

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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AUGUST, 1999

From the Editor:

When in April, our Secretary asked me whether I would be willing to take over the editorship of the Newsletter because Edward was beginning to feel 'it was getting a bit much', I was, after some small hesitation pleased to do so; after all, Edward would be there to guide and advise me just as he had, now and again, been willing to help me (with a quiet chuckle) solve a tricky clue in Saturdays' prize crosswords in *The Times*. (I remain in awe of his ability to solve those on a daily basis in under thirty minutes).

Now, I am so saddened that I take up this role after his death.

This edition then is an edition that is largely devoted to a celebration of Edward's life and his magnificent seventeen years as secretary to the Society. As his successor, Michael Sharp so succinctly put it: 'for me Edward *was* the Kilvert Society!'

As you can imagine there has been no shortage of material for this Newsletter tribute to Edward. What is more it is intended, in due course, that the Society will publish a booklet in Edward's memory, as it did for Oswin Prosser and Fred Grice, two other Society stalwarts.

Private and modest gentleman that he was, Edward would, no doubt, have been embarrassed and amazed at the vast number of expressions of respect, admiration and affection which his death provoked, so apparent too on the day of his funeral in a crowded Parish church and afterwards, when his many friends gathered to reminisce about him at the Chase Hotel. 'Edward would not have wanted all this', said someone; 'no', replied our secretary, 'but he deserves it!'

The arrangements for the day were most fittingly carried out by Edward's great friend and ex-colleague Mr. Frank Drabble. We sang Edward's favourite hymn, *O Thou who camest from above* to S.S. Wesley's fine tune *Hereford*, there was plenty of Elgar, his favourite composer and we listened to a most moving address (reproduced below) from our President, David Lockwood.

It was a very sad day yet an uplifting one too because of the nature of the man we were remembering. 'You see,' said Paula Fisher (one of Edward's former pupils) to me that afternoon, 'he's still doing good, even after his death!'

A latter-day Man of Ross indeed.

Jeff Marshall

Preached at the funeral of Edward West in Ross Parish Church on 17th June 1999 by David Lockwood.

My text comes from the account about Elijah when he emerged from the cave at Horeb. He saw the wind, he saw the earthquake, he saw the fire and God was in none of them, then

‘after the fire a still small voice’

If you should go into the church at Stinsford where Thomas Hardy was born, you will see a window depicting Elijah in his mantle and the words I have just quoted. It is the memorial to Hardy and Hardy came extremely high up in the hierarchy of Edward’s revered English writers. On what proved to be my penultimate visit to Edward we talked a great deal about Hardy. I shall not forget it.

I stand here feeling terribly inadequate because I know that I speak to many who have worked and lived and known Edward well, some, upwards of fifty years. You have been his neighbour, his friend, his colleague, fellow governor, committee member, or like me, a member of the Kilvert Society.

He was born during the First World War, the conflict that robbed him of his father. It changed the structure of British Society, but not wholly, and Edward, well named, was, I think, in many ways an intellectual and very sensitive Edwardian. Very cultured, kind, but with a firm unsentimental sense of form, of justice, of duty and general correctness. There was a grave formality in him which revealed itself in his quite amazing courtesy. That can sound cold and dutiful, but the entirety of Edward was changed by his wonderful sense of humour. He had a very merry chuckle and a very shrewd eye for the pretentious, the pompous and meaningless. His charity, though, did not allow him to proclaim his judgements. However, with a few chosen fellows his real opinions came out: they could have been pungent criticism, but no, they became funny and though truthful were not hurtful.

Most of us know of his love of literature and his range was far wider than just Kilvert and wider than just English. He was tremendously knowledgeable about music. I did not venture too far into this subject, my interest is very untechnical and he could floor me by reference to adagios and the second part of the fourth movement. But, I think, he forgave me because I too loved Elgar.

When I hear Elgar I think of Edward and that composer is the essence of all that was best in the Edwardian era. I must say, too, that Edward resembled him, the same upright bearing, hold of the head, tidy clipped moustache and the fondness of both for cigarettes.

His love of music reached a kind of apotheosis in the musical evening he arranged last summer for the anniversary celebrations of the Kilvert Society. We had two hours of delight in music and poetry. He had gathered his musical friends from near and far. He sang and he was the master-mind of it all. Someone said to me when it was over ‘That was Edward’s swan-song.’ She was, alas, quite right.

He told me how he had loved Gilbert and Sullivan, indeed a photo of himself and two others in Japanese costume hung in his sitting room. He did not tell me that he was a most notable Poo-Bah. I can easily imagine his ability with the music and his perfect delivery of Gilbert’s wit.

I cannot speak of Edward as a schoolmaster. I was neither pupil nor colleague. I recall, though, a Classics don saying of teaching, there were only two essentials, ‘You love your subject and you love your pupils.’ This, I know Edward did. Wherever I was with him in a hospital, in a café, or pub, he invariably found someone he had taught and they hailed one another with a friendship across the generations.

As the years went by he suffered the ailments of age. First there was the arthritis which he doggedly fought with a kind of denial. At last he had an operation and the pain disappeared, he was more mobile and his face showed the absence of pain. Then deafness assailed him and it was a sad agony that he could not hear the course of discussion around the committee table. He tried and tried and his minutes were a triumph over his disability. It was all very frustrating for him.

Other ills afflicted him and his independence was remarkable. I speak for us all when I say how anxious we all became on his behalf. Now, though we can be glad that he maintained his home until almost the very end. It was at a cost, but he thought it well worthwhile.

Before I close I must add his wonderful persistence as a correspondent. He kept in touch with perhaps hundreds of former pupils and staff of the Grammar School and just as many members of the Kilvert Society here and overseas. His generosity was great and unseen. He paid for things like *The Times* in the Common Room, refreshments for the staff at the end of term and a very large proportion of the cost of the Kilvert Family Bible found in Western Australia.

Like his friend I can echo, ‘I could go on.’ I have not mentioned his interest in sport, his time in the RAF.

I must, however, mention his garden. The last time I saw him he rejoiced in his scarlet Persian tulips, common in Iran, rare in Britain. A lovely sight in front of his greenhouse.

A return, now, to Elijah and more significantly 'the still small voice', a phrase of immense mystery.

Edward West was quietly a most energetic man. He was never idle; he was involved in many things and with many people. In spite of that there was in him a deep stillness at his centre. He was a friendly man, but also a very private man. At his core was 'the still small voice'.

You will, I hope forgive me if I provide two quotations for my ending. The first comes from the very end of Hardy's *The Woodlanders*;

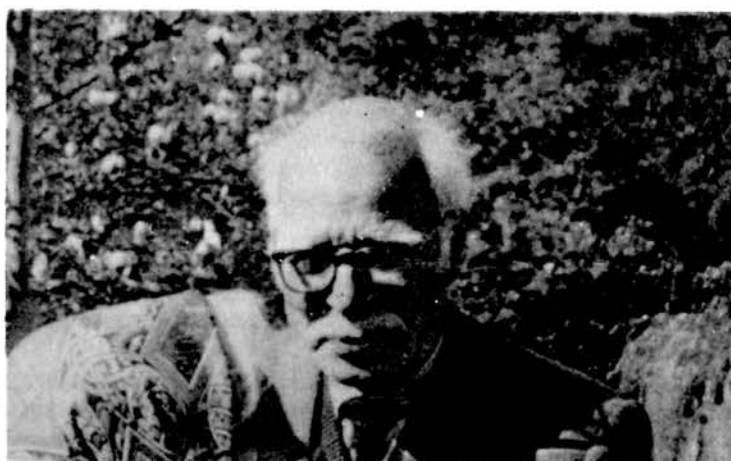
'...for you was a good man and did good things.'

The other is from Edward's favourite oratorio *The Dream of Gerontius*;

Profiscere, anima Christiana, de hoc mundo!

Go forth upon thy journey, Christian soul!
Go from this world! Go in the name of God.
The omnipotent Father who created thee!
Go, in the name of Jesus Christ Our Lord.

EDWARD JOHN CHARLES WEST (1914 – 1999)



From John Dunabin, Edward's oldest friend and one-time schoolfellow:

With a likely readership all of whom admired, respected, and even I suspect as I did loved Ted West, my only justification for writing this tribute is the length of our acquaintance. When I first met him as a schoolfellow he was almost 18, tall, erect, black-haired and one could well say handsome, unfailingly courteous but with a somewhat intimidating manner. A contemporary who also met him first when we were all in our middle to late teens, admitted to me not very long ago that for his first few weeks at school he assumed Ted was a member of the teaching staff!

At morning prayers he led the singing, occasionally and most disconcertingly moving seamlessly from a resounding bass to a tolerable tenor. In many ways, and not overlooking the part played by our austere headmaster (who he preceded in date of joining), Ted seemed to be the School, joint editor of the magazine, joint stockroom monitor, a position of power and influence, and an active secretary of several school societies, playreading, chess, etc., official scorer at all school cricket matches too. Whenever a pianist was required he was there, and at our annual concerts he took a prominent part, in this capacity or in leading a small group of male voices.

Ours was an all-boys' school, but just across the street was the Girls' High School, with an invisible but almost impenetrable iron curtain between; in a futile attempt to prevent fraternization, our times of leaving school at midday and late afternoon were separated. Ted got to work on our Head, co-opting a friend on the other side of the curtain to do the same on 'The Med' (Miss Medwin, a rigid disciplinarian and strongly isolationist herself, one gathered), and organized a very successful boys versus girls tennis contest. Recollecting the event could still give him pleasure many years later.

Leaving school, where by this time he was School Captain, was clearly an emotional wrench for him, but this is where Ted's inner strength became obvious. There was no lingering, no looking back, and no maintenance of formal links with the past. He went to London University to study his favourite subject, English, and to immerse himself, not in the same

sort of extra-curricular activities – this was a harsher and more competitive environment than that of a small school in a sleepy provincial city – but in theatre and concert-going, visiting picture galleries, and in forming bonds with students and others of different nationalities. Was there a suggestion of helping lame ducks? I am unsure; some of the friendships endured for a long time. Here I am in danger of becoming introspective, and wondering why our friendship, slow to mature, lasted as it did. Perhaps it began when we found ourselves jointly defending Shakespeare's Lady Macbeth against an attack by our English master, who thought she was a soulless monster. Later, it survived a period when, for several weeks until the end of term, I was not on speaking terms with any other member of the small sixth form, having stated my disapproval of the 'slippering' of a silly, troublesome youngster, instigated by the School Captain himself.

Ted was an only child, his father having been killed as a serving soldier during the war of 1914-18, and while we never discussed the matter I am sure that not only did this result in his mother being determined to do everything in her power to ensure he did not suffer as a consequence, but also in strengthening his devotion to her. As an uncomplicated person from a small Radnorshire village she did not play the piano or tennis, but she joined in some of her son's other activities, preparing cricket teas, behind-the-scenes work for the school concerts, etc., and was never too busy to offer a warm welcome to his friends at their home.

But this cannot become a biography; there are gaps in my knowledge which seem to have widened with the passing years. After some temporary teaching at his old school and private coaching of members of the Thomas family of Llanthomas – yes! – he joined the staff of Ross Grammar School. The war then intervened and Ted was recruited into the RAF. It taught him to drive heavy motor vehicles – I do not think he ever touched a steering wheel again once he left the service – but I suspect the highlight of his career there was when on leave in Paris soon after the war's end, with a friend he called on the famous painter Pablo Picasso.

Ted, despite several affairs of the heart, never married; this is just surmise but I suspected it came from a conscious decision following a reluctance to break the bond with his mother. Then came disaster when, not long before the war in Europe ended, she was knocked down and killed by a military vehicle not far from her home in Hereford.

Ted had resisted persuasion to apply for a commission in the widely held belief that 'other ranks' obtained their release more promptly, and he shed his uniform as quickly as he could – we renewed contact the same day! – but with no family or near relations, nor, I learned after questioning, an assured home of his own.

Happily, by contrast there was an assured return to his teaching post in Ross, and an old friend of his mother, an elderly maiden lady, offered him a home within daily travelling distance of the town. More than that, she made him heir to her considerable fortune. Sadly though, if inevitably, his benefactor began to assume quasi-parental rights of veto over his comings and goings, something Ted's independent nature could not accept, so he said goodbye to home, fortune, and, more importantly for him, a close friendship.

From then on Ross or nearby became his home, with infrequent visits to his native city. Nostalgia was never one of his weaknesses, and Hereford was becoming bigger, less friendly, his old friends more dispersed, whereas in Ross he could greet and be greeted with warmth by increasing numbers of pupils and ex-pupils. Walking around the town together on Saturday mornings, these frequent encounters gave me considerable vicarious pleasure.

I have continued at some length while still I fear omitting many things about Ted, his urbanity and unfailing courtesy, all underlain by a mildly acerbic sense of humour which stayed with him well into his eighties, and of course his kindness and generosity.

I have left out too any mention of his best known activity of recent years, as Hon. Secretary of the Kilvert Society and Editor of its Newsletter, something he enjoyed immensely; I would find it difficult to do this aspect justice in a small space and I am sure others can do so better. When the late Oswin Prosser's illness prevented him from continuing in this dual role, it seemed only commonsense to join in persuading Ted to enlarge his work for the Society by assuming the task. It was good for us, and good, very good indeed, for him.

For over 60 years my own observations of humanity, of happenings good and bad, have been punctuated by the thought 'I must tell Ted about that when next I write', usually seeking his comments. I would have enjoyed describing to him some of the events in Ross on Thursday 17th June.

From Reg Morgan, former Kilvert Society Publications Manager:

It is perhaps not generally realised, nowadays, that the death of our former Hon. Secretary, Oswin Prosser, in 1977, precipitated a serious crisis in the Society. Oswin, suffering from a terminal illness, had had the foresight to induct an assistant, intending that she would eventually assume his mantle of Hon. Secretary in due course, but unfortunately she, too, at about the time of Oswin's death, suffered a personal bereavement and was anxious to leave Hereford and move back to her native Wales. Added to this, no other suitable member living within a reasonable distance of Hereford could be found to take her place. The situation was becoming desperate, when Fred Grice, the then Chairman of the Committee,

announced that a member, who none of us had heard of, had come forward and would attend the next Committee meeting. It was at this emergency meeting, held soon afterwards, that I first set eyes upon Edward, after he had been called into the meeting to be interviewed.

I can still see him, now, his tall figure, head bowed, hat in hand standing before the Committee, as if he were some poor fellow badly in need of a job being interviewed by a hard-hearted board of directors. It was as if he thought we were doing him a favour in considering him for the job, instead of the other way round! At all events he was offered the job, which he appeared gratefully to accept.

When, in later years, I told him that he had probably saved the Society from closure, he was quite incredulous. I believe he thought I was pulling his leg.

Yes, Edward was the personification of modesty and courtesy, and as our present Chairman pointed out in his Appreciation of him in the June Newsletter, a gentleman. But it should not be assumed that this prevented him from being critical of one or two members of the Society's hierarchy from time to time. He certainly did not suffer fools gladly.

The one characteristic of Edward's which impressed my wife and myself, during the many years that we knew him, was how unrevealing he was at a personal level – what would nowadays be called 'a very private person' – even though we got to know him quite well over the years, through correspondence and the exchange of visits when he came to Hay and when we enjoyed his rather spartan bachelor hospitality at his modest abode in Ross. The nearest we ever got to uncovering his origins was when he disclosed that his family had lived in the Radnor Forest area, though so far as we could make out (and we were careful not to be overtly intrusive of his privacy) he seemed not to have any living relatives and to be quite alone in the world so far as family was concerned.

One aspect of his past life, however, he did reveal, and that was that as a young man before the last war he had resided for a while at Llanthomas, acting as tutor (he was, of course, a school-teacher by profession) to the younger members of the Thomas family. By that time 'Daisy' was dead, having died in 1928, and so were the other sisters Kilvert knew, the last one (Charlotte) having died in 1933; but we thought, since their deaths had all occurred within a decade of Edward's sojourn at Llanthomas, that he must have gleaned something that would have been of interest to Society members. But try as we might we could never induce him to write anything for the Newsletter on this subject.

Edward was not without a quiet sense of humour, being vastly amused on one occasion when I told him that a newly joined lady member at a Society function had asked me who 'that military-looking gentleman' was. Indeed, so far as appearance was concerned he could easily have passed for a retired brigadier.

We last saw him here at Hay when he brought one of his Bostonian friends to see us. I remember his telling us that he was thinking of writing a contribution for the Newsletter expounding his theory that when Kilvert went fishing on Llangorse lake with his father and brother he probably spent his time, while they were testing their angling skills, in writing up his diary. He became somewhat pensive when I pointed out Kilvert wrote his diary in ink, and since a couple of decades would elapse before the invention of the fountain pen he would have been obliged to carry a bottle of ink as well as a pen with him, and that sitting in a boat in company with three active persons would hardly be conducive to composing the sort of prose which Kilvert was apt to produce. However, I'm pleased to say, he took his host's lapse of good manners in good part.

The last time I spoke to him was on the telephone after the Society's excursion in April last, when we heard the latest news of him from his fellow-townsmen, Mr. Gordon Rogers. By this time he had already had one fall and had been feeling very unwell, but to my relief he seemed quite cheerful and very much his old self and as interested as ever in the future of the Society. Then shortly afterwards we heard of his second fall and admission to hospital. When, a few days later, the telephone rang and I realised it was our Hon. Secretary on the other end of the line, I knew instinctively what he was going to tell me.

Edward will be greatly missed by all those who knew him. A fitting epitaph for him might well be adapted from a well-known line by the poet Samuel Rogers:

'To know him was to love him.'

A Good Friend to Down Under:

How can it be, members in England might wonder, that Evelyn and Ivy and I in the south of the South Island, New Zealand, feel that we have lost a good friend? After all, we're so far away.

But all of us met Edward West at times – Evelyn many times – and he was a regular correspondent. He made a special effort to keep overseas members involved in the life and work of the Kilvert Society, and we never felt we were just the farthest-away names on the membership roll.

And if he kept touch with us in NZ, then what of members in other countries? He once told me the number of A4 pads he had gone through in a year (which I've now forgotten), but I do know that in 1993 when I was having a clearance I reluctantly burned most of 67 letters and 15 postcards received until then, which averaged 9 per year. A few from those years I kept, including a 'reply' to our then Prime Minister who had invited overseas visitors to come to this country's 150th anniversary. It began, 'Dear Geoff/with ref/to your most cordial invitation/to choose NZ for my vacation/and take some part in celebration/Oh, come I will/if you foot the bill!' He went on to list all he hoped to see and do, for he'd done his homework – but alas, in spite of more personal invitations than that of the government, his Down Under holiday remained a pipe dream.

Always Edward's letters were so welcome, despite the miniature writing! He wrote on topics as diverse as his favourite NZ Braeburn apples, outings with friends, obscure literary Diary references which he asked me (as a librarian) to track down, misuse of the English language, classics that were worth watching on TV, the merits of his loved hymn tune *Hereford* when compared with one called *Dunedin*, and so on. Lately we swapped views on the nuisance of growing older with loss of hearing, and in January he wrote, 'Frankly, I am feeling my 85 years.'

Back in the days when Edward was waiting in pain for a hip operation, Ivy and her husband Bill stayed with him, and then later I stayed at the time of the 1988 Clyro Festival when he was mostly recovered. He invited me, saying he hoped I could put up with an untidy old bachelor, and I accepted, saying I would probably feel obliged to put in my spoke. Which I did, when I saw the comparative inconvenience and lack of safety in his house for someone with a new hip. I remember asking whether he had lady friends who told him he should have this or that improvement – and he said emphatically, 'Good God, no!' It is sad now to think that a lot more could have been done to make his last years more comfortable and safe.

Like everyone else, we three have some special memories – Ivy of her farewell hug in hospital a few days before he died, Evelyn of his asking her to read a lesson at several of the Commemoration Services, and I remember days spent as his chauffeur around Francis Kilvert's haunts. Bredwardine and Llanbedr, Edward said, were his 'most evocative places.'

I once wrote to the Kilvert Society Chairman and expressed appreciation from all of us – Evelyn, Ivy, Bill and myself – for all that Edward did to keep us in touch at such a distance. The letter was read at the AGM and Edward wrote to say he had felt embarrassed. I replied, 'Sorry, but you'll have to stay that way. No retractions, it's all true, and more.'

That being so, he wouldn't be too pleased with this Newsletter and its tributes. But we three and so many others who counted Edward as a good friend can say, 'It's all true, over and over. He went far beyond the usual duties of a Secretary and that has made the Kilvert Society special for us.'

Lyndall Hancock (Dunedin, NZ), on behalf of Evelyn Madigan (Dunedin, NZ)
and Ivy Goodsir (Invercargill, NZ)

The following are reprinted from the Ross Gazette
(by kind permission of the Editor, Mr. Kevin Minton:)

Obituary Notice 10th June 1999

Mr. E.J.C. 'Ted' West, who taught at Ross Grammar School for 36 years has died, aged 85. He lived at Baker's Oak, Lincoln Hill.

When he retired in 1975 it was said that during his time in Ross virtually every pupil who passed through Ross Grammar School had found in Mr. West an adviser and a friend.

Upon his retirement, a presentation dinner dance was held at The Chase Hotel which was attended by 250 Old Rossians who came from all over the country to pay tribute to him. When making a presentation Deputy Headmaster at that time, Mr. G.D.T. Prime said 'He is a man who has dedicated his life to Ross Grammar School'.

Born in 1914, he was an old boy of Hereford High School and achieved a BA (Hons) at London University. He came to Ross at the start of the second world war when he took up the position of 'Temporary Form Master' when an influx of nearly 40 evacuated secondary school children meant that an extra class had to be formed. He served during the war with the RAF.

Although he specialised in English and French there were few subjects he had not taught over the years and he also contributed to many school plays and operas. Many productions benefited from his expertise behind the scenes and he also played many principal parts. To many, the Sergeant of Police in *The Pirates of Penzance* was Ted West.

More recently, since 1981, he was secretary of the Kilvert Society with which he retained links.

Echoing the sentiment, expressed in 1975, of a former Headmaster, Mr. T.C.S. Bullick, 'He will be remembered with affection by all Old Rossians'.

My Teacher, Ted West

by Mary Sinclair Powell:

It was with great sadness that I learned of the death last week of one of the remaining few, true gentlemen Ross has ever known. I also felt very happy that I had known him for over 35 years. I am, of course, referring to Mr. Ted West.

All who knew him, especially those who had had the privilege in this town of being taught by him, will never forget his gentle, but persuasive manner, extreme sympathy and kindness, as well as his wonderful ability to teach even the most difficult of pupils.

I don't remember ever hearing him raise his voice, unless he was singing with the school choir. Gilbert and Sullivan productions saw him come into his own. I have never been able to watch the Mikado without thinking of him.

Of course, his unique abilities included the way he always remembered who you were, what you had been doing and also his great sense of humour.

He would also ask after my brother, whom he never taught, but knew well through the rest of my family. Likewise to other Rossians I spoke with. He was always interested – it was not just part of the conversation to 'fill in time.' It did not matter whether he had taught you during the war or at the end of his career, he always greeted you with a good morning, together with your Christian name and a lovely smile while 'touching his forelock.'

He knew all his pupils by name, no matter how old they were, an amazing feat. We were all 'his family.' He outlived a lot of them, something I should imagine, which made him extremely sad.

I last spoke with him about three weeks ago. He was even more frail than he had been a couple of weeks before. But he still had that lovely smile and great sense of fun. He made light of the way he was struggling to climb the hill by the library. 'I am not getting older, the streets are getting steeper' he told me with a chuckle.

One memory of him I will always have and cherish. He taught both my parents and my mother's sister during the war years. He told me once the time to retire is when you start teaching grandchildren. When my parents were killed in the Paris air disaster of 1974, he was there offering help and advice if I needed it. I asked him if he would like to read the lesson at their memorial service. He was a little taken aback, as to why it should be him. I told him that the family all held him in great regard and affection, and would be deeply honoured. 'But if you cannot manage it, we would quite understand as we all know how upset you are about the accident,' I said. With no hesitation he agreed, and did it with his usual style and manner. That was the man he was. Very upset himself but able to manage that one last service for them.

He was always at the school reunions, talking with everyone as if he had only seen them just the day before. This applied to those who still lived in Ross and the other side of the country. I don't remember him saying a wrong word about anyone.

I am sure I speak for my fellow Rossians when I say he was a wonderful man of the old school, always the mentor, a true Russian and a real friend, who will be greatly missed.

Shrimps, Forest Brown, Kilvert and Pooh Bah

Personal Memories of EJC West:

'Give me the boy and I will give you back the man.' This could easily have referred to Ross Grammar School in the 1960s.

Nostalgia can blur the memory but the teachers of that era who taught and moulded my generation had character and charisma – and none more so than Ted West. In class he achieved results through encouragement. Call at his home and he would entertain with bowls of shrimp and illicit bottles of Forest Brown, to wash down the easy conversation on music and literature.

And was there ever a finer Pooh Bah in the history of Gilbert and Sullivan than Ted West, countering TCS Bullick's Mikado?

As he now sits on his cloud – looking down with Gilbert Yorke, TCS, 'Fuzz' Saunders, John Thomas and the rest of his colleagues who got there before him – I am sure he has got us in his book. Yes he's got us in his book.

Kerry Wilce (Ross Grammar School 1959-66)

If you're really lucky, you finish your education and you can look back and say there was one person whose talent, personality and ability to inspire stood out at the time and has remained with you for the rest of your life.

I was really lucky; I had Ted West.

Who else would have bothered to recommend Hopkins to a Thomas fan while puffing heavily on the ubiquitous 'ciggie' and cheering on the school rugby team.

Who else peppered his lessons, and life, with a wry humour that captivated both young and old?

Who else broke out the coffee for anyone who trundled out to Weston in the holidays, lent his own books and dispensed the occasional words of wisdom with such calm and style that even 'bolshie' teenagers could accept it? Only Ted West

Jacqui Cobham (1961-67)

Ted West was a remarkable man. Not only was he a renowned scholar, but he had a ready wit. He was full of amusing anecdotes.

He was an inspired teacher who enthused over the subject he was teaching, which rubbed off on his pupils.

I remember him reading *The Hound of the Baskervilles* to us. I enjoyed it so much that I went out and bought it with my pocket money as I could not wait for Ted to finish it.

He had no favourites. He would welcome you into his home of an evening at Weston-under-Penyard for a chat and refreshments.

In later life he always had time for a chat. He never forgot a name or a face. He would enjoy his Saturday morning coffee with two of his old colleagues, Vera Packman and Charlie Prime.

A truly remarkable man – the world is a sadder place with his loss.

David Childs (1959-66)

Ted West – a name, it seems, that should be known to millions and indeed may well be as a result of his international work for the Kilvert Society.

It is, however, the man who is remembered by an ageing population of ex-RGS children.

Ted West was the epitome of a scholar and a gentleman. His erudition in conversation and his skill in the classroom, and indeed out of it, accompanied a generosity of spirit that made every student want to welcome him into their lives.

Not that everything was Cointreau and Senior Service – much of the time was very hard work. Editing the *Rossian*, composing excruciating pieces and proof-reading time and time again were all made worthwhile by Ted – and he did it year in and year out.

I know that I feel, and my family feel, we have lost one of our number with Ted's death, and that a brilliant ray of sunlight has passed from our lives – but it has been my great privilege to have known him.

Glyn Moulds (1960-66)

Meeting Ted West as an impressionable 12-year-old back in the early 60s was for me, as it must have been for many many hundreds both before and after that time, what is now called a life-enhancing experience.

Very early impressions were misleading, however. A solid physical presence with a deep resonant voice (enhanced as I later discovered by a good intake of Players Please), and that trademark moustache made this less than totally confident *Rossian* more than a little apprehensive, but this was very soon replaced once exposed to the wit and wisdom and real warmth of the man himself.

English became one of the week's real highlights because we knew we were guaranteed a good quota of witticisms, diversions, put-downs for those deserving them, banter and shared laughter, no one had said that you were allowed to actually have some fun while you learned and we really weren't ready for it.

As a communicator he was inspirational and his love of literature encouraged many of us to broaden our reading habits from our staple diet of Ian Allan's Western Region locomotives and the (now sadly defunct) Record Mirror to more solid reading matter, habits which took root and flourished over the years. Such was the influence of his Dylan Thomas readings that even this supremely ungifted writer was inspired to try his hand at creative writing, fortunately the results have not passed into permanent record.

Slightly later in school our group decided that Mr. West could not possibly have had enough of our sparkling company during school hours and took to dropping in on him of an evening en masse.

These visits were always received with the utmost courtesy and good humour and the warmest of welcomes, though we were always careful not to strain the limits of hospitality by attempting the trick too often.

Occasionally we would try to draw him out to talk about himself but he was always adept at re-routing the conversation in different directions so that he always knew far more about us than we did of him. However, to our huge delight he could occasionally be persuaded to let slip a piece of juicy information about the staff room habits or background history of this or that (usually unpopular) member of staff.

Above all he treated us as a group and individually with respect and friendship which was unique, and talked about things that mattered to us. Looking back now it seems a very presumptuous thing to have done, but it formed a bond between all of us and him which has stayed with us over the years. When our paths crossed in recent times he never failed to ask after the others in that group of school friends, the memory for names reliable as ever, even 35 or more years later.

No other teacher's name ever came up for the 'visiting' treatment and I'm sure most would have been appalled at the very idea if they had, but after all they were, well, teachers, and to us Ted West had become a lot more than that. His memory will stay with that group of old Rossians throughout our lives.

David Lewis (1959-1966)

Ted West remembered

Tributes to Ross Grammar School teacher Ted West keep coming. Roger Millett, now living in Lincolnshire said: "My mother pointed out to me the notice about Ted West in the 'deaths'.

"Although never a star English pupil, Ted West taught us all a lot about life, as well as his love of literature. He made sure that our exposure covered a wide range to (hopefully) hit the right note with each and every pupil.

"As a mathematician (sort of) he would be tickled pink to know I have written the occasional poem and had a book (about solicitors accounts) published. "He touched our lives".

Roger sent in a poem about his old teacher (inset).

Douglas Hughes, from Hereford, said:

"In pre-war days the late Mr. West ("Teddy" to those of us growing up around him) lived with his mother, widowed in the Great War, at 1 Coronation Villas, St. Owen's St., Hereford – opposite what was the city's first cinema in the silent era and is now a launderette.

"Eight years his junior my first recollection of his scholastic prowess was his attendance at Hereford High School while I was enclosed at St. Owen's School.

"Mrs. West and Teddy had a paying guest in the thirties who became something of a legend locally and enjoyed fairly widespread publicity outside Herefordshire.

"This was Anthony William Hall of Little Dewchurch, an ex-police inspector, who for the whole of that decade laid claim to the throne as

ODE TO TED WEST

Please sir, I can't
Please Sir, what's this?
Please sir, I'll die
Please sir, I'll miss

Young man, you can
Young man, be calm
Young man, we'll try
Young man, you'll live

School's where we laugh
School's where we cry
Schools come and go
Schools live and die

Teacher's not impressed
Teacher's plagued rott'n
Teacher's ne'er forget
Teacher's ne'er forgott'n

You taught us pen
You taught your best
Thank you dear friend
Thank you Ted West

ROGER MILLETT
RGS 1963-70

"the last of the Tudors", King Anthony I.

"It was at this *pied-à-terre* that in 1931 he drafted his lengthy epistle to the "usurper" King George V, directing him to quit the throne and this land.

"Teddy's subsequent career has already been fully highlighted in your columns. Mrs. Ted West, alas did not live to see the full blossom of her son's talents. How proud she would have been! "She fell victim to an American jeep outside her home as the Second World War reached its end. What of Anthony Hall? He returned to the family domain in 1939 and spent the war years as a shell examiner at the nearby ordnance factory. "He died in December 1947 aged 49 and is buried in Little Dewchurch churchyard."

AUTUMN WEEKEND

Saturday September 18th:

Meet at Llanthomas Gardens, Llanigon, near Hay-on-Wye (SO. 208402) at 12.30 p.m. for our usual picnic lunch. Llanthomas Gardens is a modern house built in the old walled garden of Llanthomas House. It is the home of Mr. and Mrs. B. Dennis, who have generously given us the run of the garden and the use of a large open-fronted building for our picnic if the weather is unkind. From here we will take a fairly short walk to the church where many of the Thomas family are buried, including 'Daisy'. If the weather and time allow the walk may be extended to include Penyrwlodd returning to Llanigon over the fields. Afterwards tea will be available at the home of our treasurer, John Wilks at 'Woodlands', Cusop Dingle.

Sunday, September 19th at 3 p.m.:

Evensong, Commemoration Service and Memorial Service for Edward West at Llanigon Parish Church, conducted by the Rev. David Rees, vicar of Llanigon. Preacher Rev. John Jackson, of Rhosgoch. Tea will be available afterwards.

THE ADDRESS

**Given by our member The Rev. John Day, Vicar of
Sturminster Newton (Dorset) on the occasion of the
Kilvert Society's visit to Langley Burrell on May 15th 1999**

'I went to church early across the quiet sunny meadows. There was scarcely anyone about, only one boy loitering by the stile in Becks by the road under the elms. The trees are in their most exquisite and perfect loveliness. There is usually one day in the spring when the beauty of everything culminates and a presentiment comes that one will never see such loveliness again, at least for another year. I went into the churchyard under the feathering larch which sweeps over the gate. The ivy-grown old church with its noble tower stood beautiful and silent among the elms with its graves at its feet. Everything was still, no one was about or moving and the only sound was the singing of the birds. It seemed to be given up to the birds and their morning hymn.'

And here we are over a hundred years later at this same place. Sixty years ago hardly anyone had heard of Francis Kilvert except for members of his family. In a part of my present parish in Dorset is the tiny hamlet of Kingstag. There, long before the last war, retreated one Percival Smith, Kilvert's nephew, to live the life of a recluse. It was he who inherited the 22 notebooks that was Kilvert's Diary and in 1937 he had the wit to send them to a publisher where they fell into the capable hands of William Plomer. Now Kilvert is famous and we have come to this church today to honour him.

There is no need to explain who he was to any who appreciate fine literature and as soon as this particular diary appeared in print it came to be recognised as one of the finest among diaries. What this particular diary does is to transport us back in time to the mid-Victorian period to what were then out-of-the-way places, and Kilvert creates for us an atmosphere and he evokes a life-style. His daily entries overflow with stories about people, the rich and the poor, and we are introduced to a fascinating man who we get to know with special intimacy. 'Why' he asks himself, 'do I keep this voluminous journal? I can hardly tell, partly because life appears to me such a curious and wonderful thing that it almost seems a pity that even such a humble and uneventful life as mine should pass altogether away without some such record as this and partly too because I think the record may amuse and interest some who come after me.'

My own interest in the Diary came out of my father's interest. He was born in Chippenham at the end of the last century, less than twenty years after Kilvert died. He could recall some of the families mentioned in the Diary. And then there was my great-aunt, she was baptised in this church on March 7th 1869 by Kilvert's father. She reached her century and would recall with pride her Kilvert and Langley associations. Her father was John Matthews, estate carpenter.

Many Victorians kept diaries, most of them are of very little significance. I recall John Betjamen mentioning a typical entry. 'Another miserable wet day, even wetter than yesterday, it is to be earnestly hoped that it will be less wet tomorrow.' Although it is impossible for an English diarist to avoid the weather, Kilvert never wrote like that. He is a poet in prose. On Wednesday October 7th 1874 he tells us, 'I have been trying to find the right word for the shimmering, glancing twinkling movement of the poplar leaves in the sun and the wind. This afternoon I saw the words written on the poplar leaves. It was 'dazzle' the dazzle of the poplars.'

Even ordinary day-to-day happenings are not humdrum to our Diarist, even what he describes as uneventful is curious and wondrous and he has an urge to record them, to communicate his feelings to us, to entertain. Kilvert is verily an artist of the written word.

He often writes of his favourite parish occupation, 'Villaging', he visits the poor and associates with the wealthy. But I guess he knew little about urban misery, although in his parish he cares when his people go short, and as far as he was able he tried to help them. But apart from one or two exceptions, eg Miss Mewburn and the agricultural workers lot, (29th November 1873) he rarely questions the accepted ideas of the landed classes. There is that lovely pen picture of one morning when he went into Langley School to talk to the children. 'Who made the world?', he asks the class. One small girl raises her hand and meekly responds, 'Squire Ashe.' In those days the rich man was still in his castle and the poor man at his gate.

For almost the whole of the Diary period Kilvert had no money and it was probably this more than anything that bedevilled his love affairs. There was that first passionate love for the daughter of the Vicar of Llanigon, Daisy Thomas. One September day he walks to Llanigon to seek an interview with Mr. Thomas, he wants to tell him that he has fallen in love with his daughter and would like to marry her. The father turns him down and as he returns home he comments in his diary, 'On this day when I proposed for the girl who will I trust one day be my wife, I had only one sovereign in the world and I owed that.' Those words tell us that Kilvert had deep feelings, but he was also poor. Small wonder, he was the son of a poor parson who had brought up a large family and who had needed to augment his meagre stipend by taking pupils into his home. And then there was his passion for Ettie Meredith Brown, for three whole months the two were close, and then suddenly they were forced to part. Probably it was the same old trouble, his prospects. He relates that the parting took place on a dark December day in Salisbury and how he wandered afterwards the dark streets '...sick at heart, broken-spirited, well nigh broken-hearted, with the tender loving despairing words of the last farewell ringing in his ears as he still seemed to feel the last long lingering pressure of the hand and the last long clinging embrace and passionate kiss Don't forget.'

Maybe poor old Kilvert was not successful in love, he had little money, his prospects were not bright, but at least he was sure of his next meal, and warmth and comfort. 'Every morning' he writes 'Summerflower brings splendid watercresses from Kellaways Mill. Just as I heard the breakfast bell ring across the Common from the Rectory and turned in at the black gate, a man crossed the stile carrying a basket. He said his name was Summerflower, that he had fasted since yesterday morning and that he could buy no breakfast until he had got watercresses to sell.'

Kilvert also tells odd and amusing tales of people he encounters when out villaging. On Sunday December 7th 1873 he calls on old Sally Killing after church. She asked me the usual and indeed invariable question whether I remembered her old thatched cottage near the road by the lilac bush and the old house in Westfield. I asked her how she passed her time; 'Aw ther,' she said, 'I do rock and sway myself about.'

He also regales us with stories of times past when religion in this country was at a low ebb. On May Eve 1874 Kilvert travels on the train to Dorchester to meet William Barnes the Dialect poet. He is met by Henry Moule the Vicar of Fordington who entertains him with tales of his parish in years gone by. 'No man had ever been known to receive Holy Communion except the parson, the clerk and the sexton. At one church there were two male communicants. When the cup was given to the first he touched his forelock and said 'Here's your good health, Sir' the other said, 'Here's the good health of our Lord Jesus Christ.' One day there was a christening and no water in the font, 'Water sir', said the clerk in astonishment, 'the last parson never used no water. He spit into his hand.'

And all through the Diary we are treated to his beautiful descriptions of what he observes and the magic of Kilvert is in his ability to give it all a quality, to make us feel that we are actually seeing it with him. The world of the Victorian was full of troubles and wrongs but one thing his world did have which ours does not, and that is its ancient peace. Kilvert lived here before the invention of the car, before the north of this county was scarred by a motorway. He knew nothing of aircraft or radio or television or the mobile 'phone. What is so wonderful in the Diary is his record of that marvellous, now lost, tranquillity and has anyone made a better job of recording it for a later age to appreciate? 'A beautiful peaceful summer sunshiny morn such as Robert Burns would have loved. Perfect peace and rest. The sun and the golden buttercup meadows had it almost all to themselves. A few soft fleecy clouds were rising out of the west but the gentle warm air scarcely stirred even the leaves on the lofty tops of the great poplars. One or two people were crossing the Common early by several paths through the golden sea of buttercups which will soon be the silver sea of ox-eyes. The birds were singing quietly. The cuckoo's notes tolled clear and sweet as a silver bell and a dove was pleading in the elm and "making intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered". (15th June 1873).

I wonder, as Kilvert tramped his several parishes, as he sat down to assiduously record his day, did he even in his wildest dreams ever think that we would be in this place where he was merely the curate, 120 years after his death, to honour him? I doubt it. But does he not deserve our gratitude?

As well as the Diarist, I recall the man who wrote it. Were I at the start of my ramblings to have offered you a text of scripture, I could have done no better than to draw on those lovely words that describe Barnabas in the Acts of the Apostles. 'He was a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith.' But I have no doubt that such grand words would have both astounded and humbled our curate, I think he would have preferred me to use the words with which I began our prayers just now, quoting that other great man of letters, Thomas Hardy, who wrote a poem about how he would like to be remembered, as 'the man who noticed things.'

When the present has latched its postern behind my tremulous stay,
And the May moth flaps its glad green leaves like wings
Delicate filmed as new-spun silk.
Will the neighbours say, he was a man who noticed such things?

We, Kilvert's admirers, respond with an emphatic 'Yes' for he was indeed a giant among the ones who notice things.

'More and more people kept coming into the churchyard as they finished their day's work. The sun went down in glory behind the dingle, but still the work of love went on through the twilight and into the dusk until the moon rose, full and splendid. As I walked down the Churchyard alone the decked graves had a strange effect in the moonlight and looked as if the people had laid down to sleep for the night out of doors, ready dressed to rise early on Easter morning.'

Thus the Diarist describes for us the ancient Welsh custom of Grave Dressing on Holy Saturday as it was happening in Clyro churchyard in 1870. By chance he was there and recorded the scene in his lovely style, allowing us to be there with him in that now-lost world of the nineteenth century.

Kilvert was indeed blessed with an intense awareness and sensitivity, enriched I am sure by his unquestioning Christian beliefs. Do you remember how he described his walk over the rocks of Aberedw? 'Every step was through an "enchanted land".' Does that sum up his mind so well? As I stand here today two other North Wiltshire writers I have in mind had similar experiences and recorded them, Richard Jefferies, not long after Kilvert, describes so vividly the flora and fauna of these parts, and Alfred Williams, the self-taught Swindon railway worker wrote divine poetry describing his 'joy in every hill and hollow.'

I will finish with early words from scripture. And God said, 'Let us make man in our own image, after our own likeness' and that's what makes you and me and Francis Kilvert different from anything else in the whole of creation. Our ability to create in partnership with the great creator. Today give thanks for one who created in words, one who had the ability to transform even the humble and uneventful into the curious, the wonderful and the enjoyable.

TWIN SPIRITS

By Mr. David Howell (St. Albans)

Although born in the same year and in neighbouring counties and having acquaintances in common it would appear that Kilvert and Hardy never met. Perhaps they did know of each other's existence, for Hardy was influenced by the Moule family and it was Mr. Henry Moule, the vicar of Fordington, who introduced Kilvert to the Dorset poet William Barnes, a neighbour and friend of Hardy.

But although it seems that they never met, it is difficult to find two men who were so observant of the countryside and its inhabitants and whose writing so evokes the spirit of rural Victorian England and Wales.

In many ways they were twin spirits; both were influenced emotionally by similar sights and sounds. Admittedly Kilvert was a devout Christian whereas Hardy had great difficulty with his faith, but in so many other ways they were so similar.

Both wished to have children of their own. Kilvert when at Mouse Castle writes: 'Could not help envying the father his children', when he saw them romping together on the hillside. When his sister's children leave the Rectory at Langley Burrell he writes, 'the old house is very quiet this evening. No children's footsteps on the stairs, no children's voices about the passages, the silent empty nurseries, the little untended gardens, two or three toys forgotten and left behind with an old lesson book seem to ask for the children and wonder where they are.'

Hardy writes regretfully, 'We hear that Jane our late servant is soon to have a baby. Yet never a sign of one is there for us.'

Kilvert writes emotionally when he sees a caged thrush singing his heart out in a London street. 'He sings to his jailers of the fields and the green lanes which he will never see again. He has heard a voice within his breast which tells him that out in the country the sweet spring has come.'

Hardy in his poem *The Blinded Bird* writes,

'Blinded ere yet a wing
By the red hot needle thou
I stand and wonder how
Zestfully thou can'st sing
Who hopeth, endureth all things
Who thinkest no evil but sings
Who is divine. This bird.'

Both Kilvert and Hardy were susceptible to female charms and it seems that railway journeys provided temptations for both.

Kilvert is irresistibly drawn towards Irish Mary, whom he meets on the train to Liverpool. He is tempted to follow her when she alights at Chester.

'There was a certain intensity and power and richness of life and the extraordinary sweetness, softness and beauty of her voice, in singing and talking gave her a power over me.

She lingered about the carriage door. Her look grew more wistful, beautiful imploring. A wild recklessness came over me. Shall I follow her. No, yes, no. At that moment then the train moved on. She was left behind. Goodbye sweet Irish Mary. So we parted. Shall we meet again? Yes, No, Yes.'

Hardy in his poem, *Faintheart on the Railway Train*, notices the passing scenery but when the train stops:

'And then on a platform. She!
A radiant stranger who saw not me
I said, 'Get out to her do I dare?
But I kept my seat in my search for a plea
And the wheels moved on. O could it but be
That I had alighted there!'

Although the comparison in most cases is with Kilvert's prose and Hardy's poetry the emotions they create are the same and it only goes to show the poetic nature of Kilvert's prose.

Both men were accomplished dancers and they reflect with nostalgia on former times when buildings now deserted and ruined, once housed joyful dancers.

On May 3rd 1870, Kilvert writes of 'the old deserted kiln house, empty, now desolate with its broken roof, broken unframed windows. Here were held the Quarterly Dances, only the weird sighing through the broken roof and crazy doors, the quick feet, busy hands, saucy eyes, strong limbs are moulded in to dust and laughing voices silent.'

Hardy in his poem, *Ancient of Ancients* writes:

'Where once we danced, where once we sang gentlemen
The floors are sunken, cobwebs hang
And cracks creep, worms have fed upon
The doors. Yea sprightlier times were then
Than now with harps and tabrets gone Gentlemen.'

On Friday 27th August 1875 Kilvert made his first visit to Stonehenge 'Came in sight of the grey green cluster of gigantic stones – it seems to me as if they were ancient giants who suddenly became silent and stiffened into stone directly anyone approached.'

This was the great edifice that Hardy describes as the last resting place of Tess in her flight across Salisbury Plain with Angel Clare: the stones made up a forest of monoliths grouped upon the grassy expanse of the plain. The couple advanced further into this pavilion of the night till they stood in its midst.

'It is Stonehenge!' said Clare.

There are many similar subjects treated effectively and tenderly by both Kilvert and Hardy and the last one to be considered here is the story of the oxen.

In his diary entry of January 5th 1878 Kilvert narrates the story of James Meredith:

'I was watching them on old Christmas Eve and at 12 o'clock the oxen that were standing knelt down upon their knees and those that were lying rose up upon their knees and there they stayed kneeling and moaning, the tears running down their faces.'

Hardy in his well known poem *The Oxen* writes:

'If someone said on Christmas Eve
Come see the oxen kneel!
In the lonely barton by yonder coomb
I would go with him in the gloom
Hoping it might be so.'

A sentiment for us all on which to ponder.

A KILVERT OCCASION HALF-A-CENTURY AGO

By Mr. Jack Burrell (Bristol)

On July 2nd, 1949 I caught the 9.05 a.m. train from Bristol (Temple Meads) to Newport. Here I waited an hour for the 11.03 a.m. to Brecon, one of four trains per day that made their leisurely way over this route of contrasting scenery. Most of the patronage was from people going into Merthyr from the Bargoed area or from the Merthyr/Dowlais area to Aberystwyth.

Along with the Aberystwyth passengers I alighted at Tallylyn junction to go just up the road to stay with friends. On the Sunday morning I walked the four miles into Brecon to catch the 1.30 p.m. to Hay. I took Kilvert's familiar road to Clyro and followed Dr. Williamson (Bishop of Swansea and Brecon) up the path, he was to dedicate a tablet. Professor Bartlett from Lampeter (later Bishop of St. Asaph) preached and Kilvert's great nephew (who held a living in the Portsmouth area) was also there.

Hard to believe these days but I came out of church just in time to catch Yeoman's bus to either Kington or Weobley, I cannot remember which, at this distance in time. Here I took another bus to Hereford, with the accompaniment of girls singing *Lilli Marlene*, a very popular song at that time.

In those days west to north Bristol trains travelled via Shrewsbury and Hereford as distinct from via Birmingham today. I reached Temple Meads at about 9 p.m. and was home in time to hear a recorded account of the service on BBC Welsh Region as it then was.

KILVERT TRAIL

A service was held at St. Mary's Hay, on June 2nd to mark the launch of a series of twenty church leaflets entitled:

A Cleric's Trail, Francis Kilvert and a life of faith on the Borders of Powys and Herefordshire

Each leaflet is available in its own church with a general leaflet listing all twenty churches, from St. Harmon in the north of the Kilvert Country to Capel-y-ffin in the south. The general leaflet contains brief details of each church and a map, it is also available from Tourist Information Centres.

Kilvert's Clyro Now

By our member Eugene Fisk of the Kilvert Gallery in Clyro

This charming new booklet (with a foreword by Clyro resident Sir John Harvey Jones and published for the Clyro Preservation Society) is a series of drawings by Eugene Fisk of Clyro village scenes accompanied by an occasionally acerbic commentary. Many of the pages are also beautifully edged with sketches of the wild flowers to be found in the area with a note of their season and location.

The booklet is priced at £9.95 + postage and may be obtained from the Kilvert Gallery, Ashbrook House, Clyro, Hay-on-Wye, Hereford HR3 5RZ

(Tel/Fax: 01497 820831)

Because of pressure of space a number of items have been held over until the next Newsletter in February, 2000.