

Local Interest

Hubert Nicholson, poet, novelist and founder of the Epsom Poetry Group, died on 11 January 1996 at the age of 87. Born in Hull, he worked as a journalist and in 1941 published *Half my Days and Nights*, a delightful autobiographical memoir of life in Hull and London in the 1920s and '30s. He had no time for pretension and was a generous promoter of the work of other writers.

The Rialto has just published *How It Turned Out*, Selected Poems of Frank Redpath. Born in Hull in 1927 he earned a living writing stories for children's comics and lecturing at Hull College of Further Education. Frank died in 1990. His poetry was written over a lifetime but he seldom sought to publish it. Philip Larkin knew Frank and admired his poems. They are remarkable for their elegance, wit and ability to move the reader. (Price £6.95 from The Rialto, 32 Grosvenor Road, Norwich NR2 2PZ)



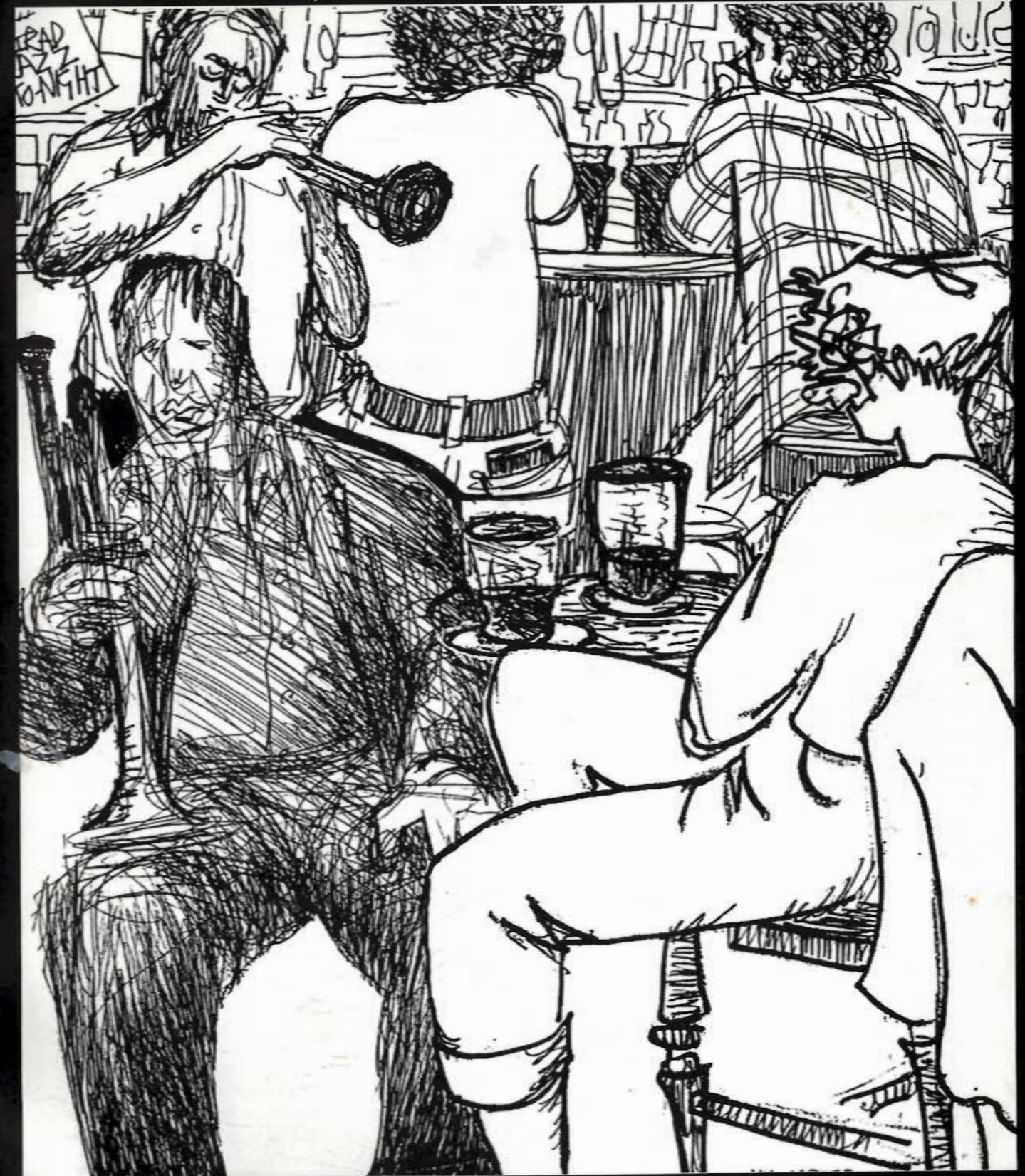
Larkin and his staff on the move to the new library, September 1959

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ABOUT LARKIN ABOUT

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EDITORIAL

Women on Larkin

The launch of the Philip Larkin Society has attracted widespread attention in most major national newspapers and is starting to generate interest abroad. Not all of the articles have been flattering, but the degree of interest shown has outshone coverage of any other new literary society in Britain and indicates a sustained curiosity about the man and his work.

The editorial policy of *About Larkin* is twofold. Firstly, the committee will report on Society events and Larkin related issues. Secondly, we intend to address some of the mythologies which have become attached to Larkin the man and the poet. Since the publication of the *Selected Letters* and the Andrew Motion biography, Larkin's name has become synonymous in some quarters with misogyny, political incorrectness and general glumness. This has surprised many of the people who knew him well. Therefore, this biannual newsletter will focus on themes which cast new light on the poet. In the first two issues we concentrate on Larkin's attitudes to women. One of the advantages the Philip Larkin Society has over other dead poets' societies is that many of his contemporaries and colleagues are still alive and ready to share their memories of him.

Despite working hard to give the impression that he was a misogynist, Larkin developed many close friendships with women. Ruth Siverns's article recalls the impact of an intelligent, literary young man suddenly arriving in a small Shropshire town. Maeve Brennan's interview with Winifred Dawson gives a unique insight into the reality behind the texts of several poems concerned with being single, attached or married. At various stages throughout his career Larkin went out of his way to encourage women's writing. Poems by women were included in a 1974 Christmas Poetry Society Supplement and one of them, Joan Barton's 'Great House', is republished here. Later, as Judith Priestman explains, Larkin was instrumental in securing his correspondence with Barbara Pym for the Bodleian Library archives.

Larkin lived at a time when gender divisions were much more rigid than they are today. Outside his family he scarcely knew any women until he went to Oxford. Once he began to be involved with them, he realised his vulnerability to women was in conflict with his ambition to be a writer. He spent the rest of his life trying to balance their emotional claims on him with his fear of the net of marriage. That he succeeded proved to be fruitful for his art, though he expressed misgivings at having allowed his head to rule his heart.

This first issue of *About Larkin* is a special bumper one and is limited to 600 copies.

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COVER DRAWING

I was delighted to be asked to do the cover drawing for the first issue of *About Larkin*. After 25 years teaching Art, more or less full-time in Adult Education, I am now liberated to do my own painting. Using watercolour and gouache, I enjoy interiors, people and landscapes full of incident.

My idea of a good night out is to be with a sketchbook in a pub where a traditional jazz band is playing.

Jill Carter

PHILIP LARKIN AT WELLINGTON 1943-1946

Ruth Bowman was a sixteen year old schoolgirl at the local high school and a regular borrower from the library when she first met Larkin. In this article, she reflects on the impact Philip's arrival in 1943 had on the library-going population of Wellington.



Ruth Bowman aged 20

After Oxford, where Philip Larkin had enjoyed academic success and the company of a particularly gifted circle of friends, Wellington seemed a gloomy contrast. Too large to have the community spirit of a village and too small to engender the cultural activities of a larger town, it was an unremarkable little place with a built-in resistance to new ideas and even perhaps to newcomers. Add to that the antiquated and ossified library which Philip has described so well in 'Single-handed and Untrained', and one wonders that a brilliant young man of twenty-one could have endured it for as long as he did.

The answer, of course, lay in Philip himself: in his determination to make something of this

unpromising first job and in his inner resources. He set about improving the stock of the library with immense zeal. To those of us who needed more reference and non-fiction books and who longed for a more up-to-date choice of fiction, his arrival was heaven sent.

I was sixteen in 1943, had been born in Wellington and could not wait to get away from it to University. The arrival of Philip made life suddenly brighter. Here was someone, a mere handful of years older than myself, glamorised by an Oxford degree - not all that common in Wellington at that time - mature, learned and successful, who was yet willing to discuss with me books I had read, advising me on what I should read and actually interested in my reactions. I was dazzled. Annoyingly, some of my contemporaries developed a sudden and unlikely interest in English literature and hung around the library shelves in what I felt was a distinctly predatory manner, but Philip, whose maturity I had over-estimated, regarded these giggling sixth-formers with some complacency.

Many older borrowers were more guarded in their reactions; suspicious of his youthful enthusiasm, and no doubt irritated by the influx of young females, they found the changes he made to the library stock alarmingly 'modern'. The appearance of such shocking authors as D.H. Lawrence, Evelyn Waugh and Aldous Huxley, was to some an outrage and they were not slow to say so. However, Philip weathered these early storms and the offending volumes remained and became accepted. So did Philip himself. To these older readers he was unfailingly courteous, and his diffidence and nervous stammer, together with his patient willingness to find them books they would enjoy, won them over completely.

He was less successful with children. They were an unknown quantity and he viewed them with

mistrust. The sound of children's feet clumping up the narrow staircase immediately put him on his guard, though he was always ready to help the genuine enquirer.

The thorn in his flesh was the Reading Room. It was a large room on the ground floor. Open from nine in the morning to eight-thirty in the evening, and offering as it did, not only newspapers and periodicals, but also free warmth and seating, it exercised a magnetic attraction for the tramps of the area. Once in they were difficult to dislodge, and as the lending Library and the Librarian's Office were on the first floor, undesirables could arrive with little chance of being seen and intercepted.

Philip dreaded complaints about them from genuine users of the Reading Room as he was then forced into a confrontation with the offending itinerants, and this was a situation he was temperamentally unable to handle. It was hard enough to persuade them to leave when he locked up, and even after that had been accomplished, there were other unpleasant reminders of their occupation - the remains of food on the tables and stubs of forbidden cigarettes on the floor. As I grew to know Philip better I realised that this part of his duties was literally a nightmare to him. He told me that he often dreamed of 'their brutish faces'.

Most young men would have found the irksome working hours and lack of social life in war-time Wellington quite intolerable, but to Philip they were of little importance since they left him free to write. His living arrangements offered little luxury or, indeed, comfort. At that time young people away from home took rooms in houses presided over by landladies who provided full-board, and during his time in Wellington Philip lived in two or three such houses. Though he grumbled constantly to me about them, I think he was reasonably

content. As long as he had solitude in which to write he scarcely noticed his surroundings.

This spartan way of life was enlivened, however, by the proximity of Bruce Montgomery and the occasional weekend visits of Kingsley Amis, two of his closest Oxford friends. Bruce was already in Shropshire when Philip arrived, teaching modern languages at Shrewsbury School and writing detective stories under the name of Edmund Crispin. Regularly on a Tuesday, his evening off, Philip took the train to Shrewsbury and spent a convivial evening with Bruce in a local pub. In many ways they were very unlike. Bruce was sociable, extrovert, exuding charm and confidence, a composer as well as a published writer and already making a name for himself. Philip could have been forgiven a pang or two of jealousy but his affection for Bruce far outweighed his envy and they took enormous pleasure in each other's company.

Kingsley Amis's visits were only occasional but eagerly anticipated by Philip. These two were great friends, united by their dedication to become poets and novelists, by their passion for jazz, and by a shared gift for mimicry and a frequently juvenile sense of humour. These were weekends of serious drinking and endless, often riotous, conversation. Wellingtonians would have been amazed at their diffident librarian's metamorphosis. But these friendships were more than just enjoyable breaks from monotonous routine. They were valued as sounding boards for his progress as a writer, that centre of his life to which all else was subordinate.

And what progress it was. He had begun his novel of Oxford life, *Jill*, before he came to Wellington, and this he completed during his first year, at the same time working on the poems which were to make up *The North Ship*. Poetry then, as later, was an immense labour to him. He was his own severest critic

and was seldom satisfied with what he had written. When a poem was going badly depression engulfed him and he could think of nothing else. When he felt he had got it right he was transformed. Nothing mattered quite as much. During the second half of his time in Wellington he became immersed in his second novel, *A Girl in Winter*, which at that time was to be called *The Kingdom of Winter*. This was his first attempt at a serious novel and, as usual, it cost him dear to produce, though he felt a great affection for it since at that time he saw himself as a novelist rather than a poet.

By the time he left Wellington in the summer of 1946, elated at the prospect of working in the library of Leicester University College, *Jill* and *The North Ship* had both been published and his second novel was well-advanced. It would not be a bad total for any young man of barely twenty-four: for Philip Larkin it must surely be regarded as a remarkably creative period. Perhaps he owed Wellington a greater debt than he realised.

Ruth Siverns (née Bowman)

VIEW FROM HESSLE ROAD

(for Jean Hartley)

Old Bikeclips with the size 12 Oxfords wrote,
but eloquently, of a cut-price crowd.
I'm here to argue on a moral note
not that his choice of phrase be disallowed,
but that perhaps there's something to be learned
in asking why it was he wrote of them,
not they of him. Supposing that we turned
the flat-faced trolley round for once; what then?
Let's say we told those grim and head-scarfed wives
from fishy-smelling streets that they were owed
a swipe at Hull's late bard: 'Oozee?' perhaps
they'd gob out from the side of their own lives,
'We've never 'eard of 'im down 'Ezzle Road.
No, bollocks. Poetsarra ... crowdacraps!

Maurice Rutherford

Maurice Rutherford is a Hull-born poet whose latest volume, *Love is a Four-Letter World* (Peterloo £6.95) includes a number of his earlier 'Larkin' pieces. 'View from Hessle Road', previously unpublished, will appear in his new pamphlet collection *After the Parade* due to appear in autumn 1996 from Shoestring Press, 19 Devonshire Avenue, Beeston, Nottingham NG9 1BS (£2.95/\$7.25)

PHILIP LARKIN, PREUX CHEVALIER

Janice Rossen was fortunate enough to meet Philip Larkin in 1983 while researching her book on Barbara Pym, and will always remember with fervent gratitude his grave courtesy and his ebullient wit. In addition to treating her to a lively and bibulous luncheon, he gave her the best of all possible gifts: a rendering of the 'Sex Life in Ancient Rome' face from Lucky Jim. In this article, she examines the courteous and generous side of Larkin's nature. This is clearly exemplified in his relationship with Barbara Pym and other female professional colleagues, and has hitherto remained largely unnoticed by critics.

Although recent revelations about Larkin's secret character have inclined many to scorn him as a 'perfectly disgraceful man' (akin to the sinister and callous rakes in Restoration Drama), this most complex of poets also possessed another side: that of courteous professional. He could write in the other mode, of course: 'The women I clubbed with sex! / I broke them up like meringues', slavers the narrator in 'A Study of Reading Habits' (Collected Poems [CP]: 131). In addition, the cynicism which he often professes in his poetry is balanced by an aching romanticism as well (further masked by an elaborately ironic pose): the poet in 'Wild Oats' still keeps two snaps of the 'bosomy English rose' (CP: 143) in his wallet. And he is, mock-tragically, besieged by the shrewd and demanding women 'in specs' who drive him to a cool admission of inadequacy, however overlaid it is by smouldering inner rage. Yet there is another crucially important

strain of Larkin's attitudes towards women which reveals much about his character.

A kind of middle ground between these problematic views of women as temptresses or as harpies appears in his relations toward female professional colleagues. Like many men of his generation, he seems to regard the gender issue with considerable awe, and perhaps some discomfort; he never can forget that they are women. Yet this fact often calls forth an elaborately courteous and generous side of his nature which may have been overlooked by critics in the haste to paint Larkin as a lascivious voyeur. His thoughtful behaviour towards the library staff at the Brynmor Jones Library, upon becoming University Librarian, shows him as having coached many of the women on the staff for their professional library examinations. His long-time friendship with novelist Barbara Pym reveals him as a stalwart champion and an affectionate correspondent; and if the affection is perceived to have resulted from the safety of distance (he almost never saw Pym, and was happily untroubled by harbouring romantic designs upon her), this does not take away from the sheer joy of the letters themselves. The astonishing fact is that Larkin wrote his funniest letters to Pym, made many of his best jokes to her, and was the most lugubriously cheerful in his missives to her of any of his correspondents. She - or her particular kind of relationship with him - brought out the best in Larkin.

The story of their friendship is well known. An admirer of Pym's work, Larkin wrote to tell her so in 1961, adding that he would be delighted to write a sort of 'general essay on [her] books', which might appear in conjunction with the appearance of the next novel when it came out (Selected Letters [SL]: 323). She had published a steady stream of modestly successful novels in the 1950s, beginning with

Some Tame Gazelle in 1950, continuing through *No Fond Return of Love* in 1961, and there was no reason to think that she would not go on writing steadily for the indefinite future. At the time Larkin's letter arrived, she was at work on *An Unsuitable Attachment*, which was ultimately refused for publication in 1961 not only by Cape (her previous publisher) but by everyone to whom she subsequently sent the manuscript.

Larkin responded to the distress caused by this blow with the utmost sympathy. 'I am astonished at your bad news, and really can hardly believe it', he wrote to her immediately (SL: 352). Over the next several years, he consistently urged Pym to keep on writing and assured her that everyone to whom he had given copies of her books had found pleasure in them as well. On more than one occasion over the next several years, he attempted to use his own professional influence to convince publishers to consider her work - an act which seems most uncharacteristic for him, in its forcefulness and initiative. In the end, he was given the satisfaction of playing the true preux chevalier and of (almost) single-handedly rescuing her from oblivion. When the *Times Literary Supplement* surveyed a number of literary figures in 1977 about writers whom they believed to be either 'over-' or 'under-rated', both Philip Larkin and Lord David Cecil cited Barbara Pym as an 'under-rated' writer.

Following her triumphant vindication in the TLS, the resulting change in Pym's publishing fortunes was immediate and astonishing. She found instant publication for works in progress, and her earlier books were re-issued amidst a blaze of publicity, which, in addition to their manifest merit as novels, assured their success. Larkin, naturally, was jubilant. 'Super news!' he wrote to her with glee. 'I am drinking (or,

come to think of it, have drunk) a half-bottle of champagne in honour of your success' (SL: 557). Two years later, he is still rejoicing on her behalf, as he writes to her in 1979: 'I really am delighted that all your lovely books have come to life again: makes me very happy'. In the best tradition of the courteous gentleman, he lays all the credit at Pym's own door, concluding: 'Talent will out' (SL: 608).

Their correspondence continued until her death in 1980, and remained almost entirely long-distance, formal exchange. The two writers only met for the first time some fourteen years after Larkin's first letter to Pym. The occasion was, appropriately, lunch in Oxford at the Randolph Hotel, preparatory to which Larkin wrote requesting Pym to meet him on the front steps of the hotel 'at 12.29. Should I not be there', he went on, 'please wait in the bar: I don't like to think of you waiting on the steps' (SL: 523). These are traditional, old-fashioned manners. I would bet anything that he picked up the tab at lunch.

The relationship between these two writers is important for what it suggests about Larkin. For one thing, he was at his best in a formal role - on his best behaviour, as it were. When he originally wrote to Pym, it was as a deferential younger writer to an admired, distinguished, older colleague. (This is not to say, by any means, that he had not had acclaim for his own work, and could not combine the satisfaction of growing success with inner conviction of his own genius). But this role suited him. Yet again, when Pym unexpectedly became a damsel in distress, he was able to display passionate support for her talents - and possibly to experience privately both the *Schadenfreude* of seeing a fellow writer come to grief and the clenching fear that it might one day happen to him. As, indeed, Pym's powers as a novelist declined for a period (partly as a result of the weariness of continual rejection of

her books by publishers), Larkin could empathise deeply with this. His own encroaching writer's block was a burden which he could share perforce, and about which he could wax poetic, as he confided in 1975: 'Of course, *work* goes on, but I am quite unable to do anything in the evenings - the notion of expressing sentiments in short lines having similar sounds at their ends seems as remote as mangoes on the moon' (SL: 521).

The most significant aspect of the letters between Pym and Larkin is their tone - playful, lugubrious, affectionate, self-castigating, moody, hilarious, and above all, ironic. This sensibility they shared, especially as expressed by their denigrating of truly frightening experiences, as when Pym made a kind of self-mocking comedy of her cancer surgery in 1971: 'It was my first visit to hospital and apart from the first few days of discomfort (and even that wasn't very bad) I rather enjoyed the experience. To have a lovely rest, to have flowers and grapes and books brought to you and to be a centre of interest is not at all unpleasant!' (Barbara Pym, *A Very Private Eye: An Autobiography in Diaries and Letters*, ed. Hazel Holt and Hilary Pym (New York: E.P. Dutton Inc.: 262). Larkin knew instinctively how to respond to this, and her very detachment seemed to give him the freedom to make a heartfelt response. 'There is such a thing as an over-quick reply to a letter, I know, but I must say at once how much I sympathise with you over your operation. What a very, very upsetting thing to happen!' (SL: 440). He tends to invite mutual sympathy from Pym over all the minor difficulties of life - University term beginning, learning to drive, having his flat repainted, worries about money - though always with grave humour: 'I am having an ineffectual economy drive', he announced to her in 1978. 'It consists of not buying other people drinks' (SL: 579).

Much of the best of Larkin's correspondence shines in letters to those with whom he felt he could be expansive. Kingsley Amis to some extent brought this out in him (largely the freedom to indulge in foul language). But more nearly John Betjeman and Barbara Pym - in their own humility and unpretentiousness - seem to allow him to lower his defences. His domestic complaints seem marvellously expansive, as in the inspired description to Pym of the ongoing worries about maintaining his recently acquired house in Hull. 'Nothing much has happened since - perhaps the most thrilling thing is that I have got a gardener, a pleasant-featured young man who comes for 60p an hour every Friday morning. Of course, he doesn't relieve me of the task of grass-cutting ('One man went to mow') or half a dozen other things, but he is a wonderful standby' (SL: 528). Pym and Larkin both paraded for each other the delight to be found in dramatising life's small trials and pleasures, exaggerating them whimsically to a like-minded audience.

Above all, they shared an amiable professional camaraderie. They wrote to each other about writing - creativity, frustration, publication, royalties, fees, the sublime happiness of receiving proofs, the satisfaction of enthusiastic reception of one's work. Larkin reports to Pym in 1975 about her novels being discussed at a dinner party which he had recently attended in London, full of gratification that another guest, Gwendoline Butler, had declared herself to be equally impressed with Pym's novels: 'Her delight was just what a writer wants!' (SL: 535).

The combination in Pym and Larkin's epistolary friendship of shared professional interests, unthreatening emotional (and physical) distance, and freedom from direct competition (at the time they began corresponding with each other, Larkin had given

up writing novels) seemed to give Larkin the opportunity to display a warm and gracious side of his nature. They both gained from this friendship, which was of an anachronistic, almost Victorian courtesy, largely uncomplicated by sexual or sadistic overtones, or even by professional jealousy.

Among the tangled complexities of Larkin's relationships with women, I would urge that - as regards his friendship with Barbara Pym - the good which he has done ought to live after him, that we might remember it with pleasure.

Janice Rossen

Janice Rossen has written *The World of Barbara Pym* (Macmillan, 1987), *Philip Larkin: His Life's Work* (Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1989) and *The University in Modern Fiction: When Power is Academic* (Macmillan, 1993).

LETTER FROM PHILIP LARKIN TO HIS NIECE, ROSEMARY

Still.
25 April 62

My dear Rosemary,

I hope you have a good birthday - you won't be back at school yet, will you? - and plenty of interesting or useful presents. I'm not sure which this thing in sending you is, but I hope you can wear it sometime. One of the nice things about being a girl is that you can wear all the nicest colours & precious stones & smell of the

most beautiful flowers - you are much luckier than men who go about in perpetual camouflage smelling of Tweed & Gorse & Old Spice, not very inspiring smells. So congratulate yourself on your good luck.

I hope your holiday in Wales cleared away all vestiges of winter colds and that you are now ready for a splendid summer with plenty of swimming and new things seen and done. I shall be thinking of you on Saturday & hoping you are enjoying yourself with love from Uncle Philip.

Rosemary Parry (née Hewett) was born on 28 April 1947. She studied English and European Literature at the University of Warwick. She graduated in 1968 and worked for a year at Leicester University Library before going on to library school in Loughborough. After qualifying as a librarian she worked for nine years at Loughborough University of Technology.

The letter reproduced here was sent to Rosemary on her fifteenth birthday. To her, Philip Larkin was not 'a famous poet' but Uncle Philip, and she remembers him mainly for his sense of humour. The tone of this letter is very typical of the letters he would write on birthdays and at Christmas.



Kitty, Philip and Eva Larkin on holiday circa 1932

PHILIP LARKIN, BARBARA PYM AND THE BODLEIAN LIBRARY

Dr Judith Priestman works as Curator of Literary Manuscripts in the Department of Western Manuscripts, the Bodleian Library, Oxford. She is responsible for the Philip Larkin archive held there and has recently completed cataloguing the papers of Bruce Montgomery, Larkin's friend and contemporary. This article is extracted from a much longer piece which she published in *Bodleian Library Record* v.14. 1991.

In 1977, the Bodleian held an exhibition called 'Oxford Writers, 1914-1977'. Among later visitors to the exhibition was Barbara Pym who had recently been approached

by the booksellers Bertram Rota, acting on behalf of an unnamed American university. Knowing Larkin's interest in such transactions, both as a poet and a librarian, she wrote to him asking for his advice. Pym seems not to have kept Larkin's reply, although it is plain from her next letter to him that he asked her for a list of the papers:

Yesterday I went into the garage and delved in the packing case or tea chest where the MS remains of Miss Pym are deposited and I came up with what you see on the attached list!

Popular Pym legend has it that it was her visit to the 'Oxford Writers' exhibition that determined her to leave her papers to the Bodleian. In fact, when she died in 1980, Pym left no directions in her will but as an account of an inspirational visit resulting in a bequest it is ambiguous, to say the least. Pym may have decided to retain her papers in order to bequeath them to the University at a later date and so become an 'Oxford Writer' herself. (Of the sixty-five authors featured only six were women, and Pym was not among them). But it seems more likely that the visit persuaded her to retain her manuscripts in order to preserve her privacy and to prevent them from being defaced by literary stamps. When she died in 1980, Pym left no directions in her will about the destination

of her papers, and although the combination of Larkin, Pym and a modern writers' exhibition may seem to possess an irresistible and elegant logic, her manuscripts actually came to the Bodleian as the gift of Pym's sister, Mrs Hilary Walton, with Dame Helen Gardner acting as intermediary.

Where the positive connection between Larkin, Pym and the Bodleian occurs is in Larkin's bequest of Pym's letters to him. Pym's own papers included 115 letters and cards sent to her by Larkin between 16 January 1961 and 14 December 1979 (MSS. Pym 151-2). Larkin knew of the Pym donation, and when he died in 1985 he bequeathed to the Bodleian some 106 letters and cards sent to him by Barbara Pym between 1 March 1961 and 28 October 1979 (MSS. Eng. lett. c. 859-60). The Library thus houses both sides of the correspondence which was the chief medium of this famous literary friendship. It includes their first exchange of letters, and covers the entire period of Pym's critical neglect and subsequent popularity, up to her death in 1980. The letters are packed with literary and librarianly discussion, and accounts of the minutiae of their daily lives: Larkin reveals a long-standing feud with his garden - 'it is like the lull on the Western Front, both sides preparing for the Spring Offensive' (14 December 1979 [MS. Pym 152, fol. 52]); Pym wonders if she should write a novel called 'BLIND MOUTHS AT THE NIPPLE' (1 May 1979 [MS. Eng. lett. c. 860, fol. 64]). The tone of the letters is easy and unstrained, and it allowed both Pym and Larkin to express without too much commitment, the darker as well as the lighter sides of their characters. It is by turns funny, intelligent and rather moving in its scrupulous avoidance of personal stridency even when profound and often painful feelings are being described.

Larkin wrote briefly about his correspondence with Pym in the foreword to *An Unsuitable Attachment* (1982) where he characterized their exchange as 'amusing and undemanding'. In 1953, before he knew Pym, he had expressed reservations about 'undemanding' letters in his unfinished poem 'At thirty-one, when some are rich'. Complaining about evenings 'wasted' writing 'letters to women', he describes his efforts as:

Ends in themselves, my letters plot no change;
They carry nothing dutiable; they won't
Aspire, astound, establish or estrange.
(Collected Poems : 69-70)

Perhaps Andrew Motion's poem 'This is your subject speaking' provides us with a more objective coda on the relationship between Pym and Larkin. Larkin, 'half-grinning, half-scowling', tells Motion:

I'm reading the new Barbara Pym
and she says what a comfort
poetry is, when you're grieving
(but you were laughing):

'a poem by T. S. Eliot;
a passage by Thomas Hardy;
a line by Philip Larkin ...' a line ...
and think what I did for her!
(Natural Causes: 51-2)

Thanks to Larkin's bequest, the Library was able to enrich its manuscript holdings considerably, completing both sides of the Pym/Larkin correspondence. His generosity and professional creativity stand alongside his own writing as part of a single, unified literary achievement.

Judith Priestman

PHILIP LARKIN'S HULL AND EAST YORKSHIRE

The latest pamphlet to be issued in the Philip Larkin Memorial Series was published in November 1995. People - fans of Philip Larkin - regularly visit Hull and East Yorkshire and want to know and see places and buildings connected with Larkin who lived in the area for thirty years from 1955 until his death on 2 December 1985. *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire*, by Jean Hartley, sets out to provide the answers, with summary descriptions of many (but not all) of the most important places, and details of where and how to find them.

The pamphlet immediately became a best-seller in the Hull area, and has attracted considerable attention elsewhere. Indeed, not one but two *Guardian* reporters have sampled the trail and described it at length at different times! The trail has also been featured on BBC Television's *Look North*, Yorkshire Television's *Calendar*, and on Radio Four and Radio Humberside. The pamphlet has attracted very good reviews.

It costs £3.95 (ISBN 1 872167 74 8). Members can order it via most bookshops, or direct from Hutton Press, 130 Canada Drive, Cherry Burton, Beverley, East Yorkshire, HU17 7SB (adding £1 for postage and packing).

See Society Events for details of how to join the Society's own 'Hull Larkin Trail' on Saturday 8 June 1996.

MAEVE BRENNAN INTERVIEWS WINIFRED DAWSON (née Arnott)

Maeve Brennan was already working in the University Library in Hull when Philip Larkin was appointed Librarian in 1955. She worked with him throughout the thirty years he spent at Hull and during that time came to know Larkin well, both as a colleague and a friend. She and Winifred Dawson first met in April 1993, by which time Maeve had already known Ruth for six years.



Maeve Brennan in Hull in about 1963

Because Philip talked about you I knew about you before you heard of me. However, apart from remembering that you were the inspiration for 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' and 'Maiden Name,' I'm afraid I didn't retain a great deal. I certainly never expected to know as much about you as I now know, let alone meet you. I suppose the first time you heard my name was through Andrew Motion when he was gathering material for the biography a year or so after Philip's death. Did it ever occur to you that we should meet, and stranger still, that our first meeting should have taken place at Ruth's? (April 1993).

I suppose the first time I heard your name must have been when Andrew interviewed me in November 1986, but you were only a vague and shadowy figure to me at that time. I was only made aware of your part in Philip's life when I read James Booth's book several years later. I could not have guessed that we should meet at all, let alone at Ruth's.

How long had you then known Ruth, and how did you meet her?

I'd known her only a few months before I met you. Andrew Motion had told me that she lived quite near me in Romsey and gave me her present surname when he interviewed me in 1986. But that was the very day my first grandchild was due to be born, and when I heard the news of her arrival that evening, his information went out of my mind very swiftly. It was only after you had written to me when you heard that I was going to be in Hull in November 1992, while you would be in Romsey, that I got in touch with her. Sadly, I'd wasted six years of potential friendship but I knew little about Ruth and whether she would be pleased to see me. But of course, she was, and since then we've met on many occasions.

Apart from our friendship with Philip - which had many similarities in terms of romanticism, idealism, even an element of fantasy - since I've known more about you, I've been struck by other affinities we have. To begin with, we were born in the same year, and through our fathers we have a common Irish heritage. As a result of this, you spent the war years in Ireland. I should have done so. Arrangements had been made for my brother, sister and me to go to boarding schools in the Republic soon after the outbreak of war. Our travel tickets had been purchased but at the eleventh hour my mother would not let us go. Later, we followed the same career and both met Philip as a colleague. Tell me something about your early experiences in Northern Ireland and why you stayed on there after the war.

I arrived in Northern Ireland on 3 September 1939, the day the war began, and went to stay with a dear aunt and uncle. Had I remained in England, I should have begun my grammar school education the following day. As it was, my education after that was extremely fragmented, and so heavily weighted on the arts side that English literature was about the only subject I could study at Queen's. All my friends and most of my family were in Ulster and it seemed natural to stay on there after the war. I had no idea at all what I was going to do next. No-one seemed to worry about such things in those days. Then, a very lowly, temporary job as a cataloguer in Queen's Library just fell into my lap. I started work in September 1950 and Philip arrived soon afterwards.

What were your first impressions of him when he joined the staff at Queen's in October 1950?

I'm sorry to say that I can't remember my first sight of him at all. Before he arrived, a rumour had reached us that he had published a novel and somehow we got hold of a book called *Girls in Green* by Prudence Summerscales which we imagined could have been Philip's pseudonym - all very ironic when one considers his Brunette Coleman phase of which we knew nothing then, of course. As a colleague he brightened all our lives with his wry comments on daily life, and his marvellous collection of faces. He used to put his head round the door of the cataloguing room and pull a face which would put us all in a good mood for some considerable time. He was also a very able, efficient and respected member of staff.

When did you become aware that he was taking a special interest in you?

I was not aware of it. After all, there were many young, attractive girls in the library, at least ten out of a staff of twenty four, and Philip always had the talent for making each one feel she was special to him. He always took a great interest in everyone's clothes and hairstyles, not just mine. He didn't ask me out or pursue me in any conventional way, so I did not realise that he felt anything special for me.

But in February 1951, three months after meeting you he wrote 'Latest Face' (Collected Poems [CP] : 53). When did you first see this poem, and were you aware that yours was the face which inspired it?

I read neither this poem nor the 'Album' one for several years. In fact not until they were published in *The Spectator* in 1954 as Philip makes clear in his letter to me of 7 April 1954. He may have told me about the poems but I wouldn't have asked to read them in case I'd be embarrassed or expected to comment on them. After all, I didn't know then how good a poet he was, and I had had poems, both good and bad, written to me before.

A month after he wrote 'Latest Face,' he wrote the bitter little poem 'To my Wife' (CP : 54) which resembles 'Love' (CP : 150) written when Philip and I were close. Was your relationship quite intense in March 1951?

No, not in the least. I was involved in several other relationships at the time which I was trying to sort out to my satisfaction, with no great success. Philip was refreshingly on the sidelines, a man I could see frequently, with no emotional entanglements, and I rather assumed that he felt the same about me as I knew about his flight from Ruth and Monica.



Winifred Arnott (later Bradshaw, later Dawson) in Northern Ireland in about 1953

In August 1951 you went to the London School of Librarianship and Archives, where, incidentally, I learnt years later, you were a fellow student of my life-long friend, Isabel. Did you expect your friendship with Philip to continue?

Yes, because I felt in my bones that I should be going back to Belfast. I felt I had not finished my time there and I certainly expected to go back for at least another year.

At this time, a liaison with Patsy Strang was developing. You knew her. Were you aware that Philip's feelings for her were other than platonic?

No, I wasn't, partly because Philip had said that 'married' for him meant 'out of bounds', and partly because we discussed her often and were puzzled by what made her tick. Although a qualified doctor, rich and attractive, she didn't seem happy. She didn't do anything and she already drank too much. I myself found her terrifyingly self-assured and sophisticated.

While you were in London, you met Geoff Bradshaw who was to become your husband. In July 1952, however, on completion of your course, you returned to Queen's and the friendship with Philip continued. (A decade later I was in a very similar position.) How did you view the situation vis-à-vis the two men until you became engaged to Geoff at the end of 1952?

Well, Maeve, you have to understand that at that time music was my passion, particularly what Philip called 'horrible' music. I was much given to singing madrigals, oratorios and so on, and with Geoff I discovered opera. All my emotions went into that, and I think we both imagined a life devoted to music. Well, plainly Philip was on the other side of the fence, as well as on the other side of the Irish Sea.

As a result of your engagement, Philip wrote 'He Hears that his Beloved has become Engaged' (CP : 66). Although this poem was not published during Philip's lifetime, were you aware how strongly he felt about your engagement, and, if so, how did it affect you?

Yes, I returned from England in January 1953, newly engaged, and almost at once the situation changed. This time it was Geoff who was on the other side of the Irish Sea and his letters were not as intimate as Philip's had been when I was in England. I was immediately stricken by doubts. Philip said he felt as if someone had brought in an unpublished manuscript by D.H. Lawrence, which he said he would leave on his desk to look at after the holidays, and then found that someone had stolen it.

*Shortly after this, a group of you, including the Strangs and Arthur Terry, went to Dublin to see *Tristan and Isolde* at the Gaiety Theatre - not exactly Philip's choice of entertainment. You had a bad migraine and, according to one source, you missed the opera. But this was not, I believe, the case. Would you like to put the record straight?*

Yes, I should. It was not a migraine but it was caused in the following way. It was a very exciting and memorable day [in April 1953]. The very fact of going to see an opera on a Sunday made it special to those of us with a northern upbringing. Someone had borrowed a large vehicle. We got up early. The weather was glorious and we made straight for the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin and started some serious drinking - again impossible in Belfast on a Sunday when the pubs were all closed. I wasn't used to this and soon felt very ill. Patsy, with kindness and competence, took me to some friends of hers who lived in a beautiful house in a Georgian square where I was put to bed in linen sheets and woke to the sound of a lawn mower, quite recovered. Then Patsy and I went off to look for the men in several pubs and cafes. Eventually we found them in Phoenix Park and off we went to *Tristan*, performed by the Munich State Opera. I still have the programme. I can't believe Philip didn't enjoy it. I know I did.

In September 1953 Philip wrote for you his best known love poem, 'Lines on a Young Lady's Photograph Album' (CP : 71-72). Did he show it to you, or tell you about it at the time?

He may have told me about it at the time but, as I said before, I didn't actually read it until 1954 and by then it was within two months of my marriage to Geoffrey and I did not want to think too much about it.

Is it an accurate description of your album? Did he 'pinch' one of you bathing?

Well, yes, fairly accurate, allowing for poetic licence. Actually, there were two albums — one of my childhood before the war, and another of my school and university days, very small prints, and, of course, black and white. Though obviously tempted, he didn't pinch one of me bathing and a reproduction of that snap appears in *A Writer's Life*.

At this time you left Queen's for the second time to start a job at Birkbeck College, and to be with your fiancé in London. How did Philip regard the parting this time?

We were both unhappy at this parting but it was inevitable because the chief cataloguer had come back to re-possess her job and there was no position for me. I had to move on.

You continued to correspond with Philip and even confided to him your misgivings about your forthcoming marriage. Did you believe he would help you to resolve them?

Possibly, but it was a forlorn hope. At first I wrote full of complaints about my new job in the library at Birkbeck. I don't think I ever mentioned my misgivings about my marriage but he must have realised that I didn't sound over enthusiastic about it. Of course, as I now realise, he was heavily involved with Patsy Strang. I suppose if he'd said 'Come back to me', I would have rushed but it would have been for the wrong reasons. As it was, I married largely to get away from London and to make a fresh start, and those were also the wrong reasons.

*You were married in June 1954 and on your wedding day Philip wrote 'Long Roots moor summer to our Side of Earth' (CP : 96). No doubt you were not aware of it until its publication in the *Collected Poems* in 1988. What was your reaction when you read it?*

I was stunned. That's all I can say.

Do you think he really wanted to marry you, or was it simply that he thought he wanted you when he knew you were beyond his reach?

Well, as you know, Maeve, with successive women, Ruth, myself and you, Philip was given to playing with the idea of marriage, tossing it about in the air and chewing it until he finally killed it. He'd often said that he felt that marriage was not for him.

Loss, privation, unavailability, all sharpened Philip's emotions - in other words this was the romantic side of Philip and is surely what he meant by 'Deprivation is for me what daffodils were for Wordsworth' (Required Writing : 47). Would you like to comment?

Yes, deprivation did seem essential to his romantic feelings. He actually said to me that what people thought was love was caused by deprivation and ignorance and wouldn't survive a closer relationship. I was shocked.

*Six months after your marriage, you were still preoccupying his thoughts when he wrote 'Maiden Name' (CP : 101) which first appeared in *The Less Deceived*. How did it strike you on reading it some eighteen months after your marriage?*

After my marriage I regarded the rubicon as having been crossed and I tried to put all thoughts of Philip out of my mind. I was not one of the original contributors to *The Less Deceived* though Philip kindly sent me a copy. I had a new life by then. I was teaching, building a house and thinking of a family; he was part of the past.

*Your friendship with Philip was punctuated by five very personal poems, starting with 'Latest Face' in February 1951 and concluding with 'Maiden Name' four years later. He once described them as your *ave atque vale*. What are your feelings about such a legacy of your relationship?*

I feel very proud and honoured to have inspired these beautiful poems, but I also feel regret that I never thanked their author sufficiently.

You continued to correspond spasmodically, and a year or so after your marriage broke down in 1976 you met for lunch after an interval of more than twenty years. What were your reactions on meeting again?

We were delighted to see each other. He hadn't changed much. I had probably changed more. We talked for several hours. I probably bored him by going on about my recent divorce and I wish that had not been our last meeting. We intended to meet again in London but it never happened.

It is now over forty years since your close friendship with Philip. What do you think looking back on it?

It was a great privilege to have him as a friend and colleague. He was simply the most fascinating person I ever met in my life and a pleasure to be with or correspond with.

Have you any regrets?

Yes. I greatly regret that I didn't keep up my correspondence with him throughout my first marriage, apart from the odd post card or greetings card at Christmas and birthdays. This was because I felt he lived in a rarefied atmosphere peopled with poets, publishers and literary figures such as Barbara Pym and Kingsley Amis. What could I possibly say that would interest him? But now I know better. My life wasn't dull, only different, and I think he would have greatly enjoyed hearing about it.

Philip romanticised his relationship with you. He therefore, probably, invariably showed you - as he did me - his 'better' side. Were you surprised by the revelations about his 'darker' side once they became known?

No, not greatly. I think there were enough hints in the poems. He was such a many-sided man that the dark side balanced the happier side that I had known.

Finally, what do you think Philip would have made of the now quite well-established friendship which you, Ruth and I enjoy?

I just don't know. I think he would have been fascinated. First, there was the fact of our actually getting together, in which you, Maeve, were instrumental. You put us in touch with each other. And then there's the fact of our continuing friendship through meetings and letters. Perhaps the fact that we all get on so well might be due to what a psychologist friend of mine tells me is 'assortative mating', the selection of a series of 'mates' who have a strong resemblance to each other. Philip could not have envisaged our actually meeting and becoming friends.

M. M. Brennan

This interview was recorded in the Audio Visual Centre at the University of Hull on 14 November 1995. The idea for the interview came about when possible items of interest for the Newsletter were under discussion by the Committee. It was not intended as a conversation piece with exchanges of views on Larkin, although some responses did inevitably prompt an occasional spontaneous comment during recording. These remain on the tape but have been omitted as inappropriate from the published version. A full version of the interview is held in the Archives Reading Room of the Brynmor Jones Library.

JOAN BARTON AND THE 1974 POETRY BOOK SOCIETY CHRISTMAS POETRY SUPPLEMENT

Joan Barton was born in 1908. Her collection of poems, *The Mistress*, was published by The Sonus Press in 1972. The poem 'Great House on View Day' appeared in the 1974 Poetry Book Society Christmas Poetry Supplement which Larkin edited. The letter to Larkin expresses her surprise and delight at being asked to contribute to the supplement and goes on to discuss their differing attitudes to 'work'.

Great House on View Day

Best of all, the attics, through whose high windows
swathes of light pour in
and old lawns roofed with cedars stretch away
to private woods,
parkland and private woods and private places,
and greenness reaching to infinity;

in dove-coloured miles of early morning rain
the far kok-kok of pheasants; silences
winding it round. Someone should be here
contentedly alone
writing their masterpieces
and testing their verses on this private air.

A someone looking out: for looking in
discovers low-roofed warrens - servants' rooms;
two to each sagging bed,
iron frame and ancient flock, the flowered po,
the tin alarms
forever jumping in the dark cold head.

Joan Barton

The White House, Stratford-sub-Castle, Salisbury, Wiltshire
TELEPHONE: 0722-27442

26 JUL 1974

25th July 1974

Dear Philip Larkin.

Your letter asking me to contribute to the Poetry Book Society Christmas Poetry Supplement was a marvellous surprise and pleasure. My problem is, how long can you give me? If I could have a week I think I could send you something: I have four poems in a state of suspension and so they would have remained but for your invitation. If I don't hear from you, may I conclude that the end of next week will do? My average is far lower than yours of $4\frac{1}{2}$ poems a year.

Your letter made me feel guiltier than ever. I have been meaning to write to you ever since "High Windows" was published and our six copies came, and in fact I did write ten days ago and then decided that I was being a bore and didn't send the letter. It is particularly bad because I have enjoyed and am enjoying the book so much, and I want to tell you how greatly I admire and envy your expertise and what a true and splendid poet I think you are. I like particularly "To the Sea", "The Trees", "Cut Grass" (masterly and beautiful), "Livings", "The Building" - the lines

" and someone walking by it

Out to the car park, free."

absolutely sum up, for me, the experience of being in hospital: the thing about it that is hardest to endure.

The reviews, except from one or two twits, have been as good as they should be. Dan Jacobson in "The New Review" interested me very much, apart from the justice of what he said. It may surprise you, but there is a great deal in your attitude (can't think of a better word), as he describes it, that I can understand, particularly about "work". I have always had to work to keep myself and I have enjoyed it - I am good at it, like you, so that it has been no hardship to leave four poems in bits: in fact having to get out a catalogue is always a splendid excuse to leave everything else. It wasn't like that when I was a girl, or young woman, of course, earning 15/- a week at George's the Bristol booksellers: then every spare minute went on writing, mostly fruitlessly on novels - I am not inventive and it was pure waste of time. Incidentally, I managed to get a mint copy of "Girl in Winter" the other day, not a first unfortunately, but the reprint. I read it when it came out and am looking forward now to reading it again. I must stop and go down to the saleroom where there are a few extraordinary books. Will continue later.

When I wrote "work" I didn't mean bookselling, but "running" things, as I did in the British Council and for the Women's Land Army for part of the war: there I had 250 voluntary workers, ladies, (and - far less trouble - 1,000 Land Girls) from whom I learnt to say "gel" and "coupöng" and petrol. From one very grand one I learnt about Siegfried Sassoon's relations with his wife: she knew the wife, not SS. I was reminded of that last week when during the Salisbury Festival Dennis Silk gave a lecture on SS, whom he had

Dennis

known and hero-worshipped since he was playing cricket at Cambridge. It was an excellent lecture. How extraordinary it must be not to have to work, but to live in a great house and never think about money and have a "manuscript room". I used to think it would be easy to "be good", as a person not a writer, in such circumstances, but now I wonder: SS used to shut himself up at the top of the house and his wife never saw him for weeks on end - I was told.

Thank you for asking how I am: the answer is fine. It was a bit hairy while it lasted, for I was waiting to go into hospital for nearly five weeks and you have to agree beforehand that they can do what they like, i.e. take out an innocent cyst or a mastectomy, and until you come out of the anaesthetic you don't know. In the event it was, as they say, innocent and I was in hospital only 29 hours, though feeling a bit limp for the next fortnight - I suppose partly the release from tension, partly the anaesthetic.

I am to have a broadcast on Radio Three in "The Living Poet" series: no date yet. Jill Balcon has read most of the poems, supremely well, and I have recorded some quite idiotic linking comments. Anne Stevenson is responsible for my being asked - she gave my book to the producer. I shall always be grateful to you for taking it to C. Day Lewis: Jill Balcon remembered that.

Perhaps we shall be lucky enough to get another book from you in less than ten years - I hope so.

Will you send me

some reviews?

Kevin Barker

SOCIETY NEWS

THE INAUGURAL MEETING OF THE PHILIP LARKIN SOCIETY

The inaugural meeting of the Philip Larkin Society took place on Saturday, 2nd December 1995, appositely in the Brynmor Jones Library of the University of Hull, Philip's professional 'home' for the last thirty years of his life. It was a happy occasion and distance proved no obstacle to Larkin enthusiasts who had travelled from places as far afield as Scotland, Cornwall and Kent to be 'in at the start', joining with their shorter haul colleagues from the Midlands, Lancashire and Humberside.

The location was the Exhibition Area of the Library, currently housing the 'Philip Larkin: Letter Writer' Exhibition, which provided a wholly appropriate and informative setting for the meeting. On arrival, members were proffered wine and soft drinks and, to a background of Larkin's favourite jazz provided by Dr John White, they wandered around the exhibits, revelling in the various letters and photographs chosen for display, and meeting up with old friends and making new ones. The University was well represented by the Chairman of Council, Dr Tom Farrell, and the Vice-Chancellor, Professor David Dilks.

The proceedings began at 12.30, presided over by the President of



Left to right - Anthony Thwaite (President), Eddie Dawes (Chairman) and Alan Plater (Vice-President) at the opening of the inaugural meeting of the Philip Larkin Society on 2 December 1995.

the Society, Dr Anthony Thwaite, who was introduced by the Chairman, Professor Eddie Dawes. Anthony, after warmly welcoming everyone, conveyed apologies for absence from a number of people, including the University Chancellor, Lord Armstrong, and announced that the society's membership had now exceeded the hundred mark. He then introduced our speaker, Dr Alan Plater, renowned writer for theatre and television, and Honorary Graduate of the University, and a former resident of Hull.

Alan, speaking 'off-the-cuff', regaled his audience with a lively, delightfully humorous talk about Philip Larkin as a friend and fellow writer, amusingly observing that they were both members of the bald-headed league! He pledged

his whole-hearted support for the aims of the Society, noting some of the facetious press comments recently made about it, and expressed his belief that the Society presented the opportunity to address some of the myths that have been circulating since Larkin's death. Although he did not share his politics, that in no measure diminished his enjoyment of Larkin's works.

Anthony Thwaite thanked Alan for his excellent contribution and the company then adjourned for a pleasant buffet lunch, served in the Library Committee Room. Anthony, Alan Plater and Jean Hartley were kept busy signing copies of their Larkin titles and there was plenty of opportunity for chat, reminiscences and discussion before Eddie Dawes reconvened



Alan Plater speaking 'off-the-cuff'

the meeting at 14.00 for the afternoon session. On behalf of the Society, he expressed gratitude to the Ferens Education Trust, whose munificence had ensured financial security during the difficult start-up period before the membership built up and the essential sustaining subscriptions came in.

Eddie then introduced Professor Mike Walton and Mr John Harris, of the University of Hull Drama Department, who presented a splendid 'double act' of readings of prose and poems from Larkin's works. Their material, chosen by Dr John Osborne and admirably suited to the occasion, sought to present Larkin on a variety of themes - Hull, childhood, marriage, work, jazz and death. The prose derived principally from interviews Larkin had given to the press over the years, and the selection of poems embraced 'Here', 'Afternoons', 'Self's the Man', 'The Whitsun Weddings', 'Toads', 'Toads Revisited', 'For Sidney Bechet', 'High Windows', 'Aubade', and finally 'The Trees', with its uplifting ending of 'Begin afresh, afresh, afresh'.

Anthony Thwaite thanked the duo for their fine performance and brought the proceedings to a close. There was still time to secure copies of Jean Hartley's *The Larkin Trail* and two Larkin-association titles from Edinburgh University Press, Barry Bloomfield's *Brought to*



'The Listeners': members of the Society audience listening intently to Alan Plater's talk.

Book and Douglas Dunn's *Under the Influence*, which had been brought for the meeting by Brenda Moon, Edinburgh University Librarian and former Deputy Librarian at Hull.

Brian Dyson, Rebecca Johnson and Janet Whitehead were responsible for the detailed arrangements of a function that everyone agreed had ensured the Philip Larkin Society was off to a resounding start.

Edwin A. Dawes
Chairman



Why does the Philip Larkin Society publicity feature a frog logo?

Read Brian Dyson's explanation on page 25.

PHILIP LARKIN'S JAZZ Wednesday 7 February 1996

Bob Smeaton, Information Services Librarian of the Brynmor Jones Library, reviews Dr John White's talk about the music that Larkin liked, disliked and lied about.

I enjoyed this evening devoted to Larkin's jazz - not just for the well chosen tracks from favourite artists, but also for the many examples of Larkin's unfailing ability to produce, in his writing, the telling image or hilarious witticism.

The tracks which John White selected, and played in full, were all particular favourites of Larkin, and showed clearly where his jazz tastes lay. These tastes were formed early. For Larkin good jazz was 'hot' jazz, discovered by him first in the up-tempo numbers played by dancebands at his local Hippodrome, numbers such as 'Tiger Rag' which had the key elements of improvised lines and foot-tapping rhythm. (The latter was an important criterion as John White attested from personal memory of record playing sessions with Larkin).

In his youth and college days, jazz was a 'unique private excitement', which he shared with fellow devotees - Jim Sutton, Norman Iles and Kingsley Amis. Their response to the music was sometimes a 'grinning, jigging wordlessness'. On other occasions, they would join in on the vocals, with hilarious results. In a 1963 letter, Larkin asked Norman Iles if he remembered 'bubbling 'My wife revolves a barrel' against Armstrong's 'Body and soul' in Kingsley's room?' - rather than the

correct version 'My life revolves about her'.

Larkin's matchless wit and ability to produce the telling image were demonstrated again and again in the course of John White's talk. He wrote of Monk's 'elephant dance piano style', and his 'hesitantly chosen chords crammed like suitcases with almost more than they can carry'. One of the tracks John White played was 'One o'clock jump' from Goodman's 1938 Carnegie Hall concert. Larkin described 'pianist Stacy cantering along the crisp tight-reined ensembles'. Larkin was eloquent too, when writing of his heroes (who, as John White pointed out, were nearly all black. So much for the nonsense about Larkin's 'racism'). He described Armstrong as 'inexhaustible and unchanging like the sun', and Jimmy Rushing's vocals as 'pouring sunshine'.

John White quoted from a correspondence Larkin had with the musician and broadcaster Steve Race in 1984. Race had asked him if his musical tastes were not simply nostalgia for his Oxford years. Larkin, in reply, admitted that between 1942 and 1956 he had not listened to much jazz so that when he began reviewing in 1961 he had a lot of ground to make up. As a reviewer, Larkin admitted to not always being entirely honest: '... there was many a time when I substituted 'challenging' for 'insolent', 'adventurous' for 'excruciating', and 'colourful' for 'viciously absurd', in a thoroughly professional manner.'

Many thanks to John White for an informative and entertaining evening.

Bob Smeaton

Recordings selected by John White

1. Eddie Condon and the Chicagoans
'Ain't gonna give nobody none of this jelly roll' (1939)
2. Sidney Bechet and his New Orleans Feetwarmers
'Nobody knows the way I feel this morning' (1940)
3. Louis Armstrong and his Orchestra
'St Louis Blues' (1939) - Larkin dubbed this 'the hottest record ever made'
4. Louis Armstrong with the Russell Garcia Orchestra
'You're the Top' (1957)
5. Fats Waller
'I'm crazy 'bout my baby' (1931)
6. Bessie Smith and Her Blue Boys
'Young Woman's Blues' (1926)
7. Benny Goodman's 1939 Carnegie Hall Jazz Concert
'One o'clock Jump' (1938)
8. Billie Holiday
'These Foolish Things' (1936)
9. Duke Ellington
'Harlem Airshaft' (1940)
10. Count Basie and his Orchestra with Jimmy Rushing
'Sent for you Yesterday' (1938)
11. Billie Banks and the Rhythmmakers
'Yellow Dog Blues' (1932)
12. Earl Bostick
'Flamingo' (1951)
13. King Oliver
'Riverside Blues' (1923)

FUTURE SOCIETY EVENTS

Wednesday 24 April 1996

Why Larkin's poetry gives offence.

This talk by Dr James Booth will take place on Wednesday 24 April 1996 in the Tranby Room, Staff House, University of Hull commencing at 8 pm.

The Society hopes to produce an audio-cassette of this talk for members who are unable to attend the event in person. Cassettes will be available in early May at a cost of £3. These cassettes will be for members' private use only. Anyone wishing to purchase a cassette should send a cheque for £3 (payable to The Philip Larkin Society) to: The Philip Larkin Society (24/4), c/o Dr J. Osborne, Department of American Studies, University of Hull, Hull HU6 7RX.



Saturday 8 June 1996 - The Hull Larkin Trail - 10.00 am to 4.30 pm

Based on the pamphlet *Philip Larkin's Hull and East Yorkshire* by Jean Hartley, this guided walk will concentrate on some of the places and buildings connected with Larkin who lived in the area for 30 years. What sort of environment did he live in? What inspired him to write masterpieces such as 'The Whitsun Weddings' and 'Here'?

The tour will start and finish at Hull Paragon Station and will visit locations in Hull city centre, the

Avenues, the University of Hull campus, Cottingham and Hessle. Coach transport will be provided between Hull, Cottingham and Hessle but a fair amount of walking will be involved throughout the day. The visit will be restricted to members of the Society and further details will be sent out automatically to those members who have already requested them. Otherwise, please write to the Society requesting further information.



Monday 30 September 1996 at 8 pm

Visit to the Philip Larkin Suite in the Brynmor Jones Library, introduced by Brian Dyson and Dr Rebecca Johnson.

Venue: Philip Larkin Suite
Brynmor Jones Library
The University of Hull



Saturday 30 November 1996

2 pm Annual General Meeting

3pm Professor Malcolm Bradbury has kindly agreed to give the keynote speech following the first Annual General Meeting of the Society. The title of his talk will be 'Looking at the Literature of the 1950s'.

Venue: The Middleton Hall
The University of Hull

Non-members and guests will be welcome to attend the talk. Further details will be sent to all members in due course.



LARKIN CONFERENCE 1997

We are pleased to announce that The Philip Larkin Society will be hosting a major international conference - NEW LARKINS FOR OLD - to be held at the University of Hull from 27-29 June 1997.

At the moment no further information is available but all Society members will be circulated with full details in due course.



Annual Subscription Fees

£12 (full fee)
£ 9 (unwaged or senior citizen)
£ 5 (student rate)

Membership of the Society runs from 1 January to 31 December of any given year.

Overseas members are invited to pay their subscription by a cheque in £s sterling drawn on a London bank or by international money order. Cheques should be made payable to 'The Philip Larkin Society', and sent to Dr John Osborne at the Society's address for general correspondence (see page 2).

OBITUARIES

PROFESSOR J. P. KENYON

18 June 1927 - 6 January 1996

John Kenyon's distinguished career began in Cambridge as a Lecturer in History and Fellow of Christ's College from 1955 to 1962. At the age of 35 he was appointed to the G F Grant Chair of History at the University of Hull, a post he held for 19 years. Desirous of change from a redbrick environment, he went to St Andrews in 1981 as Professor of Modern History. His next and last appointment was as Distinguished Professor of Early Modern British History at the University of Kansas from 1987 to 1994. His chosen specialty was seventeenth-century England on which he wrote several definitive books. For many years he regularly reviewed books on this period for *The Observer*. On retirement, he and his wife Angela, returned to Norfolk where they had bought a pied-à-terre before moving to Kansas.

Soon after his arrival in Hull, John established a friendship with Philip Larkin. Initially, their common interest was jazz but this quickly extended to university politics, a shared sense of humour, and lunch-time drinking. Normally slow to take the initiative, Philip, with rare alacrity, invited the Kenyons to Pearson Park to listen to jazz on his Pye Black box record player.

My friendship with John and Angela was confirmed when they invited me to dinner with Philip on 15 December 1964, memorable not only for the first showing of the BBC's Monitor programme depicting Philip's life in Hull, but also for the dense fog which affected us all that night. Philip had only had a car for a few months and certainly had no

experience of driving in thick fog. The six mile drive to the Kenyons' home was a nightmare and we arrived distraught, well after the appointed time, only to find Angela also in an agitated state. Earlier in the evening, while taking their younger daughter to an appointment, poor visibility had caused her to run into the back of a lorry. Miraculously they were unhurt, but Angela was still haunted by thoughts of what might have been. John, equally distressed by the near tragedy, nevertheless handed round drinks and restored calm with remarkable aplomb.

Philip was apprehensive about the programme but relaxed as it unfolded. He had not seen a preview and could not have foreseen its immediate success nor its popularity ever since. I have always felt greatly privileged to have been present on that occasion.

Over the next decade, there were many shared happy occasions but sadly the friendship waned after the mid-1970s and I don't think Philip kept in touch after the Kenyons left Hull. I resumed contact with them at Philip's memorial service in Westminster Abbey on 14 February 1986, subsequently seeing them occasionally and keeping in touch by letter.

A master of prose, John's letters are interesting, informative, interwoven with views, literary gossip and witticisms. Most of all, I valued his astute perception of, often, unspoken problems and his gentle advice. I had long recognised that his larger-than-life presence, his rich booming voice and robust manner concealed a deep sensibility and compassion. His letters confirm this.

M. M. Brennan

SIR KINGSLEY AMIS

16 April 1922 - 22 October 1995



Kingsley Amis © Jerry Bauer 1984

Sir Kingsley Amis's passing last 22 October closed the career of a remarkably versatile, prolific man of letters whose work earned him the position, William H. Pritchard wrote, as 'the most entertaining, the most exhilarating of contemporary writers'. In addition to holding various teaching posts between 1949 and 1968, Amis produced twenty-four novels, two novellas, eight books of poetry, three collections of short stories, fourteen volumes of non-fiction, one memoir, seventeen edited volumes, nine radio or television plays, as well as hundreds of reviews and contributions to periodicals and symposia on subjects as diverse as politics, education, literary criticism, crime fiction, linguistics and religion. In 1981 he was named a Commander of the British Empire; in 1990 he was knighted.

Kingsley William Amis was born in Clapham Common, south London

on 16 April 1922, and raised in the suburb of Norbury. His father, William Robert, fully expected his only child to enter commerce, like himself. His son's intention, however, was to be a writer — a poet, really — though it was not until the publication of his rollicking and irreverent novel, *Lucky Jim* (1954), that he won acclaim. A visit to his friend, Philip Larkin, in Leicester had suggested the theme for *Lucky Jim*; later Larkin helped Amis turn the novel into a publishable manuscript. While admirers praised it as the funniest book they had ever read, funnier even (though not wittier) than Waugh's *Decline and Fall*, detractors expressed dismay for its 'unforgivable attack ... on civilized cultural values'. Over the next few years, Amis (along with his hero, Jim Dixon) was widely represented by the press as an 'Angry Young Man' — an epithet applied to a group of artists and commentators whose works seemed to register their distress about changes in British society after World War II. Like such contemporaries as John Braine, John Wain, Alan Sillitoe, Colin Wilson and John Osborne, however, Amis rejected the label as 'a very boring journalistic phrase'. Angry? At times, but also irritated, dissatisfied, resentful, exasperated, fearful — and always funny.

His comic proclivities were influenced by his father — a man with 'a talent for physical clowning'. Amis described himself as an 'undersized, law-abiding, timid' child who found popularity at grammar school by exploiting his inherent powers of mimicry. That talent flourished while Amis was a scholarship boy at the City of London School (1934-41) — where he specialized in the classics until he was sixteen, then switched to English — graduating from St. John's College, Oxford in 1945. For fellow student Philip Larkin, it was Amis's 'genius for imaginative mimicry' that attracted him: 'For the first time I felt myself in the presence of a talent greater than my own'.

Like many moral satirists — immediately we think of Swift, Pope, Twain — Amis was often misunderstood, many readers confusing the extreme views of some of his characters with those of the author himself. 'Just because Kingsley has that kind of wit which cuts to the heart of things,' said Brian Aldiss, 'people — some people — mistakenly believe he's not compassionate'. A good deal of Amis's later reputation as a curmudgeon, for example, was a role he enjoyed playing; he found much pleasure in being cantankerous, in annoying people, particularly the fashionable, the pretentious, the affected. Calling him a 'very ill-used man', C. S. Lewis once told Amis, 'I've always had great sympathy for you. They [the critics] will not understand that a joke is a joke. Everything must be serious'.

After serving (as a second lieutenant) in the British Army's Royal Corps of Signals (1942-45), Amis returned to Oxford where his friendship with Larkin grew over their mutual love of jazz and debunking authorities and other writers. He also met Hilary (Hilly) Bardwell, a student at the Ruskin School of Art, upon whom he would later draw to create characters in such novels as *Take A Girl Like You*, *Difficulties with Girls*, and *The Folks That Live on the Hill*. When Hilly became pregnant with their first son, Philip, they married in 1948; they later had Martin (1949) and Sally (1954). In 1965 they divorced, allowing Amis to marry the novelist Elizabeth Jane Howard. They too divorced, in 1983, and for the rest of his life Amis lived with Hilary and her third husband, Lord Kilmarnock — an arrangement that worked beautifully for all concerned.

Although his reputation was founded chiefly upon his own effortlessly individual brand of comedy, over the years the objects of Amis's humor broadened and deepened. Always a writer of

considerable breadth, showing sympathy for the most unlikely human types, very much aware of the darker side of existence — Amis tried, like Waugh, 'to make cruel things funny because it was the only way of making them less unbearable'. In forty years his characters changed dramatically, from fundamentally decent people who choose to act in a manner that has at least some significance, to an utterly depraved ghost (*The Green Man*), to septuagenarians who die in rather grotesque fashion (*Ending Up*), to people young and old stripped of their humanity (*Russian Hide and Seek*), castrated (*The Alteration*), impotent (*Jake's Thing*), mad (*Stanley and the Women*), treacherous or decaying (*The Old Devils* and *The Folks That Live on the Hill*).

He said that writing provided for him an antidote to the 'terrible feeling of gloom and panic and Christ knows what ... that a combination of drink and the ageing process seemed to usher in', and he was amazingly productive right toward the end — having completed his own version of Fowler's *Modern English Usage* as well as 100 pages of a new novel not long before his death.

Kingsley Amis's readers could never predict what a new work of his would be like — that is one of the joys of living contemporaneously with a writer of the first rank. We will miss that suspense now, but we can return to his work (as to Philip Larkin's) again and again, each time renewing old pleasures and discovering fresh ones. 'If we have to remember him for one thing', Eric Jacobs said, 'perhaps it should be this: that he capitalised the idea you could be intelligent, funny and popular all at the same time'.

An important window on Amis's life and work was his deep affection and admiration for Philip Larkin — the 'most enlivening companion', the best letter-writer, his ideal reader and kindred spirit.

They saw much less of each other after Larkin moved to Hull but continued a lively correspondence. Six years before his own passing, Larkin wrote: 'I don't know that I ever expected much of life, but it terrifies me to think it's nearly over I mean, you've become what I dreamed of becoming, and I don't suppose you ever dreamed of being a librarian'. At his best friend's funeral, Amis concluded his eulogy: 'We take seriously what he left us. We are lucky enough to have known him; thousands who didn't and more thousands in the future will be able to share his poems with us'. Shortly before his death, Amis had happily agreed to be an honorary Vice-President of the Philip Larkin Society.

Kingsley Amis was cremated and then a short service was held at his local church, St. Mark's. A memorial service is being planned. He is survived by his three children of his first marriage (Philip, Martin, and Sally) and by both his former wives.

Dale Salwak

Dale Salwak is a Professor of English at Citrus College, Glendora, California, and the leading bibliographer of works by and about Kingsley Amis. His books include *Kingsley Amis: A Reference Guide* (G.K.Hall, 1978); *Kingsley Amis: In Life and Letters* (Macmillan, 1990); and *Kingsley Amis, Modern Novelist* (Harvester-Wheatsheaf, 1992).

PHILIP LARKIN MEMORIAL RESEARCH SCHOLARSHIP

This scholarship, established in 1995 on the tenth anniversary of Philip Larkin's death, is open to graduates proposing to undertake a programme of research in some aspect of post-Second World War poetry in English. Preference may be given to someone intending to study the work of the late Philip Larkin and/or his contemporaries and who expresses an interest in working with materials in the Larkin archives of the Brynmor Jones Library.

Candidates must hold, or expect to obtain, an honours degree (normally a first or good upper second class, and normally of a university in the United Kingdom or other EU country) or an equivalent qualification.

The award will cover full tuition fees at home/EU rate and a maintenance grant based on the Research Council studentship rate. The scholarship will cover the full length of the programme subject to satisfactory progress reports.

Application forms can be obtained from:-

The Post-Graduate Office
The University of Hull
Hull
HU6 7RX
United Kingdom

Closing date for completed applications is Saturday 1 June 1996.

LEAPING TO CONCLUSIONS



Some members may have wondered why publicity and other material produced by the Society's Committee has featured a frog logo. This was in fact first used on the back cover of the catalogue produced to accompany the exhibition *Philip Larkin: his life and work*, which was mounted by the Brynmor Jones Library in 1986, and has been used for various other publications since then. It was kindly drawn in 1986 by Alan Marshall, who was then the Hull University Photographer, and who, of course, photographed Larkin over a period of many years. The inspiration for the drawing was in fact a frog-shaped pottery money box which used to sit on Larkin's library office desk and now resides on permanent display in the Archives Reading Room, also in the Brynmor Jones Library. The money box, thought to be one of a pair, is said to have been given to Larkin by George Hartley, of the Marvell Press, publisher of *The Less Deceived*. For the author of 'Toads' and 'Toads Revisited', the frog served its purpose admirably. We hope members (and frogs and toads) will excuse the apparent confusion.

Brian Dyson

PHILIP LARKIN: WRITERS AND THEIR WORK

Laurence Lerner, distinguished poet, scholar and critic, writes about his forthcoming book Philip Larkin: Writers and their Work, which is due to be published in June 1997 by Northcote House Publishers in association with the British Council (Price £6.99 ISBN 0746 308 388)

As was only to be expected, there is now a steady stream of books about Larkin. Our way of paying tribute to authors, in this age of criticism, is not to lay wreaths on their graves, nor to write verses praising their undying fame (nor even, perhaps, to feel their much-loved books fall to pieces in our hands from so much use): it is to write books and articles about them, analysing their work, relating its verbal strategies to deep structures of language, or to the social context, and even, nowadays, taking it sternly to task for not conforming to whatever orthodoxy has come into fashion. So it was inevitable that when the old British Council 'Writers and their Work' series was revived, this time published by Northcote House, Larkin would have to be included: and the task of writing about him fell to me.

What could I say, I wondered, that would justify yet another book on Larkin? Not, I decided, to find out something new about Larkin's life, how good a librarian he was, or how he treated women: Andrew Motion's excellent biography tells us all we need to know about the man, and a good deal more than some of us want to know. Nor to engage in lengthy arguments about Larkin's unacceptable political attitudes - to foreigners, to blacks, to women. He held a lot of views I don't much care for, but then so did Eliot and Yeats and Lawrence and Gide and Baudelaire and Hemingway (to say nothing of Dickens and Milton). If we only admire the writers we agree with, there wouldn't be much literature left. And since the more offensive remarks of Larkin's are to be found in his letters and conversations, not in his poems, they can surely be allowed to sink into the oblivion they deserve: if all our off-the-cuff remarks and prejudices were held up for inspection, which of us would escape whipping? But then I thought, if this is what I think, should I not say so in the book? If you declare that a subject is too trivial to merit serious discussion, you are discussing it. I haven't fully worked out how to deal with this dilemma.

One possibility, I thought, was to take a look at Larkin's manuscripts, and discuss how the poems grew under his shaping hand: these are available in the Larkin archives at Hull, so I went to have a look at them (after I'd already drafted most of the book).

Laurence Lerner

Well, you can't actually look at them, since they'll only show you photocopies, but those were enough for my purpose. I felt I'd learnt a lot about how Larkin composed, and I hope to say something about how the best poems developed, but it's not easy to do this without taking a lot of space - far more than the series allows me. I'll have to do this very selectively, choosing a line here, a stanza there, and then producing the earlier version from my notes to point out how good it might well have seemed if the final version wasn't better.

But in the end, poets matter because of their poems: a book on any poet can only be justified because you feel you have something to say about him or her. Forget all the other books, stop worrying if yours will be better, or necessary, or repetitious, just write it as best you can. The one thing I felt I must discuss, even though it isn't really very original, is what sort of poetry you can write if you believe life is 'first boredom and then fear', if your metaphor for life is 'Cemetery road', if you visit a church 'bored and uninformed'. Is it not suicidal for a poem to announce that it has no cause for joy or insight or strenuous emotion? I feel it is, yet out of this attitude Larkin wrote some of the most wonderful poems of our time. That, I thought, is what I have to discuss. And the answer? Or if that is too grand a claim, the way to look for an answer? Read the book, when it comes out.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We should like to thank Brian Beckett, June Bridge, Brian Dyson, Carl Schofield, The University of Hull Photographic & Copy Service, The University of Hull Printing Service, The Brynmor Jones Library, and The Ferens Education Trust. Special thanks are due to Rebecca Johnson for laying the groundwork for this first issue of the Newsletter.

The letter from Philip to his niece, Rosemary, is reproduced by kind permission of the Larkin Estate.

NOTICEBOARD

Membership News

As this first issue of *About Larkin* goes to press, The Philip Larkin Society has 174 paid-up members. We consider this as no mean achievement for a Society which has only officially been in existence since November 1995. Our aim is for a long-term stable membership of around 500 members. To this end, we would like to ask for the assistance of all our existing members in helping to publicise the Society, and by encouraging family, friends and colleagues to join too.

We are particularly encouraged by the increasing number of overseas members who have joined the Society. We would like to extend a special welcome to them, and also to our many loyal UK members who are not able to travel to Society events, and for whom this Newsletter will be the only real contact with the Society. Enjoy!

On the Web



The Philip Larkin Society now has its own page on the World Wide Web. If you have access to the Internet, type

<http://www.hull.ac.uk.php/lbsrej>

and all will be revealed! The page includes details of how to join the Society and also access to other poetry pages. It's great fun once you get going.

Submissions to the Newsletter

We welcome contributions from all Society members. If you have memories of Philip Larkin or anecdotes or wish to suggest a theme for a future issue of the Newsletter, please send them for consideration to the Editor.

Guidelines for Contributors:

1500-2000 words for articles (all footnotes should be incorporated into the body of the text)

500 words maximum for short articles or news items.

Text should be typewritten on one-side of A4 paper and in double-line spacing.

Among the themes we have in mind for future issues are:-

- Philip Larkin and Ireland;
- Philip Larkin, Juvenilia and Coventry;
- Larkin and Oxford

Next Issue

The main theme of the second issue of the Newsletter, due to be published in October 1996, will be Philip Larkin on Women.

Letters



As this is the first issue we do not yet have any letters from readers. However, please feel free to write to

us about anything Larkinesque. If you would like an answer to a question about a particular aspect of Larkin's life and work, here is the place to put your queries to other Society members.

All correspondence regarding the newsletter should be addressed to: The Editor, The Philip Larkin Society, c/o BJL Archives, The University of Hull, HU6 7RX and should include a stamped self-addressed envelope.

Larkin Summer School

We have received details of a residential summer school which is being organised by the WEA at their Wedgwood Memorial College in Barlaston, near Stoke on Trent, from 9-13 September 1996. Society member, Donald Lee, is coordinating the school which will take as its theme 'Here - In the Footsteps of Philip Larkin', and will comprise a series of themed walks - up to 6 miles daily - in areas associated with Larkin. There will be full-day visits to Coventry, to Lichfield (to include an assessment of the 17 Larkin graves re-discovered last year by Don and his party), and to Hessele for a walk along the Humber foreshore to North Ferriby (a walk Larkin did many times with the Hartley family). Jean Hartley is the guest after-dinner speaker on 11 September when she will recall 'The Philip I knew'.

Further details about the course can be obtained from Dr Derek Tatton, Wedgwood Memorial College, Station Road, Barlaston Village, Stoke on Trent ST12 3DG. Telephone: 01782 372105 Fax: 01782 372393