



THE  
*JOHN CLARE SOCIETY*  
*Newsletter*

*No. 117*

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## THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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**The John Clare Society Website:** <http://johnclaresociety.blogspot.com>

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Sadly, this newsletter contains obituaries of two people who, in their different ways, were important in the life of the Society: David Powell, and Pat Cox.

Instead of my usual editorial, I am starting this issue with one of Clare's early poems, accompanied by two of the lovely photographs of Helpston that Tom Ryder has sent me.

### **In Helpstone Church Yard**

What makes me love thee now thou dreary scene  
& see in each swelld heap a peaceful bed  
I well remember once the time has been  
To walk a church [yard] when I usd to dread  
& shudderd as Ive read upon the stone  
Of well known friends & next door neighbours gone  
But then I knew no cloudy cares of life  
Where neer a sunbeam comes to light me thorow  
A stranger then to this worlds storms & strife  
Where neer a calm is met to lull my sorrow  
I then was blest & had not eyes to see  
Lifes future change & fates severe tomorrow  
When all those ill[s] & pains shoud compass me  
& no hope left but what I meet in thee

*(The Early Poems, vol. II, ed. Robinson and Powell, p.319.)*

Two Photographs by Tom Ryder



## The 2013 John Clare Festival

Festival will begin, as always, with the Midsummer cushions at the church on the Friday, and the results of the children's poetry competition. For anyone who has never been, it is a lovely event - particularly if the sun shines on us!

On the Saturday, the school will be open as usual at around 9 am - for book and Society stalls. They will be available all day, and the main parking will be up there. However, as a change to the usual schedule, we will not have a marquee this year. Instead, the AGM (starting at around 11 am), the President's welcoming talk, and the afternoon talk will all be up at St Botolph's Church. The village hall (and the Blue Bell) will be available for lunches - perfect cream teas in a perfect English village! Hopefully, the dancers (both folk and Morris) will be performing in the village over the lunchtime period.

The afternoon talk will be given this year by Dr Sara Lodge from St Andrew's University. Sara will be talking on John Clare's influence on Keats - and, of course, both poets shared the same publisher (Taylor). Following the talk, there will be the usual coach tour (looking at Clare's flora with the Langdyke Trust), or a guided walk around the village, or just time to browse (the stalls, the Annakin art gallery, the John Clare Cottage). At 5 pm there will be the usual poetry reading in the church, and on the Saturday evening, a concert in the church which will be called Music of Rural England.

If you have never been before and are toying with the idea, do come. We are a friendly lot and no one is left on their own. And if you can help in any way on the day, we are keen to get volunteers. Just contact Ian Jebbett: 01529 307535 or [ian.jebbett@hotmail.com](mailto:ian.jebbett@hotmail.com).

## Two images from last summer



The winners holding one of the John Clare Society trophies donated last year to further the link between the Society and the local community. I think this photograph is by Colin Bell.



Ronald Blythe, who reached 90 in October, reading his address at Festival 2012. Photograph by Peter Leverington.

## Pat Cox

It is with great sadness we inform members that Pat, the wife of Peter Cox, died suddenly just before Christmas at the age of 76. Many will remember Pat's welcoming and kindly face at every Clare Festival, always helping with the Midsummer Cushions ceremony, and then in the schoolroom on the Saturday cheerfully managing the sales table with Peter. She was a happy presence who always remembered people's faces with a warm, genuinely concerned greeting. Pat was a strong support to Peter, with whom she shared many common interests, especially their love of nature and the countryside, both being keen ornithologists.

Pat was born in Cirencester and later won a scholarship to Oxford High School, from where she entered the nursing profession and also met and married Peter, later moving to Lincoln in 1967, which has been their home ever since. The affection with which she was regarded was attested to by the 300 or more at her funeral at St Peter-in-Eastgate in Lincoln. She was laid to rest at a woodland burial ground near Nocton, south of Lincoln.

Pat was a true helpmate to Peter and a loving mother to their sons. She will be greatly missed and affectionately remembered by all who knew her in the John Clare Society.

Rodney Lines



This photograph was sent to me by Peter Moyse, who says it is the only one he has of Pat. It doesn't show her lovely warm smile, but the picture is a typical one in that it shows her helping her husband with the sales stall at the Festival. VP

## A Tribute to David Powell

David Powell has been one of the most significant 20<sup>th</sup>-century scholars to proclaim the genius of John Clare, and it was very appropriate that he was in charge of the Clare manuscripts in the Northampton Central Library. He wrote his thesis for his B.A. on Clare and published an anthology of Clare's poems, especially assembled for children. That book is still the best book published on Clare specifically directed to the young.

He and I worked together for many years and David always was reliable, and – as a librarian should be – excellent at finding obscure details of Clare's background. What Margaret Grainger did for the Helpston Clare, David did for the Northampton Clare. They were both great champions of the poet because they both drew upon their own roots for sustenance. David and I worked together in some of the great British and American collections of Clare's papers – at the British Library, at Oxford and Cambridge, at Harvard and Yale, at the University of Texas, and, of course, at Northampton and Peterborough in England.

He enjoyed his visits to North America and soon made his way around New York and Philadelphia as if he were a commercial traveller. I think of him as a loyal friend in a great undertaking. He is irreplaceable. I must also add that he was the most loyal fan of the Northamptonshire Cricket Club – and so a man of good taste! He was an inveterate walker – in that role as well, Clare would have appreciated him.

Eric Robinson



David Powell (right) with John Goodridge.  
Photograph by Natalia Arango Maude.

### **David Powell: A Legacy**

Eric Robinson recently paid tribute to his late friend and colleague, David Powell, with the words 'he has been one of the most significant 20<sup>th</sup> century scholars to proclaim the genius of John Clare, and it is appropriate that he was in charge of the Clare manuscripts at Northampton Central Library' (see above).

I am privileged to have been one of the many scholars to have reaped the benefits of David's knowledge of the Clare collection at Northampton. My interest in John Clare arose from reading one of the many volumes of his poetry that Powell edited with Eric Robinson. I had little idea at the time that he would be one of the scholars to have strongly influenced my decision to pursue an academic career in

English literature. His knowledge of Clare's personal library and the support he gave me in learning about the books and the important information they contain served as essential lessons in archival research that have since informed my work on Clare and the relationship he had with his friend and patron, Eliza Louisa Emmerson.

I first met David in 1999 as an undergraduate. At the time I began to demonstrate a genuine interest in undertaking archival research on John Clare and Bob Heyes gently advised me to consider raising some funding to update Powell's Catalogue of John Clare's library (1964). I subsequently met David for coffee and asked his advice about how to improve on the catalogue that already existed. He was very helpful and took me to meet the Northampton local studies librarian at the time, Terry Bracher. The guidance and support David offered as he led me around the books was gratefully appreciated. We discussed the importance of marginalia and what the collection told us about Clare's tastes and interests in literature, particularly the poet's unparalleled understanding of nature and his local environment.

Powell's legacy not only rests in the huge contributions he made to Clare studies in general but is also an important reminder to successive generations of the pleasure that original literary research can bring to scholars and enthusiasts in our evolving knowledge of Clare and his times.

Emma Trehane

## A Classicist Reads Clare

I nearly gave away the copy of Arthur Symons's selection of *Poems by John Clare* (1908) I bought ten years ago. Ronald Blythe had given me another copy to mark the end of my 15-year stint of editing the *Clare Journal* in 2007, a very precious gift. But I didn't need two, and a valued colleague who liked Clare needed a leaving present. As I was about to wrap the purchased one for him something made me check the flyleaf, and that's when I spotted the pencilled signature: L. E. Upcott. Above it was inscribed in a different hand, in pen, 'on his death, to Rosemary Firth'. I looked up the names, and promptly decided that my departing colleague would have to settle for something else (a nice copy of the 1954 Heinemann Clare did the trick).

I'll deal with the second ownership inscription first. This is Rosemary, Lady Firth (1912-2001), social anthropologist and author of *Housekeeping among Malay Peasants* (1943). She was also interested enough in the *Northamptonshire* peasant to copy out, in a neat pen, 'An Invite to Eternity', noting its source as the 1920 Blunden and Porter Clare volume, *Poems Chiefly from Manuscript*. Her transcript is on a folded sheet of thick paper, cut down to size and loosely tucked into the front of the volume. She has also noted in pencil on the book's front pastedown, 'Selected Poems pub. Routledge lent HWBF. Jul 68'. In the summer of '68, with revolution in the air, she has lent a calming copy of Geoffrey Grigson's little 1950 Muses Library selection of Clare to 'HWBF', possibly a Firth relative (she was married to Sir Raymond Firth).

It is interesting to see an eminent anthropologist showing and sharing an interest in Clare's poetry; nevertheless it is the uncle from whom she inherited the volume who offers the richer prize here. Lewis Edward Upcott (1851-?1944), M.A., Scholar of Corpus Christi College, Oxford, was the 'inspirational classics master' of Marlborough College who published *An Introduction to Greek Sculpture* (1887). Thanks to eBay a school-worn copy of this once popular volume now also sits in front of me, assigned in pen on the flyleaf to 'The VIth Form / Marlborough College / From the Author / Feb. 1887'. This is in the same large and confident hand as Upcott's pencil signature on the Symons Clare, which (as I now belatedly noticed) he has carefully annotated throughout.

Book markings are by their very nature both unique and ephemeral—and these ones, written in a small and light pencil hand so as not to mutilate the volume, are especially fragile. They offer an insight into the critical response to Clare of a late Victorian classicist and educator, and include formal, linguistic, aesthetic and contextual

comments. Upcott is especially interested in Clare's style and literary debts, setting him alongside canonical authors (including one or two classical figures), as well as making notes on topics like natural history and folk-customs, querying usages, or noting good or bad stylistic points. He uses marginal marks such as crosses, question marks or proofing deletion marks to note lines or words which for one reason or another seem to him questionable or incorrect. He can't hide the inner schoolmaster, and Clare is assigned marks for a number of the poems, just as if they had been handed in by one of Upcott's more promising pupils. 'The Woodcutter's Night-song' (p. 62) gets a straight alpha. 'My Early Home' (173) and 'Home Yearnings' (174) both get an alpha and the word 'Palgrave' in the margin, indicating their presence in various series of the *Golden Treasury*. 'Clock-a-clay' (200) gets alpha minus, while Clare's 'Address to Plenty in Winter' (29-36) is compared to Milton's winter pastoral as 'a heartfelt Penseroso'.

Upcott also makes a classical comparison here, marking the lines 'And to make complete the blast, / While the hail comes hard and fast' (33) with 'Lucretius' and 'suave mari'. The reference is to the opening of Book II of *De Rerum Natura*: 'Suave, mari magno turbantibus aequora ventis / e terra magnum alterius spectare laborem' (Rouse in the Loeb translation (85) gives this as 'Pleasant it is, when over a great sea the winds trouble the water, to gaze from shore upon another's great tribulation'). This early Clare poem, the first in Symonds's selection, is also 'prosy—true—but weak?', and gets a slightly doubtful beta minus. On the other hand 'I Am' (204), the last and most famous poem in the book, gets the confident double alpha one might expect (and the only one he gives). Upcott notes its presence in 'Palgrave series ii', and suggests comparing it with 'Cowper's Last Poem—for the despairing note'. He awards 'The Flitting' (117-124) an alpha minus, summarising it as 'pathetic but unequal', and adding 'first 8 stanzas best'. 'Summer Images' ('Now, swarthy summer', 106-12) has a similarly mixed response. The first stanza uses 'Convention from Collins and Gray', and Upcott concludes: 'The minute notice of little signs makes it agreeable reading—The personifications vex'. 'February' (85), is summarised as 'Part true cottage experience – part anyone's vision'. Of 'April' (90-93) he comments: 'little here that is new—yet freshly put'. He notes that 'November' (98-101) is in 'Spenser's stanza' and adds that 'These Season Poems are homespun. None of Thomson's embroidering'. Such comments are fairly widespread: he is appreciative, but in a rather astringent way.

Upcott is understandably unhappy with Symonds's 'very inadequate' short glossary, querying the definition of 'ling' as 'heather' and taking technical issue with stooks being described as 'the sheaves of corn, set together, and covered by two', adding: 'not unless "capped"'. He peppers the text with his own suggestions and queries about the

meaning of words, and if a word seems wrong or misplaced he will sometimes indicate doubt as to the text's accuracy. He also 'corrects' the many dialect terms and non-standard grammatical constructions that are now generally accepted in Clare. He is clearly aware of the debate around editorial correction, raised sharply by Symons at the end of the volume's introduction in an early defence of 'textual primitivism'. Symons writes: 'I have tried in vain to find the original manuscripts, which I would have liked to have printed exactly as they were written, having convinced myself that for the most part what Clare actually wrote was better than what his editors made him write' (23). Upcott by contrast defends editorial correction, writing feistily at the end of the text (204): 'Correct not "improved" text, OK!'

Upcott's summary of Clare on the rear free endpaper suggests comparison with Burns and Hogg but confesses that 'of Bloomfield I know little'. 'For the Asylum Poems', he adds, 'one thinks of Christopher Smart', but he is forced to admit that Smart's 'output was totally unlike J.C.' He is generally stronger on matters of detail, definition and ordering, as one would expect from the author of a study of Greek sculpture that is very much concerned with cataloguing the field, and builds its appraisals on careful observation and exactitude of detail.

I have made a transcription of Upcott's text-markings and marginalia and will post this online when time allows.

John Goodridge



Arthur Symonds

## ***Delightful Creatures and Pausing on Main Street. Poems by Bob Tristram.***

Bob Tristram states that his heroes range from Zatopeck to Paula Radcliffe and John Clare to L.S.Lowry. This is revealing because during his 70 years he has run thousands of miles, enjoys Clare and in both these collections of poems many of them share his experiences of places and things.

Some give a real feeling of the place. For instance in 'Above Sammonden':

West wind  
Eating down  
Driving sleet  
Outcropping snow along the moor's edge  
Rambler's hooded up  
Anoraks humped Drip. Drip. Drip.....

Or from 'Looking Back: Kynance to the Lizard':

a blue wide with white  
Sweeps and marbles its  
Skin-slicksins, mobiles thoughts  
Skein of lofted seagulls  
We're gazing south, and back...

or his description of the Aldeburgh shore in 'The Suffolk Two'.

Some of the most interesting poems are Bob's reflections on paintings by Lowry, Monet, Picasso, Turner and others. Others describe simple pleasures: peeling an apple, first day back at school, a visit to The Georgian Theatre, Bury St. Edmunds. One poem combines his love of Lowry with his knowledge of the local dialect.

Enquiries about these two small collections to 01455 290722 or [bob@friendlytiger.co.uk](mailto:bob@friendlytiger.co.uk).

Bob, who won the London (Mayor of Enfield's) Olympic Poems competition in August, and who is a regular contributor to this newsletter, has sent in the following poem, which is not in either of the collections.

## The very heart of England

The Fosse and Watling weren't just Roman ways  
High Cross, once Venonis, their intersect.  
J.C., himself couldn't have made all this up.

Where else place a Parva, a Magna, a Smockington  
a hill bold Ullesthorpe Mill, an ancient Bittesby  
dawdle a Green Lane, to a Spring Farm, Cloudsley Bush?

Where plant a Cotton's Furze, stake out a Tithe Platt Top  
trail a Long Spinney to an ominous Coal Pit Lane  
extending it further to a simple washed Mere Lane?

Where encounter Five Lane Ends, whilst heading for a Heath  
a Home Pasture, Manors, The Gables and an Hopsford Moor  
in going by Nettle Hill, Monks Kirby and broad Willey's Fields?

Discover a Mount Pleasant, or a cottage in a Hungerlands  
shoot in the Butts, stride Miller's Lane to Bumblebee Farm  
Kennels, Nursery, Brickyard, by a raced-on Pinch Furlong.

Pause in Little Walton, over the Hillcrest beside a 'Railway'  
(once) a 'Fox' Covert. Meet, yews, thwaite, glebe and dale  
Long Acre, coombe, gorse, Wharf, Ashtrees and Folly Bridge.

Observe such a past littered with temple, wold, fishpond, grove  
The Hollies, wood, orchard, Hall, Abbey, mounds, and ridgeway  
a Villa, a lodge, a withy, grange, brook, barn, bow, gypsy, toft?

No! I suspect poor J.C. swaddled first in Swaddywell, and later  
grieving away his many lives in that distant, to him, Northampton, in  
months of parish Sundays, could never have compassed all of this.

Bob Tristram



Through Castor Hanglands. Photograph by Peter Moyse.

## House martins resident at Lippits Hill Lodge

John Clare invades my thoughts  
As I descend Lippits Hill.  
I Pass the Lodge, his home for years.  
I look up to its upper storey.  
Which was his room? – I'd like to know.  
Imagined: its walls impregnated with his being.

The house is, as he would remember it –  
Solid, well built, quite grand,  
Now recently renovated with panache.  
Its grounds, landscaped and beautified  
With ponds, exotic trees and shrubs.  
Resident: many birds and assorted wildlife.

John would have watched as I now watch  
The house martins busy with their chores –  
Feeding their growing young in clay-built nests  
Above his window?  
They have an exacting trip ahead –  
A thousand miles to tropic climes.

Lippits Hill Lodge – thank you – a refuge  
For an ever scarcer bird,  
Long term threatened by ever more polluted air  
And a paucity of persecuted insects.  
To blame  
Climate change and zealous overuse of killer chemicals?

I walk home across Clare's beloved Fairmead –  
Common land he cherished and still enjoyed in common.

Pete Relph

## JOHN CLARE SOCIETY SALES - NEW ADDITIONS & CHANGES

### Recent additions to the Society's sales stock

Peter Moyse, *John Clare A Poet for all Seasons*, £16 (inc. p&p). Peter's glorious colour photographs illustrate a selection of Clare's prose & poetry.

Ronald Blythe, *The Yeoman's House*, £15 (inc. p&p). About Bottengoms Farm, Ronald Blythe's home in the Stour valley.

Greville Press Pamphlets, *Poems by John Clare*, £8 (inc. p&p). Selected & Introduced by Ronald Blythe.

John Clare Society Journal, *Index to volumes 1-30 (1982-2011)*. Compiled by John Goodridge. £2 (inc. p&p).

Set of six John Clare themed small note cards by wildlife artist John Davis £4 (inc. p&p).

### Price reductions now available on

*John Clare. A photographic journey with Peter Moyse.*  
This very popular DVD is now offered to members at £8 (inc. p&p).

*Four Forest Years* by Peter Relph. Clare & Epping Forest. £6 post free.

For purchase or further information please contact:-  
Mavis Leverington, 36 Peakirk Road, Glinton, Peterborough PE6 7LT.  
Tel: 01733 253263. [mavisleverington@aol.com](mailto:mavisleverington@aol.com)

**Cheques to be made out to the John Clare Society.**

## Membership

We welcome the following new members since our last newsletter.

Claire Bostock from Thurlby, Bourne  
James Canton from Little Maplestead, Essex  
Anne Carter from West Bridgford, Nottingham  
William Christmas from Petaluma, CA, USA  
Raymond Collier from Inverness  
Roger Goldsmith from Louth  
Norman Goodman from London  
Yvonne Goodwin from Barnack, Stamford  
Scott Hess from Richmond IL, USA  
Jillian Lewis from Newark  
Scott McEathron from Carbondale, IL, USA  
Ashton Nichols from Carlisle, PA, USA  
Roy Park from Addlestone, Surrey  
Judith Plotz from Washington DC  
Tony Pearce-Smith from South Luffenham, Oakham  
Nigel Rathmell from Dilhorne, Stoke-on-Trent  
William Walston from Trumpington, Cambridge

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As usual, my grateful thanks to all contributors. The deadline for the June issue will be 10 May, and articles, reviews, poems and photos will all be welcome. Those of us who are involved in sending out the newsletter either by post or electronically have to try to keep our lists up to date, so I hope that recipients of this e-newsletter are not now also receiving hard copy. Please let me know if you do happen to get a newsletter through the post and I'll take the necessary action.

Valerie Pedlar



St Botolph's Church, Helpston. Photograph by Tom Ryder.

