

# THE KILVERT SOCIETY

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

*President:*

**The Lady Delia Venables-Llewelyn**

Chairman: Revd. D.N. Lockwood, Church Row, Llowes, Hereford HR3 5JB

Hon. Treasurer: Harley Dance, 11 Green Lane Crescent, Yarpole, Leominster, Herefordshire.

Telephone 01568 780675

Subscriptions Treasurer: L.F. Jackson, Little Orchard, 10A Manor Rd., Sherborne St. John, Basingstoke, RG24 9JJ

Publications Manager: C.J. Marshall, 169 Holly Walk, Leamington Spa, Warwicks. CV32 4JY

Hon. Archivist: Revd. Dr. J. N. Rowe, 12 Begwns Bluff, Clyro, HR3 5SR

Hon. Editor: E. J. C. West, 27 Baker's Oak, Ross-on-Wye, HR9 5RP

Minutes Secretary: Mrs. V. Dixon, Tregothnan, Pentrosfa Crescent, Llandrindod Wells, Powys, LD1 5NW

Hon. Secretary: Mr. M. Sharp, The Old Forge, Kinnersley, HR3 6QB. Telephone 01544 327426

## March 1997

Dear Member,

Although the Society's autumn commemoration service had been arranged for September 29th at Langley Burrell, quite two dozen members, including our President, availed themselves of the invitation to attend the service at Clyro the previous Sunday, combining a thanksgiving for the restoration and Harvest Festival. The service was conducted by the vicar, Revd. M. Reed, assisted by our Chairman.

Over the arch of the church door was an "echo" of the Diary - two long bines of real hops. (Did Kilvert write "bines" and Plomer misread the word? "Vines" I have never heard to describe the long festoons of the plant). A lavish display, such as Kilvert described, was not to be expected. The austerities of the Second World War put an end to the old practice, and decorations became much more restrained. All the better at the service, for the eye could concentrate more readily on the restoration! Walls, windows and roof - all looked as new. The two elaborately scrolled Victorian texts, one over the chancel arch, the other at the west end, glowed in unfamiliarly bright colours.

At the beginning of the service, the Vicar's Warden, Mr. A. Gibson-Watt, paid tribute to the builders' and the craftsmen's devoted work. He also expressed gratitude to the response from members of the Kilvert Society to the appeal, both from the U.K. and overseas. The Vicar's address was on the subject of giving thanks, doubly due at this service, not only for the harvest but also for the crafts and skills of human hands. It was thus fitting that displays of needlework, of objects made from stone, paper, straw were included with usual harvest contributions.

Tea was provided in the Village Hall, and once again Revd. Reed had put out many interesting documents as well as parish registers for display. It was a pleasure to meet two members who happened to be on holiday in the area. Mrs. Vinnicombe of Aberdeen and Mr. Best from Middlesex - and I am very grateful to another member, Mr. Nunn, who kindly enabled me to attend the proceedings.

An account of the Walk at Langley Burrell the following Saturday appears elsewhere in this issue. I am grateful to Mr. Ron Watts, committee member for it. About a dozen members from the Welsh Border were among the congregation. The service was conducted by the Rector, Revd. S. Smith, the lessons read by Mrs. Payne and Miss J. Hume (both members) and the organist was Mr. C. Smith. The address, given by our Chairman is included in this issue. An excellent tea was laid on in the Village Hall by the ladies of the parish. The Society is very grateful to all the ladies and gentlemen who took part in the service, and also to those ladies who prepared the refreshments.

## 1997 PROGRAMME

**Friday April 25th.** A.G.M. and Social Evening at the Bishop's Palace, Hereford (by kind permission of Mrs. J. Oliver). The speaker will be Mrs. A. Berry who will give an illustrated talk on Kilvert and Hereford.

**Saturday April 26th.** Meet at Cusop Church at midday. Permission to use the Church car park has kindly been given. Mr. John Wilks will lead a walk to Mouse Castle - and beyond, if desired, to Vagar Hill which has outstanding views. Picnic lunch. In deference to the owner of the lands covered by the walk, please no dogs.

### LATER DATES

**Weekend of June 27-28.** Walk, and on 28th service at Kinnersley (Herefordshire).

**Weekend of September 26-27.** Walk, and on 27th service at Presteigne (Powys).

*Members in Dorset and adjacent counties might like to know of the following events of the William Barnes Society:-*

**April 17th.** Lecture by Mr. R. de Paven, curator of Dorset County Museum.

**June 14th.** Summer Lunch.

Both events at Dorchester. For further information ring Mrs. J. Bryant (01385 85338).

Other members may well be interested in a conference organised by the John Clare Society to be held 4-6 April at the Dalton-Ellis Hall, Manchester on the topic of - John Clare in his time and ours! Fee: Residential £96, non-residential places available. For details and bookings please send sae to: The Hon. Secretary, Mrs. Mary Moyse, The Stables, 1a West Street, Helpston, Peterborough PE6 7DU. Proposals for papers to: Dr. P.M.S. Dawson, Dept. of English and American Studies, University of Manchester, Oxford Road M13 9PL (Tel. 0161 275 3153; Fax 0161 275 3256; e-mail mfcstpd@man.ac.uk)

Yours Sincerely

E.J.C. West

## OBITUARY

We regret to announce the following deaths, and would extend its sympathy to the bereaved.

Mrs. V. Browning, (Shepperton), a member since 1973.

Mr. Mervyn West, (Moorhampton, Hereford), a member for over 30 years, and for more than 20 years a valued and popular member of the Committee.

Mrs. B. Smith (Kidderminster) a member since 1981.

Revd. P. Ralph-Bowman (Salisbury) a life member since 1981. He was for many years in charge of Llanbedr and Bryngwyn parishes, and as a keen Kilvertian warmly welcomed the Society for services at both churches. He also preached at Langley Burrell in 1993.

## FROM CORRESPONDENCE

The Secretary has received an appeal for a donation to the repair of the Heanley cross in the churchyard at Croft (Lincolnshire). It commemorates Marshall Heanley and "his second daughter, Kathleen Mary, who fell asleep September 15th 1891 aged 40 years". In view of the part she played in Kilvert's life, the committee agreed to respond to the appeal.

From our Darlington member, Mr. T.H. Godfrey, comes an interesting comment on white glove funerals (April 11th 1872), from "Customs and Ceremonies" by Charles Righely. "Normally they would be blackclad men but as recently as the 1930's it was the usual custom for the coffins of young boys and girls to be carried to the grave by their contemporaries, whose sashes, gloves or armbands would be white, the colour of purity and innocence .... moreover the funeral of an unmarried girl or bachelor of good reputation would be proceeded by a "maidens" garland or virgins crown of real or artificial flowers which rested on the coffin during the service and thereafter hung in the church with the white gloves of the bearers. Such can still be seen in places like Minsterley in Shropshire and Bacton in Herefordshire."

As a new member, Mr. Philip Strand (Chippenham) received his first newsletter last November. He writes that he read Mr. Sidney Ball's article with particular interest. When a few years ago he started on the Strand family tree he had very little to go on. "Playing a hunch that my parents were married at Ross," he writes, "my wife and I went to Ross, and the helpful rector let us loose among the original sources. We found the vital entry in August 1918. The Rector at the service ... Rowland T.A. Money-Kyrle. But it didn't end there. Father moved to Chippenham in 1908, became Town Clerk, and his close friend for many years was Tom Briscoe! In 1918 a Dr. Lawrence joined the practice and moved into Achill, Marsfield Road, you may ask what's he got to do with it - not a lot, but he did help me into the world in 1921!"

For the benefit of members wishing to see the Kilvert show case in Hay-on-Wye library our archivist, Revd. Dr. J.N. Rowe has sent the times when the library is open.

*Mondays* 10 - 11.30, 2 - 4, 6 - 8

*Thursdays* 11 - 3

*Tuesdays* Closed

*Fridays* 10 - 12.30, 6 - 8

*Wednesdays* 10 - 12.30, 2 - 4

*Saturdays* 10 - 12.30

It is always a pleasure to welcome a new contributor, in this issue appears an article by Mr. T. O'Brien (Newchurch) on "The Old Soldier", but he has also given to the Society a copy of his researches into the Welsh Border families mentioned in the Diary. These total an impressive 421 entries. He tells me he has some 20 more to write up. A most valuable gift, for which the Society is most grateful!

## **SERMON PREACHED BY THE CHAIRMAN OF THE KILVERT SOCIETY AT LANGLEY BURRELL ON SUNDAY 29th SEPTEMBER 1996**

The entire theme of a Harvest Festival is gratitude and, I think, that I may very well be the most grateful person in this congregation. Last Monday I woke with a terribly sore throat and felt very ill, Tuesday was just the same. On Wednesday I felt a little better, but on Thursday I was in bed again with a temperature.

When I thought of you here in Langley Burrell and how I should let your Vicar down so badly I went hot and cold in another way. I did not know what I could do. Then I hit upon a plan. I would not write a sermon, which I felt unable to do: instead I would write a letter. I like writing letters and if I was still too ill when Sunday came, then your Vicar could read it.

Here is my letter.

Dear Parishioners of Langley Burrell and Members of the Kilvert Society,

It is very good for us to worship here in this ancient, historic and beautiful church. Perhaps, if I may say so, the most beautiful of all the Kilvert churches. Many of us who love and live in the Border country have a tendency to think of Kilvert against only such a setting. If we do that, then, we are losing almost half of the diarist whom we revere.

It is, I think, undeniable that the Clyro passages are some of the most delightful and observant. The people, the sudden hills and mountains and valley excited him and the formation of the clouds rolling over the Black Mountains and the bare Begwns and sparsely populated area north of Clyro inspired him. He did good work in Clyro and had a good following.

However, without the period when he returned here to help his father, we should be much poorer as to his real character.

In Clyro he was The Curate, a man of whom they knew little, to the people he was someone unencumbered by any personal history, or family ties. Here in Langley it was quite different: he was part of a well-known family, he was judged not just for himself but as a member of the Kilvert family with ties connecting them with the Colemans and the Ashes. It is interesting to note how often he was referred to as Mr. Frank by parishioners and others. This never happened in Clyro. The people here saw another persona; Kilvert in another light.

It is interesting to ponder that when he returned here from Clyro it was to aid his father who was becoming increasingly deaf. He had been in this parish a long time and, like us all, he failed to see what was wrong in his immediate environment. His son was shocked by the slovenly appearance of the wine bottle on the credence table. When a wedding took place in the winter ivy had to be cunningly arranged so that the holes in the altar cloth were concealed. These are small indications of Kilvert's senior's complacency and lack of drive.

At home it was the same. I am always both amused and a little saddened that Kilvert having spent an entire morning polishing the harness and burnishing the brass before setting off in the pony-cart to meet his mother at the station, she failed to notice the renewed splendour. She, poor woman, had had her pocket picked in Bath and was upset. But she did praise him when he moved all the heavy pots with the chrysanthemums from the terrace to a more sheltered place, she called it a "Herculean task".

There are many stories in the diary about the family which we would never have had if he had not returned. His mother, a very proper early nineteenth century lady, had not, until then, considered her son either old enough, or wise enough to know some of the less flattering aspects of their family history. We might never have known about "The Monk" and how careless Kilvert was in tipping her out of her pram!

Yes, there is a difference between the Kilvert of Langley and the Kilvert of Clyro. Frederick Grice in his book called it the world of a Wordsworthian dream in Clyro and of the world of Tennyson here. Some truth. One could also call it the difference of Celt and Saxon. I would say, though, that it was the same man under different influences. The wild Border country excited his whole being, physically he made those momentous walks and the scenery worked upon his imagination. He was aroused to moments of ecstasy.



Here in Langley, it is another mood that takes over, he is much more reflective.

The autumn of 1873 was an extremely beautiful one and on 23rd September after picking apples with his father, toiling up with them to the attics, he wrote:

"In the afternoon as I was sitting under the shade of the acacia on the lawn enjoying the still warm sunshine of the holy autumn day it was a positive luxury to be alive. A tender haze brooded melting over the beautiful landscape, and the peaceful silence was only broken by the chuckling and grumbling of a squirrel leaping among the acacia boughs overhead, and the clear solitary notes of a robin singing from the copper beech."

"A luxury to be alive."

We do not often recognise that life is a luxury. We do notice, and frequently, when it is not. This is because, like the news in the papers and, perhaps, even more on the television, we are more alert to wrongs than to rights, to pains more than pleasures. We are often a very ungrateful people.

There are two things which are noteworthy in this little meditation of Kilvert. All the morning he had been a good husbandman, picking apples, carrying them in baskets up to the attic. Work, not as obvious and as familiar as harvesting in the fields, but good manual toil nonetheless. It brought a feeling of peace and well-being as he sat so contentedly under the tree. It was a well earned rest and it should not escape our notice that the adjective he uses to describe the hour, the day, the particular light is HOLY.

The next day, September 24th, he encounters Herriman, a railway porter and he contrasted his own leisure with the three days the porter had free in a whole year. He adds, "And for no desert of mine. Surely there will be compensation made for these things hereafter if not here." He was aware of the social injustice in his time - and many were not, they accepted the status quo. So in many ways Kilvert looked forward, he did not know whether in this life or the next to the words of the first lesson from the prophet Malachi:

"I will rebuke the devourer for your sakes ——— for ye shall be a delightsome land."

Kilvert was much more rooted, however, in the New Testament than the Old, as it should be. Our second lesson: "I am the true vine" was, then, a particularly popular one. It is a symbol which occurs again and again in Victorian church architecture and furnishings. To those listening to Jesus in Palestine, it was a telling illustration, there were grapes in most cultivated land. As Christianity took hold and advanced northwards its meaning cannot have been so immediate: Anglo-Saxon people were more used to hops than grapes. But for some there was always wine and most of all in the Holy Eucharist.

The idea of Christ that he is the vine and we are the branches is a deep one. It makes us a part of Him, we are not just leaves, fruit, but branches. It should give us confidence to fulfil the works that Jesus requires of us and the last words of the lesson, uttered so easily are the most difficult of all:

"Love one another, even as I have loved you."

On the whole Kilvert did this, but being a human being there were some quite startling lapses. His invective on tourists - above all the "obnoxious British tourist" can be cited! But it was not, perhaps, so very deep - just an annoyance taking the upper hand in what was, after all, his private diary.

Today we rejoice with thankfulness for many, many things. We should give thanks for this pouring rain, though it is rather difficult. You and I don't want it at this moment, but the earth does very badly.

Alas, writing this last bit, here in Langley, I find it is becoming a sermon and it was meant to be a letter.

So I will begin to close. First, I am so glad that I am able to be with you all. I even managed the walk yesterday that brought Kilvert amazingly closer to us. We parishioners and Kilvert members can rejoice that the Old Rectory has come into such capable and sympathetic hands. I am glad that I did not have to jump a sudden sermon on your Vicar and I am glad to have seen Langley Church so extremely beautiful with flowers inside and out.

Life is a luxury and we should always be aware of it and rejoice when we can in it.

So, my dear friends, the letter ends with the words of an old correspondent of our family, who lived to be one hundred and four, "I think it is time that I sat on a full stop."

Yours very sincerely,

David Lockwood.

## **THE WALK AROUND LANGLEY BURRELL**

*by Ron Watts (Ross-on-Wye)*

The weather was dull and cloudy and looked unpromising when we met at Langley Burrell Church. Our leader Mr. Jim Hall and his wife Marjorie, arrived early and the members introduced themselves as they arrived.

The walk started with a visit to the church and everyone was impressed by the beautiful flowerbeds all around the churchyard (we were told that they were the work of one of the church-wardens. And had

resulted in the church receiving the award of the 'Best Kept Churchyard in North Wiltshire', in both 1994 and 1996!)

The interior of the church had been beautifully decorated for the Harvest Festival and combined Kilvert Commemoration Service to be held the next day. Jim conducted a comprehensive tour of the church, including a visit to the bell tower, and provided a great deal of information about the time when Kilvert was curate there.

After leaving the churchyard by the gate leading to Squire Ashe's home, Langley House, we walked through the grounds and by the stable block of the old manor house, replaced in 1770 by the Rev. Robert Ashe, to a rock garden near an ornamental pool, where *masses* of hardy wild cyclamen were blooming in a variety of colours.

Then through fields and footpaths to Manor Farm (Home Farm in the diary) where the newly installed farmer was leaning against a gate wondering who all these people were. Jim explained that we were Kilvert devotees and showed him a clipboard holding selected readings. The new farmer had never heard of RFK but he read aloud (unintentionally) the reading referring to Manor Farm and it was nice to hear the surprise in his voice as he read.

Through more fields to "The Brewery Arms", known locally as "Langley Tap" where most of the party enjoyed excellent fare while a few sat in the garden to eat their own picnics.

The next call was at Common Farm where Jim introduced us to the new owners who had almost completed renovating the building. We were invited to walk through the house, in our boots, and during the tour we learned that the lady owner was a relation of the Ashe family.

Then to Langley Rectory where Robert Kilvert and his family lived when he was Rector of Langley Burrell. This building too was undergoing extensive renovation and we were permitted to walk all around the outside and to look into the interior through the open doors and windows. The creeper which is evident in the group photograph taken at Dora's wedding has all been removed and the date 1739 is now visible in a keystone inside the porch. That was the date the original *cottage* was greatly enlarged.

The next place we came to was Barrow Farm with a great variety of poultry all around, and in the window of one of the cottages there could be seen some day old chicks, in a large cage on the windowsill.

We were soon in Bird's Marsh and Jim took us to the spot where Kilvert was a member of a picnic party and as we stood there we could almost picture them dancing the Roger de Coverley in that quiet glade. The keeper's cottage is no longer standing. After walking through The Marsh we saw, in the distance, The Ridge where Ettie Meredith Brown lived. Kilvert also refers to the house as Nonesuch.

Jim then took us to Marsh Farm where he and Marjorie live and work. Marjorie had prepared a lovely tea and it was very difficult to tear ourselves away from such interesting hosts to return to Langley Church and our cars.

It was a wonderfully informative day, perhaps one of the most interesting in recent years, and the weather was fine and warm - typical Kilvert Weather. Thank you Jim and Marjorie for your warm-hearted and kindly welcome. Those who were unable to attend missed out on 'a day to remember'.

*p.s. Jim would be pleased to have copies of any photographs taken during the walk.*

## **GOOD READING FOR A TRYING DAY**

*by John Hodkin (Cumbria)*

Whit Monday, June 5th, 1876, was a singularly trying day for Kilvert.

It is hard to think of a more embarrassing situation for a clergyman to find himself in than a dispute with a ticket collector, and this is just what happened to Kilvert as the result of getting into the Flying Dutchman train by mistake.

It is good to know, however, that he bought a "charming book" at a second hand bookstall at Bath for 3d called "The Attic Philosopher in Paris, being the Journal of a Happy Man", which he became so absorbed in that he did not give the journey a second thought.

Who wrote this book? I put this question when I wrote an article two years ago about books in Kilvert's life. There was no reply to my appeal, so I thought it would be a diverting puzzle trying to find out.

My first thought was that it was by an American writer, knowing that a number of them found Paris a great influence on their work. The title of the book made me wonder if it was by a whimsical writer of the school of Oliver Wendell Holmes or Washington Irving. This line of inquiry proved entirely fruitless and I eventually found that the most obvious clue had been staring me in the face - that the writer was a Frenchman! He was Emile Souvestre, hardly a household name.

Souvestre was born in Morlaix, Brittany, in 1806, and died in Paris in 1854. An encyclopaedia I consulted says his most successful work is set in his home territory and that in all his writings purely

literary qualities yield pride of place to moralising tendencies.

A French encyclopaedia I looked at has a very different verdict. He has depicted in his work, it proclaims, the way of life of his region with much truth, naturalness and freshness. Whichever verdict is correct hardly matters. What is important is that this now forgotten book gave Kilvert much pleasure on that unpleasant day.

## **THE GOWER THAN AND NOW**

*by David Howell (St. Albans)*

"The lurid copper smoke hung in a dense cloud over Swansea, and the great fleet of oyster boats under the cliff was heaving in the greenest sea I ever saw". One would not expect to see these words from the Diary (18 April 1878) in a Beefeater Restaurant, but they are in a picture frame at "The George" on the Mumbles, part of the Gower on the outskirts of Swansea. Another quotation from the Diary is to be seen on the Information Board at Langland, one of the most delightful Gower bays.

It is comforting that Kilvert should be remembered here, where he spent some of his happiest days. These visits are recorded, one in 1872 and two in 1878. In view of the long gap between the first and second, he may have made other visits, rejected by Plomer. On each of the visits he was the guest of Revd. Sterling Westthorp and his wife, the youngest of the four sisters of Mrs. Venables.

Arriving at Killay station, just outside Swansea, he would be met by his host in his waggonette. On one occasion, because of a muddle in train times, he "walked over to Ilston rectory, four miles over the fine high common, through the screaming peewits and a strong wind from the sea" (This was the occasion he carried a two-gallon stone jar to fill with sea-water for Miss Newton's aquarium). At Ilston rectory he would be greeted by his hostess and the two children, and there followed days of long walks with his host, bathing, paddling with the children, other excursions - to make him regret having to leave "dear hospitable Ilston".

What changes would he find in Gower today? Killay station has long gone, a victim of Dr. Beeching, so he could not buy a ticket in order to accompany on the return journey the talkative Hughes, vicar of Bryngwyn. The station itself is now a public house containing photographs of the line in its hey day. Nor is there a Mumbles train to run the whole length of Swansea Bay. The oyster beds and Killay coal mine are no more. Nor is it likely that among the clergy of today one would find the wood-carving bachelor, the Revd. J.C. Davies of Llan Madoc who "worked like a Roman priest, close shaven and shorn dressed in seedy black, a long coat and broad shovel hat"!

Nevertheless, the essential of Gower remains, its wild beauty largely unspoilt. The neolithic tomb and the "bone cave" described by Kilvert, now known respectively as the Giant's Grave and Cathole, are still accessible. Oystermouth Castle still "stands nobly upon a hill overlooking the town and bay" and Penrice Castle is still a landmark.

Ilston itself remains a very attractive village. The church, basically of the 13th century but much restored in Victorian times, was at its centre. It is still in use. The Rectory, adjacent, is now a private residence. Together with his host, Kilvert walked down the slopes to the bays through fern and heather. Gorse and foxgloves, the bird life were admired and noticed. Kilvert could do the same walks, observe plants and birds, today, but beyond recall would be the "great fun and famous laughing...a wild, merry, happy day".

## **GENERAL PITMAN'S GRAVE**

*by Basil Butcher, (Hereford)*

Until few years ago, members visiting Mrs Kilvert's grave at Bredwardine could not have failed to notice another nearby, that of General Pitman. Superimposed on a flat slab, and cast in bronze, were helmet and cloak of the 11th Hussars. This was the work of Mrs Rafael Sabatini, wife of the famous historical novelist. On my last visit, the handsome bronze memorials were missing. Dr Newsholme (K.S member and churchwarden at Bredwardine) reports that corrosion had set in, and that they had been accepted at an army museum at Winchester. What follows has not the slightest connection with Kilvert, but I hope that our Editor may bend the rules and allow publication!

I knew General Pitman when he was living at Brobury. He had been a photographer way back in the 1860's in Northwest India. He was a member of the Talbot Album Club, the oldest postal photographic portfolio in the country. I was then the Secretary and visited him shortly before his death. Years later, browsing in a second-hand book shop, I picked up a book, opened it and there was the following account of a visit made by the author to General Pitman. The book was called "The Remainder Biscuit", the author Robert Hartman - an autobiography largely dealing with the first World War. Following is the account of the visit.

"Colonel Tommy was a remarkable man. Seeing him under normal conditions, one would never have supposed him to be a cavalry soldier, he had a slight stoop, his hair was always too long at the back, he was not a good horseman and he had a slight stammer. But I will maintain to my dying day that he was the best commanding officer in the British Army. He had character, knew his job inside and out



and loved his regiment with a whole and individual love.

"Years after the war, when he was living in Bredwardine on the banks of the Wye (he was a keen fisherman), he invited me for a day's fishing, showing me first the house and gardens. The entire groundfloor of the house - pelmets, curtains, chaircovers and sofas - was done up in a heavy brocade in the regimental colours, three inch stripes of crimson and gold. The affect was blinding and bewildering! He had been lucky enough, he informed me, to find several hundred rolls of the brocade in a country house sale. "I still have plenty left", he said with satisfaction.

Over the mantelpiece in the dining room was an old picture of a jockey on horseback. The jockey was wearing the regimental colours but apparently unaware that the horse had lost a leg. "I found that picture in Hereford" said he. "It was very dirty when I bought it, so I cleaned it with petrol. The rear hind leg came off in the process, but the jockey's colours have come up really splendidly, haven't they?"

Next we went round the garden. There was but one kind of flower in it, a jackanapes pansy. It grew in all the borders, the beds and filled any window box. Its crimson and gold faces stared at me from every direction. "I felt I had to have some of those," said the General beaming with satisfaction. "The apple trees in the orchard in columns of squadrons, with squadron leaders and troops leading in front. Heading the regiment was a group of three trees representing him, his trumpeter and adjutant. 'That's me', said the General, pointing to the foremost tree. In a corner of the orchard was a group, of trees representing the regimental band. "When we started fishing the General to my surprise advised me to put on a silver bodied fly. "But surely, General", I said, you have a XIth Hussar fly", I said, 'Never thought of it', he replied, looking rather ashamed of himself.

"When I returned to London I had some dyed exactly in the right colours and with them I tied a dozen on as XIth Hussar salmon flies in various sizes. I secured them onto a card and sent them to the General. A few days later I had a telegram from him in Scotland - "Eternally grateful, caught 3 salmon and 6 sea trout in one morning in the same pool with XIth hussars, may I have them copied?" I sent him some more, but though he fished with XIth hussars for the rest of his life, he never caught another fish. But at least he had had one good day with them".

## **A SOLDIER OF MISFORTUNE**

### **John Morgan and the Peninsular War**

*by T. O.'Brien, (Newchurch)*

The 39th Regt. of Foot (1st Batn) and the 54th Regt. of Foot (2nd Batn) were formed in 1701 and both of which later became "The Dorset Regiment". They spent 3 years under Wellington in the Peninsular Wars and fought from Portugal in 1811 right through Spain and over the Pyrenees in 1814 into France. With the 39th during most of the major battles was John Morgan, Kilvert's 'Old Soldier' and his best known and favourite Clyro parishioner. John took the King's Shilling in 1812, probably in a Brecon or Hereford pub and aged only 19 years. After a short basic training he joined the 39th already in Spain where Wellington's army was up against 200,000 French troops which the Duke, assisted by John and his regiment, hoped to push back over the border into France. It was to take them another two years of major battles at the end of killing forced marches in tropical temperatures or ice cold torrential rains. A typical example was the 3rd siege of Badajoz in March 1812 where after a gruelling march in atrocious weather the 39th bivouacked in the open without cover on wet and icy ground until the town surrendered the following month. It left them with some 150 non-battle casualties and an effective strength of 900 men.

While sitting out the siege and then occupying Badajoz John Morgan missed Wellington's victory at Salamanca in July 1812 but the following month saw the 39th take off on a march of 280 miles in a blistering Spanish summer to take Madrid.

On this long march the men wore the uncomfortable Shako caps of the time with its large '39' brass badge and red tunics with white waist and crossed shoulder belts. In the terrible heat and in regular skirmishes with the French they lost another 30 men with 30 more wounded.

The march took 22 days under their divisional commander Sir Rowland Hill who faced the French Marshal Soult and his 60,000 men. Wellington had 50,000 around Madrid including Hill's division with John and the 39th who bivouacked outside the city in an oak forest. C.T. Atkinson in his history of 'The Dorset Regt.' (1947) and other records tell of an incident in which the Old Soldier may have been involved. Food for the troops was always slow in keeping up with a forced march and the hungry men tucked into a diet of acorns which tasted "like sweet chestnuts" and ground up the nuts with rifle butts to make the coffee that later had them doubled up with agonising stomach pains. They stayed above Madrid for about a month when the Duke heard of the arrival of French reinforcements and decided to abandon the city in Sept. 1812. Hill left at the same time with John and the 39th acting as his rearguard who fought off the pursuing French in fierce battles. They eventually arrived at Coria in Dec. 1812 and ordered to settle down in bivouac for the winter. This is where John saw the large wolves who came down from the hills to water at night time (i.64). Food was again short and pay weeks in arrears, leaving them nothing to barter with the locals. Looting earned a man a flogging or

the hangman and any food found was eaten raw, there being no dry wood for a campfire for cooking or drying rain sodden kit in the winter storms. The 39th again suffered many non-combat casualties and the loss of their popular Col. George Wilson in Jan. 1813 but they finally moved out in May 1813 and on to Vittoria arriving there in June where our gallant pint-sized little hero (John was only 5'3" tall) earned a clasp to his Military General Service Medal and survived a fierce battle with the 39th suffering yet more heavy casualties. Vast stores and guns were taken including the baggage of Joseph, King of Spain and Naples who was Boney's brother. In July 1813 they left Vittoria pushing the French all the way to the final major Battle of the Pyrenees where John got his second clasp but where 180 men were lost. Then on to Pamplona and on Nov. 9th 1813, over the border into France where they stood at Bayonne until moving on to the battle of Toulouse on April 10th 1814 and another clasp for John Morgan. Boney then abdicated, the French surrendered and the 39th rested.

John's army life still had 5 years to run before he accidentally broke his leg in 1819, and the history of the 39th tells of the battalion sailing for America 2 months after Toulouse, in June 1814. Kilvert fails to mention such a big adventure for John so he must have stayed in France with the 2nd Battalion (54th). There is another clue in the Clyro burial register (26.9.1879) which credits John with the "Waterloo Medal for Quatre Bras", a decoration which Kilvert didn't record having seen. (i.158)

When Boney escaped from Elba in March 1815, the Duke had to raise an allied army to face him as he headed for Brussels. On June 15th 1815 the unflappable Duke was at a ball in Brussels, heard of the approach of the French Marshal Ney and his army and took himself off to Quatre Bras which is just south of Brussels and Waterloo. A fierce battle ensued there but the Duke was pushed back to the Field of Waterloo where he stood and fought on 18th June and almost lost to Boney.

Meanwhile the 39th returned from America, landed in Portsmouth 15.7.1815 and set off for Paris to form the army of occupation until 1818. Sometime in 1819 John broke his leg in a fall and was discharged after 7 years service. Returned by the army to the place where he was recruited, he then had to make his own way to Clyro where we lose touch with him for the next 3 years and during this period his job as a labourer may have been difficult to hold down with his crippled leg.

John turns up again on March 2nd 1822 at the church of St. Michael, Bryngwyn where he married Elinor Catherine James aged 21 years. John was then aged 29 and they were married by the Rev. Richard Lister Venables (1774/1858) the father of Kilvert's Rev. Venables. Elinor was to be the mother of John's 7 children only one of whom appears in the Diaries. She was Anne who was 'kicked by a heifer' (ii.60). The family occupied 'Fairlands', a cottage in the north of Clyro parish, but now demolished, somewhere near the 'Pentre' and 'Glynne'. All the family were there in the 1841 census but later moved down to 'The Bronyth' a hamlet just east of Clyro. The 1851 census has only their son Henry listed along with father John and his 2nd wife at this address. John's eldest daughter Anne, who Kilvert knew (ii.60), married in Clyro William Jones, labourer son of Robert of Lwr. House, in May 1858. She was aged 21 and had two sons and 3 daughters all born in a cottage in Green Lane on top of Newchurch Hill. Their unmarried eldest daughter Eliza had 2 children which made the Old Soldier a great grandfather. In Sept. 1848 John lost his first wife Elinor. He was then aged 55 (quite elderly for those days) but married again 8 months later. Wife No. 2 on 17th May 1849 was spinster Mary Williams, daughter of labourer John, a servant with the Dyke family at Cabalva and aged 39. At one time spinster Mary, well known to Kilvert, was a servant at 'The Hurst' a farm in Dilwyn parish, Hereford, where she had a son William in 1843. As a new stepson to John he probably took the place of his natural son William who was to die tragically young 3 years later.

Pestered by the Rev. Rd. Venables in 1871, the War Dept. at Chelsea Hospital agreed after 52 years to grant the Old Soldier a pension of 9d a day which weekly sum of 5/3d took him off parish relief for another 8 years until they buried him in Clyro 25.9.1879, just 2 days after his great friend Kilvert died. They may well have both died on the same day.

In the WD pensions record there is a brief description of John Morgan. It says that he was born in Brilley, Hereford, was aged 78 (in 1871), was of 'fair complexion' with brown hair and grey eyes. He stood only 5'3" tall.

### **Subscription Reminder**

Members are reminded that all subscriptions for 1997 became due on the 1st of January. The subscription remains at £5.

The committee is seeking to encourage more members to pay their annual subscriptions by standing order. This will save the cost of sending out reminders and improve our cash flow. Under the rules of the Society unless the subscription is paid by June 30th, we must assume that you have resigned membership and further newsletters will not be sent.

If you would like to consider paying by standing order, please instruct your bank to pay future subscriptions each 1st January to the Society's bankers at Lloyds Bank, Hereford Branch, Sort Code 30-94-14, A/c. No. 0241904 in favour of the Kilvert Society.

Lawrence Jackson

Subscriptions Treasurer











