

The Powys Family Collection

For thirty two years, C.F. Powys was Rector of Montacute, Somerset, and subsequently the Powys children would always regard the West Country as their home. Although the Powys were a strong and united family, it was the children's sometimes anguished quests for separate identity that drew them into a remarkable variety of careers.

John Cowper Powys the novelist, poet, philosopher, essayist and letter writer was the eldest child. Powys taught at schools in Sussex and then worked as a lecturer, all around England, for Oxford University's Extension Movement for Adult Education. In 1905 he began lecturing in the United States, where he was to remain for thirty years. He became famous as a writer, not only of novels but of essays and books of philosophy aimed at a wide readership. Powys's first publication was 'Odes and Other Poems' (1896); his first novel, 'Wood and Stone' was published in New York in 1915; this was followed by 'Rodmoor' in 1916. The first of his novels to bring him critical recognition was 'Wolf Solent' (1929), set around the Dorset-Somerset border.

John Powys retired from the lecture circuit to a house in upstate New York, from 1930 he was a full-time writer. There he wrote two more novels set in the West Country, 'A Glastonbury Romance' (1933) and 'Weymouth Sands' (1934), as well as his 'Autobiography' (1934), regarded by many as among his best works and one of the most imposing autobiographies of the twentieth century. After returning to England in 1934, and writing 'Maiden Castle' (1937) while living in Dorchester, Powys moved to north Wales a year later and wrote his Welsh chronicles: 'Owen Glendower' (1940) and 'Porius' (1951). He received the Plaque of the Hamburg Free Academy of Arts in 1958, and was appointed honorary D.Litt. by the University of Wales in 1962, the year before his death.

Theodore Francis Powys was born in 1875 and started farming in Suffolk in the 1890s, but moved to Dorset in 1901 to write. Powys's first publication was 'An Interpretation of Genesis' (1907) but it was only later that he was taken up by Chatto & Windus who between 1923 and 1932 published nine titles, including 'The Left Leg' (1923), 'Black Bryony' (1923), 'Mark Only' (1924), 'Mr Tasker's Gods' (1925), 'Mockery Gap' (1925) and, most famously 'Mr Weston's Good Wine' (1927) which in 1937 would become one of the first Penguin books. Theodore Powys's work is today less well known, though he still has many admirers and is thought by some to be the best writer of the three brothers. Theodore Francis Powys had a stroke in 1937, and wrote very little thereafter until his death in 1953.

Llewelyn Powys was an essayist polemicist and writer of memoirs. He was born on 13th August 1884 and became a schoolmaster but suffered from poor health and in December of 1909, was sent to a sanatorium at Clavadel in Switzerland for 16 months. In 1914, he travelled to South Africa to stay on his brother's farm, and when at the outbreak of war his brother joined the army, Llewelyn managed the farm for the duration of the First World War. Powys's first book 'Ebony and Ivory' was published in 1923 and was a memoir of his years in Kenya. Returning to Switzerland for his health in 1936, Llewelyn died on 2nd December 1939 in Clavadel. Llewelyn Powys's major works include 'Thirteen Worthies' (1923), 'Black Laughter' (1924), 'Skin for Skin' (1925), 'Love and Death' (1939) and 'Swiss Essays' (1947).

Although less well known than their brothers, Gertrude Powys was a painter, Philippa Powys was a published novelist and poet, Marian Powys was an authority on lace and lace-making. Of the other brothers A. R. (Bertie) Powys was Secretary of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings, and published a number of books on architectural subjects; Littleton Powys became the headmaster of Sherborne Prep. School and published two volumes of autobiography ('The Joy of It' and 'Still the Joy of It'); he also edited the Letters of his second wife, the novelist Elizabeth Myers. Writings by all of these are represented in the collections.

The core of the Collection is based around the work of John Cowper Powys, Theodore Francis Powys and Llewelyn Powys and their immediate circle of family and friends. It consists of major bequests by Mr E E Bissell and Mr Francis Feather, each of whom bequeathed his very important collection of Powys books and manuscripts to the Powys Society. Other gifts and bequests have extended and enriched the material and are

listed separately from the main gifts. In particular there is an important corpus of correspondence with their wide circle of friends, including Elizabeth Myers, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Huw Menai, Louis Wilkinson and Henry Miller. In addition, a large number of manuscripts, typescripts, publishers' proofs, letters, photographs, wood engravings and memorabilia relating to the Powys Family and their activities are included in the archive.

The collection contains books by all the major members of the Powys family as well as letters, typescripts, manuscripts, publishers' proofs, photographs and memorabilia; these include John Cowper's passport and Theodore's ration card.

Archives and Rare Books Resources Held by the University of Exeter

EUL MS 433	Manuscripts and Book Collections relating to members of the Powys family
EUL MS 444	Powys Society Archive, including administrative records, correspondence between members of the Committee, and letters from Powys family circle
EUL MS 68/PERS/1/2/21	Reginald John Clemo's letters from Littleton Powys in which he discusses his and Clemo's writing, (1950-1953)
EUL MS 68/PERS/7/2	Limited edition print of 'Sonnet' by T F Powys, commissioned by J Lawrence for the Powys Society in 1988
EUL MS 68/PERS/1/4/2	Three letters from Theodore F Powys to John Clemo, (1948-1961)