THE IVOR GURNEY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

NUMBER 71 February 2026

Chosen Hill

Chosen Hill viewed from Crickley Hill

Chosen Hill (also known as Churchdown Hill) was of special significance to Ivor Gurney who, with Will Harvey and Herbert Howells, used it as a favourite walking area easily reached from Gloucester. Gurney had come to know Howells through his apprenticeship at Gloucester Cathedral, and Will Harvey was a local boy studying law with a Gloucester solicitor. Gurney had made his acquaintance by chance in 1908. Will Harvey and Ivor Gurney shared a love of river sailing but all three young men also enjoyed walking on the nearby hills - Chosen Hill and Robinswood Hill - and did so frequently from 1906 to1911. They shared ideas and opinions about music and books as they walked. Views from Chosen Hill were the inspiration for some of Gurney's best poems.

Society Matters

IGS Society Poetry Walk, 6 June 2026 (keep the date!)

'the hill at Chosen and Ivor Gurney who knows it'.

A Gurney Society poetry walk will take place on Saturday 6 June 2026 starting at St Andrew's Church Hall, Churchdown, GL3 2JT. It will include a walk of about 2.25 miles followed by refreshments in a local café/pub (tbc).

To assist planning please email Eleanor Rawling asap to register interest. elerawling@aol.com Details and a reminder will be sent by email in early May to those whose email address the Society holds. If we do not have this or you do not use email, please write to Eleanor Rawling at 8 Mill Paddock, Abingdon OX14 5EU.

Website Manager – still needed

The Society would welcome offers of help with maintaining the Ivor Gurney website, posting news items, checking membership records, adding products to the shop occasionally and generally making sure the site is working effectively to communicate with members. This is not an onerous task but does require someone with appropriate knowledge and skills and the availability to check regularly. Please email Ian Venables if you think you can help (ianvenables7@gmail.com).

Subscriptions

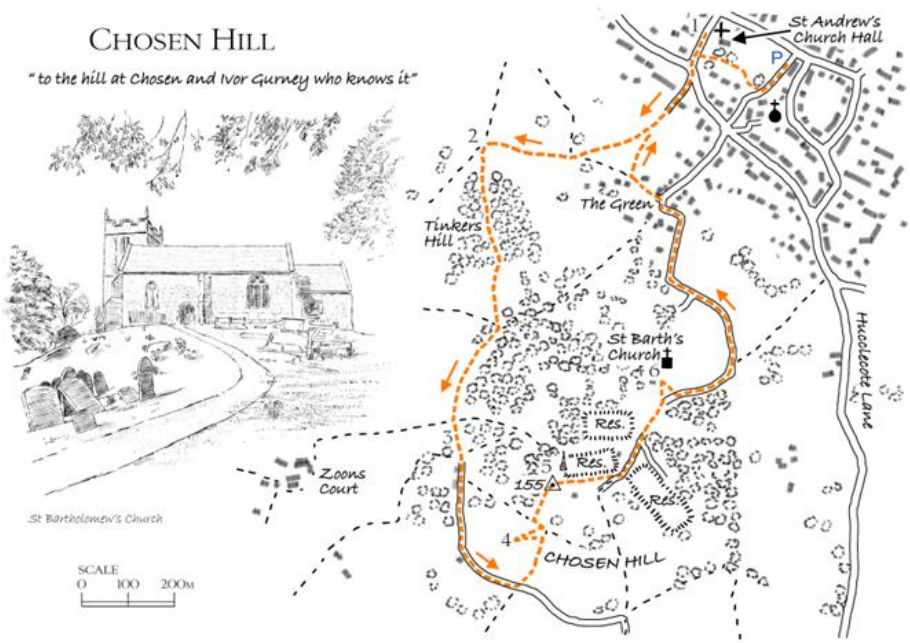
Subscriptions are valid for a year from first payment date and can be paid through PayPal www.ivorgurney.co.uk or send a cheque to Ian Venables, 2 Turrall St., Barbourne, Worcester WR3 8AJ. For current rates, see membership@ivorgurney.co.uk For acknowledgement, include your email.

The Gurney Society Journal

Philip Lancaster is Editor of the Society's journal. The next volume will follow once volume two of *Ivor Gurney: The Complete Poetical Works* is completed.

Thank you to Phil Richardson who regularly proofreads the newsletter.

Chosen Hill



This is one of 20 poetry walks appearing in *Walking with Ivor Gurney in Gloucestershire,* Logaston Press, by Eleanor Rawling.

Ivor Gurney enjoyed walking on Chosen Hill. Like its nearby twin Robinswood Hill, it is an 'outlier' of the main Cotswold escarpment, (outlier being the name for a remnant left behind when the edge has been eroded back). It is difficult to imagine the air of remote rurality that must have characterised Chosen Hill in the 1900s. Now it is boxed in by the A40 and A417 to the north, south and west, and by the M5 passing noisily beneath its slopes to the east. The suburbs of Gloucester move ever closer. An extract from Massingham's book *Cotswold Country* (1937) provides the appropriate flavour for Gurney's early 20th century experiences. "High on a steep and isolated tor, so typical of the Lias, I could see from the criss-cross of lanes the 'chosen church' of Churchdown. It was a mild December day, pensive

in mist, and, as I climbed, I noticed the white fleeces of Traveller's Joy, festooned like Christmas decorations upon the trees .. …..To the west, the silver streak of Severn was paler than the mist; to the east, the scalloped, tossing line of the (Cotswold) edge wound in and out in cunning variety of bluff and recess."

This walk climbs the northern slopes of the subsidiary Tinker's Hill, contours through woodland around the slopes of the main hill and then rises to the summit at 155 metres. Here are surprisingly wide views of the Severn Vale and surrounding hills. The return path visits St Bartholomew's Church before re-joining the village.

Gurney's poem, *There Was Such Beauty*, was written as he surveyed the scene from the western slopes of the hill . The poem dates from the 1917-19 period when despite illness and difficulties following his military discharge, Gurney was writing prolifically. Writing to Marion Scott in 1919, he described an occasion when he felt such joy at the sight of Gloucester 'O but you should have seen last Thursday! The whole world seemed to exult and glory in mere being! A Beethoven day by the Lord!' In the same letter he refers to the poem below as existing already but not published.

There Was Such Beauty

There was such beauty in the dappled valley
As hurt the sight, as stabbed the heart to tears.
The gathered loveliness of all the years
Hovered thereover, it seemed, eternally
Set for men's Joy. Town, tower, trees, river
Under a royal azure sky for ever
Up-piled with snowy towering bulks of cloud:
A herald day of spring more wonderful
Than her true own. Trumpets cried aloud
In sky, earth, blood: no beast, no clod so dull
But the power felt of the day, and of the giver
Was glad for life, humble at once and proud.
Kyrie Eleison, and Gloria,
Credo, Jubilate, Magnificat:
The whole world gathered strength to praise the day.
(Kavanagh, Collected Poems, 2004)

There Was Such Beauty

It is almost a painterly view of Gloucester that Gurney presents, dominated by St Peter's Abbey (the Cathedral) nestling harmoniously next to the river - 'town, tower, trees, river'. One senses the sky and the clouds of a spring or early summer day ('royal azure') For me, this poem recalls Wordsworth's sonnet *On Westminster Bridge* both in the way the poet is observing a beloved city from a vantage point, and in the wording and sentiments aroused. Like Wordsworth, Gurney feels the deep sense of contentment deriving from the sense of place - ''Trumpets cried aloud / In sky, earth, blood: no beast no clod so dull/But the power felt of the day and of the giver / Was glad for life, humble at once and proud' he writes. The sentiments recall the famous lines from *On Westminster Bridge* – 'Earth has not anything to show more fair: / Dull would be of soul who could pass by / A sight so touching in its majesty' and ending with 'Ne'er saw I, never felt a calm so deep'. We know that Gurney had read Wordsworth and was influenced by his philosophy of reflecting on beautiful scenes in tranquility. In a letter to Matilda Chapman, in High Wycombe, Gurney writes "My mind gradually tranquilises itself and more and more I see that splendid teacher Wordworth is for all sorts of men." (1915).

(Eleanor Rawling)

Poetry Update

Housman, Gurney, Kipling - an unusual literary link

with Linda Hart and Max Hunt, at Cheltenham Poetry Festival, Saturday 18 April 2026 at 2.00 pm, Cheltenham Friends' Meeting House, Warwick Place, Cheltenham GL52 2NP. Tickets are available online or on the door for £10.00. https://www.ticketsource.co.uk/cheltenhampoetryfestival

In 1909 a music student in Gloucester inscribed a book of 63 poems to a famous English writer and then sent him the book. The music student was 19-year-old Ivor Gurney; the famous writer was Rudyard Kipling, winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1907; and the book of poems was *A Shropshire Lad* by A.E. Housman, which has been continuously in print since its publication in 1896. During a visit to Trinity College (Cambridge) in 2019,

Linda was able to examine the book in the College library. She was thrilled, fascinated, and then very curious. Why was Gurney sending a gift to Kipling? Why had he chosen *A Shropshire Lad*? Where had the book been for the past 110 years? What sort of links were there between Housman, Gurney, and Kipling? In this illustrated presentation Linda reports the results of her sleuthing while Max reads a variety of poems and letters.

The F.W. Harvey Society held their annual event at Minsterworth in early November 2025 and showcased a film about the influence of Minsterworth on Will Harvey's life and work. A panel discussed the film and representations of the local landscape in Harvey and Gurney's poetry. The day included other presentations, including one by John Slater, artist in residence at Dean Heritage Centre who had used Harvey's work as a prompt for children's engagement with creative arts. The event was also the launch for the F.W. Harvey Society Journal, details of which and a link for membership are available here:
https://www.fwharveysociety.co.uk/society-journal/

Remember Your Lovers - The Poetry of Sidney Keyes, an online audio presented by the award-winning **Finborough Theatre**.

"I am the man who looked for peace and found
My own eyes barbed.
I am the man who groped for words and found
An arrow in my hand."

Sidney Keyes was born in 1922 in Dartford, Kent, and died in battle in Tunisia at the age of twenty. He is widely regarded as one of Britain's outstanding poets of the Second World War alongside Keith Douglas and Alun Lewis. He was awarded a posthumous Hawthornden Prize for his work. *Remember Your Lovers* rediscovers Keyes's poems to tell his story through the women he loved - above all, the German Jewish refugee artist Milein Cosman - as he confronted the devastating reality of a world at war.
Remember Your Lovers is available to stream **free** on the **Finborough Theatre YouTube channel**, **Scenesaver**, and selected podcast streaming services including **Audible**, **Amazon Music**, **Apple Podcasts**, **Spotify**.
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I33jaQcc8wA

A Tribute to Anthony Boden

by Ian Venables

It is with great sadness that I report the death on 6 November 2025 of our dear friend and President, Anthony Boden. His passing is an irreplaceable loss to his family and to all of us who were privileged to have known him. A Service of Celebration was held to commemorate his extraordinary life at St Bartholomew's Church, Chosen Hill, on the 21 November 2025.

Anthony, or Tony as he liked to be called, was born in Altrincham, Cheshire, on 21st April 1938. His parents ran a small bicycle business, and after attending his local primary school, he progressed to Altrincham Grammar School. Following the completion of his sixth-form studies in 1956, he was called up for National Service, joining the Royal Air Force Medical Corps to train as a pharmacist. After serving nine years in the ranks, Tony earned a commission. As a Second Lieutenant, he was stationed in the Far East where, from 1966 onward, his postings included India, Sri Lanka, Singapore and Cambodia.

It was during his service in 1969 that Tony met the love of his life, Anne Chapman, a nursing officer in the RAF. Their bond was immediate and enduring; they married within a year and shared over fifty years of deep devotion together, raising two talented children, Jonathan and Lucy.

On retiring as a Group Captain in 1988, Tony's passion for the arts flourished. He studied for a degree in Humanities with the Open University, but by a remarkable twist of fate, Anne's family connection to the poet Ivor Gurney came to define his retirement years. Tony had already edited the letters Anne had discovered from Gurney to her mother and that resulted in *Stars in a Dark Night*, published by Sutton Press in 1986. This was followed by *F.W. Harvey: Soldier, Poet*, the first full-scale biography of the Gloucestershire poet and *The Parrys of the Golden Vale: Background to a Genius.*

In 1989, Tony took on the task of Administrator of the Gloucester Three Choirs Festival, a post he held for four consecutive festivals. In 1990, he spearheaded a series of events to celebrate the centenary of Ivor Gurney's birth. Highlights included a song recital at Wigmore Hall featuring Ian and Jennifer Partridge, and a cornerstone mini festival held in Gloucester at the Guildhall Arts Centre and Gloucester Cathedral. The festivities culminated in a thanksgiving service at St Matthew's Church, Twigworth - Gurney's final resting place. Inspired by these events, Tony's vision for a dedicated society to preserve Gurney's legacy began to emerge. Tony recruited Michael Hurd, Kelsey Thornton, and John Phillips to establish the organization, and the Society was inaugurated at the 1995 Gloucester Three Choirs Festival.

The distinguished poet P.J. Kavanagh became the first president, supported by Ian Partridge and former Poet Laureate Andrew Motion as patrons. At the launch Tony spoke with characteristic warmth, celebrating how far Gurney's legacy had come and welcoming a new community of admirers into the fold.

"Ladies and gentlemen, it is my great pleasure to welcome you most warmly to the Three Choirs Festival and to this very first meeting of the Ivor Gurney Society. It is now 17 years since the first publication of Michael Hurd's splendid book, *The Ordeal of Ivor Gurney*, a book which drew the attention of a wider audience to the life and work of the man whose legacy we celebrate today. Since then, thanks to the endeavours of P.J. Kavanagh, Kelsey Thornton, and others, Gurney's verse and letters have returned to the bookshelves; in parallel, much of his best music has become available in recordings of excellent quality."

In 2002, Tony Boden retired as Chairman and devoted his time to writing. In 2005, he published a major book on the Elizabethan composer, Thomas Tomkins, which was followed by *The Selected Poems of F.W. Harvey* in 2011, concluding with an updated edition of the *Three Choirs Festival - A History* in 2017, edited jointly with Paul Hedley.

Anne and Tony Boden

Tony holding a painting of the founder of the Three Choirs festival,

Sadly, after a long illness, Anne Boden died in 2021. Throughout their married life, Anne had supported and encouraged Tony in his writing career and was one of the 'movers and shakers' in getting the Society off the ground. She was someone who enjoyed working behind the scenes at Society events, often helping with the catering arrangements.

In recent years, Tony's eyesight began to fail, and with health declining, he was forced to leave his home in Churchdown in 2023 and move to Monkscroft Nursing Home in Cheltenham.

Anthony Boden was a true gentleman in every sense of the word; a man of profound intellect, deep kindness, and unfailing service who enriched the lives of everyone who knew him. While on a personal note we shall miss him greatly, it is his outstanding literary legacy and contribution to our cultural heritage that will endure for generations to come.

Musical Update

(details from Ian Venables)

The Elgar Festival - *This Fragile Beauty*

Tuesday 26 May 2026 2pm

Song Recital with April Friedrick (soprano) and Eric McElroy (pianist) at the 'Firs' in Worcestershire , Elgar's Birthplace The Firs, Lower Broadheath, Worcester WR2 6RH

Performers

April Fredrick, soprano; Eric McElroy, piano; Grace Shepherd, violin; Joseph Campbell-Powell, narrator.

https://elgarfestival.org/events_2026/this-fragile-beauty/

Tickets £12 (on sale soon)/Café open (NT entry charges to non-members for cottage/garden) For information, call Worcester Theatres on 01905 611427

How does war affect creatives? What keeps them going, then and after? *This Fragile Beauty* is a multi-media programme for soprano, piano, violin and narrator exploring the WWI wartime experience of composers Ivor Gurney, George Butterworth, Arthur Bliss, and Ralph Vaughan Williams, with settings of war-poets by Ireland and Elgar's evocative *A Voice in the Desert* from the Belgian perspective. A rich tapestry of longing and loss, it features poems and letters by Gurney and others and projected paintings by war artist, Paul Nash, to immerse the audience in the unique letters, poems and music that emerged from their time in the trenches and the collective grief, processing and change that followed it.

2026, Gloucester, Three Choirs Festival

Peter' Smith's presentation ***'Severn Meadows'***

Saturday, 1st August at 1.15pm in St Nicholas Church, Gloucester.

Performers

James Gilchrist tenor; Anna Tilvrook, piano; Peter Sutton, narrator; Peter Florence narrator.

A deeply personal performance of music and poetry exploring the life of Gloucestershire poet and composer Ivor Gurney and his friendship with Will

Harvey and Herbert Howells. In their younger days before the First World War, the trio spent all the hours they could exploring the Gloucestershire countryside together. Their friendship survived the War and Gurney's tragic incarceration in a mental asylum before his untimely death. James Gilchrist and pianist Anna Tilbrook perform songs by Gurney alongside readings of his poems in this beautiful and poignant concert.

O Lord within my heart
for ever,

Set this sweet shape of land
and winding river…

FW Harvey / A Prayer

Lavenham Spring Concert, 26 Apr, 2026 , 7pm

A Gloucestershire Rhapsody

Ivor Gurney's orchestral work 'A Gloucestershire Rhapsody' will be performed by the Lavenham Sinfonia on 26th April 2026 at Lavenham Church, Lavenham, Suffolk.

Programme:

Ivor Gurney - A Gloucestershire Rhapsody
Ralph Vaughan Williams – Songs of Travel (Baritone - Mark Saberton)
C Hubert H Parry – Symphony No. 2 'Cambridge'
Conductor - Vicente Chavarria
Soloist - Mark Saberton

To book tickets;

https://lavenham-sinfonia.co.uk/programme.htm

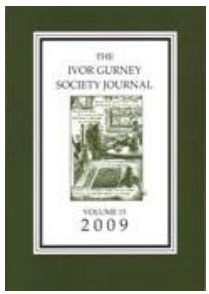
The Ivor Gurney Society

www.ivorgurney.co.uk
The Ivor Gurney Trust www.ivorgurneytrust.com

***Patrons of the Society*:**
Sir Andrew Motion
Ian Partridge CBE
Sarah Connolly CBE

President: Adrian Partington

Membership rates (UK) *(all rates per annum)*:
Individuals £14; Joint £18; Students £5; Retired £10 single; £12.50 joint; Institutional £12.50; International see website.
International membership:
You can join the Society by contacting the Treasurer at the address below or online at www.ivorgurney.co.uk via PayPal.



The Ivor Gurney Society Journal
As well as the annual Society newsletter, the Gurney Society publishes an occasional journal, known as 'The Gurnal' which contains scholarly articles on Gurney's work and related items, incl. book and CD reviews. This is sent to all Society members and is for sale to non-members (see website).

Current officers:
Chair and Acting Treasurer: Ian Venables chair@ivorgurney.co.uk
Membership Secretary: Sebastian Field membership@ivorgurney.co.uk
Newsletter Editor: Eleanor Rawling elerawling@aol.com
Journal Editor: Philip Lancaster journal@ivorgurney.co.uk