on Radnorshire. (from Mrs. B. Williams, Bala)

From a book on Dorothy Wordsworth: "On February 1826 she left for a 3 month stay at Brinsop Court in the calm dreamlike country between Hereford and Hay-on-Wye. She passed the months in the most unclouded happiness in her life with Tom and Mary Hutchinson and their 4 children..... On 1 April the season for excursions began. She went in the gig to Bredwardine to the church where half a century later Francis Kilvert would be vicar. 'Beautiful spot on this bright day,' she recorded, 'celandines, violets, primroses, budding honeysuckle, full blown palms.'" (from Revd. A. Seaburg U.S.A.)

Celebrations of the centenary of Edward Latham Bevan ("Teddy" in the Diary) are to be held at Brecon, June 13-15, marking his induction to St. Mary's church - eventually he would become the first bishop of the diocese of Swansea and Brecon. Some account of his life will be included in our September issue. (from Mr. B. Smith, Abergavenny)

Mr. O'Brien (Newchurch) tells me has read "A Spinister's Tour through North Wales", written by Augusta Pearson, one of the sisters of Mrs. Venables, and published by her great grandson Lt. Col. J. Little. It is hoped to record something of it in a future issue.

WHAT DID KILVERT THINK OF WELLS CATHEDRAL?

by John Hodkin (Cumbria)

Of all the places Kilvert visited it would be hard to think of anywhere more calculated to inspire him to heights of eloquence than Wells.

Two visits there are mentioned, one on Friday, 6th September 1872, and the following year on Wednesday, 24th September. I say "mentioned" advisedly, for the first one is dismissed in curt fashion - "The diarist visits Wells Cathedral" - and the second equally brusquely - "Another visit to Wells and Glastonbury is described".

What is so frustrating is that Plomer gives Kilvert's account of his visit to Glastonbury on the 1872 outing which makes us realise just what we have missed by not having Wells Cathedral included.

It is hard to understand why Plomer could not have preserved Kilvert's account of one of these visits at least.

Can we, more than 120 years later, glean any information about Kilvert's visits to the cathedral? (It is safe to assume that he went there on the 1873 trip too, I think.)

I recently asked the cathedral authorities if service sheets for those two days are available but, alas, sheets do not survive (or were not kept) prior to the early 1900s. The Register of Services and Preachers, the only service record for the 1870s, has no entry indicating anything special happened on the two dates, and there would appear to have been no sermon. (Still, if we cannot study the service sheets we can study the career of Charles Williams Lavington, who was organist for the whole period covered by the diaries.)

Lavington was born on 20th February 1819, and became a chorister at the cathedral when he was eight and remained in the choir until he was 16. He was a pupil of William Perkins, the previous organist, and of James Turle (1802-1882) who had also been a Wells Cathedral chorister and who went on to be organist at Westminster Abbey for more than 50 years. He is still known for his chants.

Lavington became assistant organist at Wells in 1843 and succeeded Perkins as organist in 1859 on the latter's resignation. An excellent booklet, "The Organs and Organists of Wells Cathedral", which I would commend to anyone visiting the cathedral, says that Lavington seems to have been an efficient musician, but a somewhat hard person. Almost his first act as organist was to expel two choristers, one of them merely for being absent for one Sunday!

Lavington continued until his death on 27th October 1895, at the age of 76. He had held the post for 36 years, almost as long as the whole of Kilvert's life, and was 53 on the occasion of Kilvert's first visit.

A kinder and gentler Lavington emerges from the obituary in a local paper, but it must be remembered that prominent people were often somewhat flattered in obituary notices of those days.

"The kindness and courtesy of Mr. Lavington and the cheerful alacrity with which he placed his splendid talents at the service of any good cause - when this did not interfere with his cathedral duties, which were his pride and pleasure - are as household words in the city."

The article recalls that he was one of the founders of the Wells Musical Association, which he brought to a high state of efficiency, and by its agency did much to improve and develop musical taste and talent among the citizens.

"He was a remarkably sensitive and unassuming man and devoted to his profession, in which he took high rank, but he shunned publicity and public applause."

Did Kilvert make any comment on him and, above all, what did he think of the cathedral? What wouldn't we give to know!

CAPTAIN COWPER COLES AND HIS "HMS CAPTAIN"

by Mr. A. O'Brien (Newchurch)

The night of Sept. 6th 1870 as usual turned out stormy for the squadron of 11 royal navy ships on their way home from Gibraltar to Portsmouth and which still had some miles to go under sail to put them clear of the Bay of Biscay. Their commanders were under orders to maintain sails for economy reasons rather than resort to the use of their coal-fired steam power. Some of the ships were of traditional timber construction and others were the more modern ironclads built by the navy since the 1840's. In the centre of the squadron was the brand new 'HMS Captain' the brainchild of Captain Cowper Phipps Coles, a brother-in-law of Agnes Venables.

Coles was on board as an observer and guest of the ships commander Capt. Hugh Burgoyne, VC. aged 37 and a hero of the Crimean war. Both men in an unusual and roundabout way were related by marriage. Capt. Burgoyne's grandfather was General John Burgoyne, a veteran of the wars in America, who against the wishes of her powerful family married Charlotte a daughter of the 11th Earl of Derby. From her there was no issue but the General dabbled elsewhere and sired four illegitimate children by singer Susan Caulfield, one of whom became a Fieldmarshal. Another son of the general was Sir John Fox Burgoyne, the father of the commander of the 'Captain'. A daughter of the general, Sophia Maria (d1860), married in 1814 Admiral Sir Phipps Hornby (1785/1867) whose son Admiral Sir Geoffrey Hornby (1825/95) married in 1853, Emily (d1892) the only sister of Capt. Cowper Coles.

Coles, according to naval historians, was an assertive and arrogant character who thought he could build a prototype battleship in spite of his lack of knowledge of ship design and against the advice of navy designers.

Born in Ditcham Park, Hants. in 1819 he was the 3rd son of the Rev. John Coles Rector of Silchester, at that time a village of Roman origin 7 miles north of Basingstoke. He went straight from school into the navy and was a Lt. at age 27. In 1853 he joined the huge naval presence in the Crimea and served as Flag Lt. to his wife's uncle Sir Edmund Lyons (1790/1858). The navy were taking a hammering from the Russian shore batteries until Coles took the initiative and had a large raft built on which he stuck a shielded, revolving heavy gun and after dark rowed close inshore where he successfully destroyed enemy stores, depots and an occasional gun position. Uncle Sir Edmund was suitably impressed with the results and sent Coles, now a commander, back home in 1855 to impress the Admiralty with his new ideas. However the Crimean war ended the same year, the Admiralty lost interest and Coles went on half-pay just as he was courting Emily Pearson, sister of Agnes Venables and all the other well known Pearsons of the Diaries.

Not to be beaten, Coles carried on and improved his twin, turntable guns enclosed in a 4 inch thick iron turret which he patented in 1859 and which is still in use by some of the world's navies although they are now remote-controlled by modern computers. He was encouraged by I.K.Brunel, wrote off streams of letters to the 'Times' and was summoned 5 times to 'Osborne' to explain his ideas to Albert. Still the Admiralty were very wary until the 'Times' rallied public opinion and with Coles supported by his gold braided relatives their Lordships in 1862 caved in and lent him a draughtsman.

Periodically he submitted his design drawings to the navy ship designers which they quite astutely never officially 'approved' and trials were carried out on a ship stripped down to a single deck on which Coles' revolving turret gun was then mounted and bombarded with 70 and 100lb. shot which failed to penetrate the turret or effect its operation.

The Scottish Laird brothers were chosen to build the new ship at a cost of £380,000 in their modern yards at Birkenhead and with Coles bobbing up and down between Greenwich and Liverpool things began to move and the keel was laid down in 1867. For the experienced Lairds this was a prestige job but still totally different to the routine ironclads that they had recently built. The maindeck, which was also the gundeck, was set at just 8 feet above sea level (the 'freeboard') but during construction extra loads of some 800 tons were added to other areas of the ship which, with the new guns weighing in at 25 tons each, caused the freeboard to be reduced to only 6 feet. This made for very doubtful stability when under full sail with her huge area of canvas.

H.M.S. Captain was launched in March 1869 with a crew of 500 instead of the 400 intended and over the next few months of fitting-out and sea trials, during which Burgoyne said she behaved 'comfortably', the 'Captain' set off with the squadron for Gibraltar.

It was on the return journey at around midnight on 6th September 1870 that a sudden squall struck the 'Captain' about 100 miles west of Finisterre and with the pressure of the wind on her sails she began to heel over causing her main deck to dip below the waves. Capt. Burgoyne spotted the danger and ordered the watch to cut loose all the main sails but it was too late and the 4,000 ton 'Captain' turned over on to her side. On deck at this time was commissioned officer Gunner May aged 37, who was closing the hatches on the turrets and had felt the tilt and spotted the sea sweeping across the main deck and he knew that she could never recover. He and some of the watch climbed up the sloping deck and along the by now horizontal side of the ship and walked over her bottom. Capt. Burgoyne was swept off the bridge and being a poor swimmer was soon drowned while the 18 survivors climbed on to one of the ships boats which had floated off its cradle.

Below them 500 officers, sailors and marines settled slowly to a terrible death with some of them probably still alive when the 'Captain' finally sat on the bottom of the ocean 1 mile down.

The lucky survivors under Gunner May now rowed due east for Finisterre suffering 2 days of sunburn, dehydration and hunger before beaching and setting out on a long, shoeless walk to find a British consul. After feeding, clothing and photographing them he packed them off home with their dreadful news. The nation was then told that more men were lost in this single ship disaster than died at Trafalgar.

A routine Court Martial of the 18 survivors was then convened on 27th Sept.1870 which after much buckpassing found that Coles and Lairds were responsible for the design faults and were to blame for the additional loads introduced which resulted in a lower freeboard and poor stability.

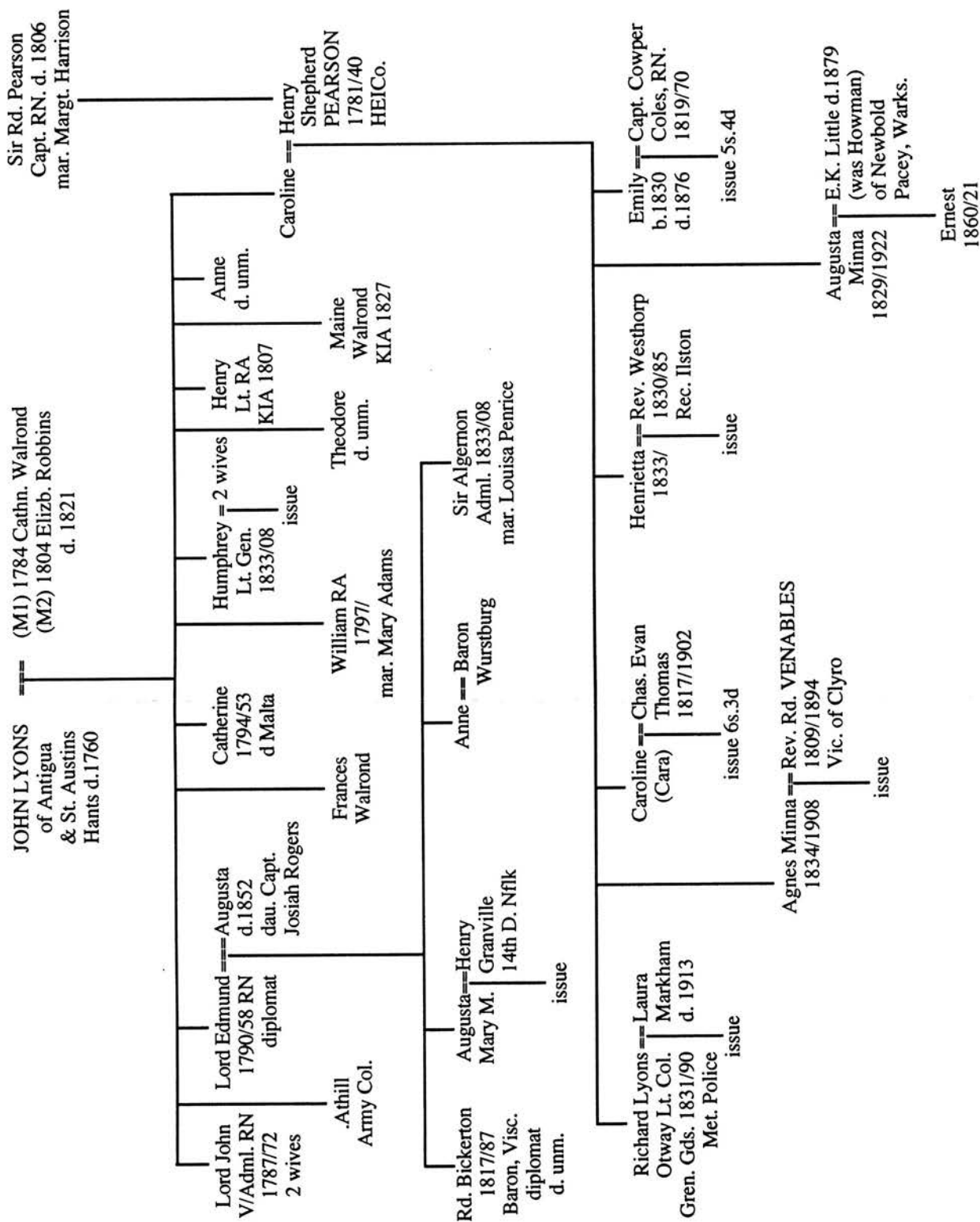
It took 3 days for news of the disaster to reach rural Clyro (Vol.1 p226) and it was Mary Bevan of Hay castle who told the story to the Rev. Venables who then had to break the news to his wife Agnes, a sister of Coles' wife Emily. Kilvert seemed quite fond of Emily who, as Miss Pearson, married Coles in March 1856 she being then 26 years old. Her father, Henry Shepherd Pearson was an East India Co. nabob who had built 'Fairingford' on the Isle of Wight where Emily Coles and her 9 young children lived for five years after her husband drowned. Financially she must then have felt the squeeze, although she had an admiralty pension of £150 a year since Feb.1871 for she took a long lease on 'Newstead', a house near Shanklin where Kilvert spent his holidays in June 1874 and July 1875 and seemed to enjoy pushing the semi-invalid Emily around the island in a bathchair.

Both sides of the Pearson family had more than their share of sailors. Emily's paternal grandfather was Capt. Sir Richard Pearson and her father's brother was Admiral Richard Pearson (1779/1838). Then on her mother's side there was uncle Sir Edmund Lyons, admiral and diplomat and uncle John Lyons also an admiral.

Emily had 9 children the youngest of whom, Commerell Markham, born 1869, was only a year old when his father drowned. He died age 33 in E. Africa. But best known to Diary readers was the son Samuel Hood who was aged 13 years when Kilvert took him in 1878, as a live-in student at £80 a year, when he was Vicar of Bredwardine (Vol. III p437). Born in Ventnor in 1865 his early education was in private schools and the navy college at New Cross which seems to have been wasted on young Sam for Kilvert thought him quite thick (Vol. III p450). Seven months later Kilvert was dead and Sam probably moved in with his aunt Agnes Venables at Clyro but later in life Sam did quite well for in 1892 he married Edith, the 2nd daughter of Sir Joseph Bailey, an owner of a fair piece of South Wales, and Sam was his steward/agent at Glanusk and other large estates. Sam and Edith lived in Badminton, Glos. Kilvert during his Isle of Wight holidays played sandcastles with Gussie, a daughter of Emily who in Oct. 1877 married Sir Baldwin Walker. Then there were two other daughters Alice and Minna, two sons Bickerton and Cowper Todd and a son Sherrard (1866/1936), a scientist with a wife named Constance.

Emily Coles died 11th Jan.1876 in the middle of a frustrating 6 months gap in the Diaries.

Details of the court martial of the survivors of the 'Captain' are in "HMS Captain" (1963) by A.Hawkey and a short story of this and other naval disasters are in "Lost at Sea" (1990) by John Harris. Details of the Coles/Burgoyne/Hornby relationship can be gleaned from the DNB and 'Hart's Naval Biographies'.



THE POCKET BOOK

by Hon. Editor

It is accepted that Kilvert used a pocket book to make immediate notes of the sights, incidents and impressions of the day, and devoted time in elaborating them into a final version. There is direct evidence for this, and there are many occasions when the reader must sense that a pocket book had been used. Yet I have felt that at times he wrote out much of the final version on the spot, so vivid and immediate is the writing.

Having recently to consult the June-July 1870 note book (edited by Dafydd Ifans, The National Library of Wales), I decided to re-read the volume. I was particularly struck by the entries for the 4 days, June 21-24. These total to nearly 7000 words. His father and brother were in Clyro during this period, his mother arrived on the 23rd and he himself was in charge of the parish, the Revd. Venables being in London. A time of demands, both of parish and family! I would suggest that some parts of the day were "finalised" on the spot.

June 21st was the day of the Snodhill Picnic. Kilvert is very much the observer. He takes no part in the preparation of the fires, nor in boiling the potatoes, and such was his loathing of tobacco that he would not have joined the "smoking party of gentlemen" after the picnic. What did he do? He may have made notes regarding the drive to Snodhill, but I would suggest that the comedy of the potato-boiling and the paragraph on the food and drink were written out on the spot, so full of detail and so vivid they are.

Plomer omits much of the later entry of the day. Kilvert describes the appearance and antics of a tame fox at Dorstone rectory. He visits the church, deploring the "Churchwarden Gothic" and crude restoration. Neither was used by Plomer, but he gives the account of the dancing and the horseplay of some of the men. Kilvert is again the observer, taking no part in the dancing. There was the opportunity to record fully. (Incidentally, Plomer's "Jim Rufen" is a misreading of "Sir Roger"). There follows two paragraphs on the return home. At 10.30 p.m., after getting a haircut in Hay (!), Kilvert and his brother are crossing the bridge walking back to Clyro. Did he, after 11.00 p.m. sit down and elaborate notes into nearly 2000 words, or was it a matter of largely writing up paragraphs written during the day?

Admittedly, he might have left some of the final paragraphs till the following day (the 22nd) for the invitation to join his father and brother on their fishing trip was not issued till "dinner time". Accommodation arranged at Llangorse, and a boat hired, the 3 men must have spent some 4 hours on Llangorse Lake. He had no pleasure in fishing; the full entry shows a great interest in scenery, in the various fishing parties and in the boatman's gossip, with precious little about the sport. Plomer gives one of the vivid sketches - the "green and white" of the group of young people from Brecon, but omits the more colourful sentence: "Upon the common near the lake shore, a flock of geese and a number of ganders were shuddering and straddling about, and through the white and grey red-billed company plodded a dark brown gypsy woman with a load of bright tins strung across her shoulders, followed by a dark bare-headed girl with a broad plain face and naked feet and legs". Even more vivid is a paragraph about a flight of starlings, which "swept by me, and wheeling about settled like a black cloud upon the lake shore. Again and again they took wing and we heard the rushing noise growing louder and then faint in the distance. When the starlings had perched, they chattered for a while, and then the chatter gradually rose to a crescendo scream till the excitement seeming to become unsupportable and irrepressible, the climax was put to the confusion by the whole flock rising again like a black cloud with a whistle and rush and relieving their overcharged feelings by whisking and sweeping in a short excursion about the lake". Such is the detail in these examples that I feel they were written up while he was in the boat. There was no opportunity for writing later. He shared a bedroom with his brother and the following day they were up "betime". (Yet the entry is the second longest of the four, over 2000 words).

"Betime" was a call from their father "between 3 and 4 o'clock", and the men were out on the lake "before 5", on the morning of the 23rd. They returned to shore for breakfast at 8.30, and went out again till "12.15". While Kilvert records that he went to sleep during the second part of the morning's fishing, the first part contains a vivid description! "The sun had been up some time but had not yet risen above the hills. He was stealing up behind Mynydd Troed and throwing an aureole or rather a silver fringe or border of bright glittering light round the sharp black edge of the dark mountain.... There was a cloud up on the peak of the Fam but we could see the bright red steep and scarp sides of the volcano-like mountain. Then the cap of cloud lifted as if a monk were uncwelling. The sun looked over the hill onto the lake and the shores burst into brilliant green". This, I would say, is recording on the spot. (the entry for this day is the shortest of the 4 days, none of it used by Plomer, but is nearly 1000 words.)

