



THE
JOHN CLARE SOCIETY
Newsletter

No. 118

June 2013



THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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Thrice welcome sweet summer in softness returning
Thrice welcome ye skies wi no clouds on your brow

These are the opening words of a 'Song' in which Clare welcomes summer because of the opportunities it presents for dalliance with his girl.

Spring – a late spring – has been welcomed unconditionally this year after such a long cold winter, and we hope that its promise will be fulfilled with a lovely summer, especially for the weekend of **12-14 July**, when we shall be celebrating Clare's birthday as usual with the Society's Festival at Helpston. Further details are given on pp.5-7.

Celebration is a keynote in this issue, for on pp.12-13 there is an account of the Clare evening that John Goodridge, one of the Society's vice-presidents, organized to mark the publication of his new book on Clare. You will find a review of the book pp.14-15

As always, my grateful thanks to all the contributors to this newsletter. Please send me articles, reviews, photos and particularly pieces about the Festival by **1 September** for inclusion in the October newsletter.

Valerie Pedlar



Hollyhocks in Helpston. Photograph by Valerie Pedlar.

THE 2013 JOHN CLARE SOCIETY FESTIVAL 12 – 14 JULY

This year's festival will take on a rather different look: no marquee. At the end of last year's festival, the marquee was vandalised, an attempt being made to set fire to it. This meant more expense for the Society as we had to make up the excess on the company insurance. They were the most cost effective hire company we had found and unfortunately have since ceased trading. We were unable to find an economic substitute. Not only that but the whole episode highlighted to us and the school the responsibility of holding that sort of event over a long weekend on an exposed school playing field.

So, this year's festival is an alternative, an experiment, and we shall review the experience after the event. What changes does this involve then?

Friday

The Midsummer cushion ceremony remains the same – **1.30pm** at Helpston Parish Church, when the prize-winning poems from the competition for pupils of the John Clare Primary School will be read. There will be folk music in Clare Cottage on the Friday evening. At the same time (**6-8 pm**), there will be an evening event at Torpal Field on the edge of the village – a place that Clare knew well and of course wrote about. The Your in Control Theatre will perform on the mound; Penniless (the other half of our concert from last year) will be playing; local artists Tony Nero, View 5, and Shaun Pitchers will display their work; and there will be the inevitable poetry. Bring a picnic and enjoy the perfect evening in beautiful countryside.

Saturday

On the Saturday, there will be tea and toast from around 8.30 am in Botolphs Barn – for the early birds – and the John Clare Primary school hall will be open from 9.00 am with the usual stalls (membership, tickets, the journal, books old and new, etc.). Get there early if you can because the calendar for the day is pretty full and the book stalls are always popular. One thing to note is that **the only parking will be at the school. Disabled parking only by the church.**

At **10.30 am**, the Society AGM takes place in St Botolphs Church in the centre of the village. For those of you who have never been to Helpston, St Botolphs is a lovely Norman church, with Saxon roots, and we will be using it this year for all the talks, the poetry readings, afternoon music, and the evening concert.

The highlight of festival is always the Presidential address by Ronnie Blythe and that will start at around **11.15 am**.

Lunches will be available from noon in the Village Hall – or there is always the Blue Bell pub – or the café at the Cottage. Or just wander around the village, watch some folk dancing, and stop to chat to the wildlife artist, John Davies, as he sketches in the open air. (At **3.15** pm he will be in the Annakinn Gallery signing copies of his new book.) Or say hello to the artists at work in Botolphs. Or visit the John Clare Cottage to view the flower garden for which they won a gold medal at Chelsea last year.

Then, back to the church for **1.45 pm** where Dr Sara Lodge from the St Andrews University will give the annual lecture *John Clare's Sonnets: Talking Back to Tradition*. If you are a regular Festival-goer you will probably have already met her at previous Festivals.

After the lecture, you could meet up with friends for afternoon tea in the Village Hall, or pick up a copy of the Helpston Wildflower and Poetry Walk. Instead of a guided walk, this year we are trying this wildflower 'treasure trail'. Cottage windows around the village will be displaying beautiful flower and Clare poetry arrangements. Can you track them all down? Will you discover flora poetry which you have not read before?

Or take the coach tour to Swaddywell and Castor Hanglands (leaving at **3pm** from the school - £5 a ticket): an excellent opportunity to explore the flora and fauna of Clare countryside, led by an expert guide from the Langdyke Trust.

Or spend half an hour in the Church listening to the Greenwood Quire taking you back to the 19th century with their selection of choral pieces (starts **3 pm**).

And festival would not be festival without poetry readings in the Church. This year, John Goodridge will be inviting you to read your favourite Clare poems – or just come along and listen. Starts at **5pm** with John giving a short introduction to his new book *John Clare and Community*. John is always an entertaining speaker.

But the day does not end there. The concert in the Church begins at **7pm**. Harpists Mark Harmer and John Dalton join Stephanie Conner on vocals in an original concert performing songs and music from John Clare's songbook. The £10 ticket includes a glass of wine at the interval. If you want a sample of John's harp playing go to <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZuPft0aWwUw>. It is wonderful – an unmissable event.

Sunday

If you are still around on the Sunday, you might think about attending the Sunday service at the Church, a celebration of John Clare – starting at **11 am**.

The festival programme will be on sale (£2) at the Cottage and at Annakinn in advance of the festival, and also at the School Hall and Church on the Saturday. In addition to a detailed programme of events, etc., it will also include some interesting articles by Rodney Lines, Carry Akroyd and the Langdyke Trust.

We will be running the Friends of Festival scheme again this year (see email attachment). The benefits of the scheme (apart from showing your support for festival) include a free copy of the programme and ability to purchase coach and concert tickets in advance. Coach tickets tend to sell out quite fast, and the only other opportunity to purchase them is on the Saturday of festival.

If you have not been to festival before and are concerned that you will be alone, give it a try. We are a friendly bunch – all brought together by a common interest in John Clare!

Linda Curry, Chair



Morris

Dancers in Helpston. Photograph by Tom Ryder.

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY COMMITTEE

Two requests:

1. We are always looking for new members for the festival planning committee, which meets in Helpston. If you are interested in joining this group, please contact Ian Jebbett on 01529 307535.
2. In the past 18 months we have lost three members of our main committee and are looking to replace them, particularly with a view to progression to the role of Chair. We have three meetings per year and these take place in Peterborough. Let me know by 25 June 2013 if you wish to be put forward at the AGM. Alternatively, if you are interested but feeling a bit unsure about it, you could come along to our next meeting on 28 September - just give me a call on 0121 475 1805 or email me: l.j.curry@bham.ac.uk. I would be only too happy to talk through what is involved.

Linda Curry, Chair

REVISIONS TO THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY CONSTITUTION

At the 2013 AGM, we will be proposing a minor change to the constitution. Currently, item 4, under 4, 'Application of the Income and Property', states that 'All cheques require two Trustee signatories'. The proposal is to amend this in line with modern banking practices. We are currently awaiting a Charity Commission ruling on whether we can just remove this sentence or have to add a codicil to the effect that it will not always be possible to conform to this.

It is becoming more necessary (and cost effective) these days for organisations such as ourselves to use internet banking. Also, more charities are finding the practice of using dual signatories difficult to manage – as trustees do not always reside near enough to one another nor meet sufficiently frequently. We do feel that we have robust financial accounting processes in place – with regular reports from our Treasurer, the requirement for committee approval for any large or unusual items of expenditure (before it is committed), and of course the annual audit.

If anyone has any comments/objections to make and is unable to attend the AGM to vote in person, please let me know in writing by 25 June 2013.

Linda Curry, Chair



Helpston Cottages. Photograph by Valerie Pedlar.

Sadly, some faces will be missing from this year's festival. The last issue carried obituaries for Pat Cox and Nick Parry, and there is another obituary in this newsletter for Nick's wife, Mary.

I was unable to accompany the obituary that Rodney Lines wrote for Pat with a photo that showed her lovely smile. Since the last issue I have been sent one that does just that.

VP



Pat Cox. Photograph by Peter Leverington.

MARY PARRY, d. March 2013

It seems only a short time ago that we were lamenting the loss of Nick Parry, and now, almost exactly a year later, his wife Mary has died, suddenly at her home in Market Drayton. Together they invented, ran and marketed the Tern Press, whose fine press books, illustrated by Nick, were a regular feature on one of the side tables at the John Clare Festival. Mary was responsible for their binding, and their striking covers obviously derived a great deal from her earlier studies of dress as well as lithography. Their editions of Clare were a collector's delight, as those who handled them can tell, as can those who are lucky enough to own them. Many will remember the books, but also many will remember their creators, whose friendly presence added something to the atmosphere of the Festival.

Kelsey Thornton



Nick and Mary Parry.

VERCOE THE CLOWN
ARTHUR PEDLAR THE MAN
At the John Clare Festival 2012

At seventy-nine some of the skills have gone –
The unicycle's not now in the act
(At least the eight-foot one). Still, it's a fact
That most of the material goes on –
The bald head, nose, moustache are all intact,
The doleful trademark face, saucy but wan,
The sort of outer shell that he could don
To be a mask for what in life he lacked –
As we too lack – self-confidence and face.
A stammer stumbling block stayed him some time
But his disguise let out the inner grace
That took his audience to another place
Where life was simpler and the world sublime.
A stammer's not a problem for a mime.

Kelsey Thornton



Vercoe. Photograph by Peter Leverington

A John Clare Evening at Nottingham Trent University

The publication of John Goodridge's new book was celebrated with an evening of Clare readings, music and short talks at the John Clare lecture theatre, Nottingham Trent University on 28 March.

Ingeniously, John put together a programme of different pieces to correspond with the chapters of his book. So, for instance, Peter Moyse, one of the Society's vice-presidents, read 'My Mary' (with its echoes of Cowper), to go with the chapter on eighteenth-century poetry. Liz Goodridge read 'To the Memory of Keats' to go with the chapter on Keats, and Adam Woods, one of John's students, read the long 'St Martin's Eve' to correspond with the chapter on festive ritual. Greg Woods began the programme by reading his own poem, 'Joy on Harvest' (see p.13), and John himself rounded things off by singing (accompanying himself on the guitar) his own setting of 'To John Clare'.



John Goodridge. Photograph by Peter Moyse.

But the evening was not one of purely cerebral enjoyment. With the help of friends and family, John had made sure that there was plenty of food and drink. And perhaps the most impressive feature of the whole evening was the cake made by his brother and his wife.

Valerie Pedlar



The Cake of the Book. Photograph by John Goodridge.

JOY IN HARVEST

Isaiah 9:3

At sundown shrilling swifts leave vapour trails across
Euphoric ruddiness. Behind its stalwart horse
The dray processes as sedately as a hearse,
Exhausted mourners following at walking pace.

As if the landscape had a duty to seduce,
The winding lane alleviates their sacrifice.
A grassy bank, a mug of ale—such charms nonplus
Their weary senses, lavish where their pay is sparse.

One farmhand wanders homeward from the public house
Not even having found a soul-mate, lad or lass,
To mark the date with the denial of a kiss.

Acute with ardour and regret, his throaty voice
Does nothing more ungracious to disturb the peace
Than caterwaul to all the world, Largesse! Largesse!

Greg Woods

John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community*. Cambridge University Press, 2013. 252p. £55.00 (\$99.00). ISBN 978-0-521-88702-1

John Goodridge's eagerly-awaited new book on Clare, brings together two of the most important strands in recent Clare criticism to offer a reading which is attuned to both the socio-historical contexts behind his work and the formal properties of the works themselves. As the title indicates, the chief focus of the study is 'community', a term which acts as an effective counterbalance to the idea that Clare was simply a victim and/or a literary outsider. In particular, it examines the ways in which Clare felt connected to two communities: the writerly community of fellow poets (alive and dead) who inspired him and provided models for his poetry and for his life as a writer; and the rural community, whose 'environment, culture and ecology' (p. 105) he set out to transcribe in his work.

The book is particularly strong on topics which have received relatively little attention, such as Clare's debt to eighteenth-century poetry (a subject which Goodridge notes 'could easily fill a monograph on its own' [p. 37], and which has tended to be seen as 'a burden to be cast off' [p. 58]), and (especially) his strengths as a narrative poet. The first four chapters explore Clare's relationships with his imagined community of 'brother bards' and look in detail at his engagements with Thomas Chatterton, John Keats, and Robert Bloomfield, as well as, more briefly, three key eighteenth-century figures (John Pomfret, John Cunningham, and Thomas Gray). Sometime in the early 1820s, Clare sketched a gravestone inscribed 'To the Memory of CHATTERTON KEATS and BLOOMFIELD', and, as Goodridge shows, these three poets were crucial in helping him find his identity as a writer. The chapters on Chatterton and Keats allow us to see Clare reading and demonstrate his sensitivity and independence as a critic; while that on Bloomfield firmly establishes the older poet's importance to Clare as a fellow labouring-class writer committed to describing the realities of rural life.

Goodridge is keen to stress that while seemingly opposed to one another, the writerly and rural communities he identifies could 'overlap and creatively converge' (p. 8). This becomes especially apparent in the second half of the book which looks at Clare's representations of rural life and includes chapters on the enclosure elegies, Clare's poems about birds' nests, festive ritual and folk narrative, and women's storytelling. In the final chapter, Goodridge provocatively suggests that 'the oral tradition of songs, ballads and stories in verse and prose', which was a major inspiration for Clare, 'is in many ways a female one' (p. 169). This provides a useful counterpoint to the 'brotherhood' of poets discussed earlier in the

book and starts to open up the still regrettably neglected area of Clare and gender. (Mary Bains, the cowherd from whom the biographer Frederick Martin claimed the young Clare had learned songs, stories and local folklore, is finally given her due). At the same time, it necessarily means that other aspects of the folk and popular tradition remain somewhat out of sight. In almost every other respect, however, the breadth and depth of the book's coverage is admirable, and the range of poems discussed goes far beyond the usual anthology favourites, a number of which nonetheless receive insightful new readings.

In his Introduction, Goodridge notes that 'attempts to impose too prescriptive or systematic a critical structure on [Clare's] work tend to be ineffective' (p. 8). His own study shows how to avoid this trap and it is very much to be hoped that his projected volume on the 'awkward', rebellious, and anti-social Clare is soon forthcoming.

Sam Ward

A Last Resort

The upstairs mullioned window had one frame thrown wide
it dangled as if one of its hinges were loose
cool draughts flooded the room. He didn't move.

He sat, eyes glazed, fixed on the distance,
out beyond the motion of the glass to that place
where, only half an hour earlier, behind their
trimmed rim of garden pollarding, another eye
had blazed its rash, brutally upon the town's roofs.
He, still speaking out loud to his memory of it.
Even though nightfall had devoured its splendour.

Words spilled out, clear, strong, resounding clinically
around his sparsely furnished, candle lit room up to
those eerie recesses of its high ceiling.
No one heard his words.
Not even John himself.

'Poor, slow the village lad, happy his sweet girl.
Dig the mouldiwarp deep I' the earth.
Health to their faces in dear smiles worth.
Not for envy of wealth, or fame
or times wasted in foolish gain.
County proud is the country maid.
Whopstraw bussin her 'long his lane.'

Words in the mind. Words in the mouth.
He suddenly stood upright.....Naked.
Words in his mouth. Words in his mind.
Slammed the failing window shut.
The mirror of language, the reflection of his
lost country shattered into a host of pieces.

He stumbled over to his white sheets.
Fell upon them with his fists.
Jack Randall battering all rivals into submission.
Stuffing handfull of linen into his mouth, gnawing greedily.
Tears coursing his cheeks. Body quivering, as it
curled in upon itself, foetus in a womb of covers.

Neither he, nor anyone else could say
how long he was to lie there. Until,
once more, suddenly, yet now soundlessly,
he rose up, reached for the quill which his generous

institution had so thoughtfully provided, and,
in a quavering scrawl like some composer inspired,
set down his destiny.....'Dear Sir.....

I am in a Madhouse and quite forget your Name and who you are you
must excuse me for I have nothing to commu[n]icate or tell of & why
I am shut up I don't know I have nothing to say so I conclude yours
respectfully John Clare'

Bob Tristram

There to meet John Clare!

All my apologies if I prove to be wrong but as far as I can remember in the past Journals of the Society there was never a thing about a connection between John Clare and Sigmund Freud. An aspect the eminent authors failed to discover? Of course not! Though, thinking about it, there might be something in it: Freudian elements in Clare's poetry. There is nothing you can't do with Freud, some say! Anyway, reading 'De zus van Freud' (Dutch translation of the Macedonian original by Goce Smilevski – 'Freud's Sister' in English) I came across this (*), at first sight completely out of the blue:

John Clare tries to sleep and mumbles his poem 'I Am'. Some lines are incomplete, others are missing altogether.

*I am – yet what I am, none cares or knows;
My friends forsake me like a memory lost: –
... my woes...
They rise and vanish...
Like shadows in love's...
And yet I am...*

*Into the nothingness of scorn and noise, –
Where there is neither sense of life or joys...
Even the dearest, that I love the best
Are strange – nay, rather stranger than the rest.*

*I long for scenes, where man hath never trod
A place where woman never smiled or wept
There to abide with my Creator, God;
And sleep as I in childhood, sweetly slept,
Untroubling, and untroubled where I lie,
The grass below – above the vaulted sky.*

He recites the poem as if singing himself to sleep, then he turns in his bed in his little room in the Northampton asylum.

The technique of a biographical novel allows the author to give his imagination free rein, the more so when his subject's life is hardly documented. Indeed, not much is known about Adolphine Freud, the main character of this book and this leaves the reader a little confused: what is fact, what is fiction?

We are introduced to the Freuds at the very moment in 1938 when Sigmund is about to leave for Britain for further treatment of his oral cancer (he is to die there the following year, euthanasia). His application for exit visa, strangely enough, does not include his four sisters, which gives me the sinister idea that, considering the course

of events in an Austria under German occupation and the already rather uncertain (understatement!) fate of the Jews, in so doing he signs his sisters' death sentence.

The five following chapters are one long flashback. Adolphine reflects on her problematic youth, the difficult relation with her mother, an unhappy love affair, an abortion, her friends, her voluntary stay in a Viennese psychiatric clinic together with Clara, Gustav Klimt's sister... The story line is frequently interrupted by treatise-like digressions on 'madhouses', on types of 'self'... and it is in the latter that John Clare of all persons, pops up. He is represented, I think, with his poem 'I Am' still 'under construction'. No further mention is made of him. Another poet with a slightly disturbed mind, the German Friedrich Hölderlin (1770-1843) is present as well, as is Vincent van Gogh (1853-1890), the Dutch painter.

Nearly every paragraph of the seventh, last and short chapter begins with 'I will forget': we hear in it the compelling personal mantra of Adolphine (*as if singing herself to sleep?*) awaiting her death, looking back on an unhappy, unfulfilled life. She died (80) in an extermination camp in 1942.

(*) Own translation and *John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson & David Powell, OUP, 1984.

Freddy Rottey

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

John Clare: Forest Poet

John Clare Society member, Pete Relph, author of *Four Forest Years*, has been invited to speak about Clare's time spent at Dr Allen's asylum on Lippit's Hill at High Beach between 1837 and 1841. Pete will particularly focus on Clare's love of Epping Forest: 'untamed – the forest walk enjoyed and loved by all' – enjoyed to this day by many thousands of visitors.

Pete will welcome the company of fellow JCS members at this event: 7.30 – 9.00 pm on **Wednesday, 17 July 2013** at 'The View', which is adjacent to the refurbished Queen Elizabeth' Hunting Lodge, just beyond the fringe of Chingford North on the edge of the forest. It's an interesting venue, newly built, with a view that extends across Chingford Plain to the woodlands beyond.

The charge for admittance is £10, which includes a 'tipple' – a glass of traditional ale (beloved of Clare!) or a glass of wine. Booking is required, and you can reserve a ticket by phoning City of London Corporation (020 7332 1911) or via www.cityoflondon.gov.uk/eppingforest.

Pete Relph

Marking the 150th Year of Clare's death

On **17 May 2014** in St. John's Church, Market Square, Peterborough, one of the finest choirs in East Anglia, the Fairhaven Singers, under their dynamic musical director, Ralph Woodward, will present a concert, including an exciting new commissioned setting of Clare's poems.

Somtow Sucharitkul is the composer of the new work – possibly based on settings of two of Clare's poems. He is a world famous composer, writer and conductor, and it is due to the good offices of Ralph Woodward that this has been made possible.

It will be a wonderful evening of music related to those aspects of life which were so important to Clare. The Bishop of Peterborough and the Deputy Mayor plan to attend.

Book the date – details of tickets in the next newsletter. In the meantime, any queries to Rev. Ron Ingamells, vice-chair.

NEW CD

Clare's Journey, a new CD with music composed by Terence Deadman and words by Trevor Harvey, includes settings of four of Clare's poems. The work was performed at the 30th Anniversary Festival of the John Clare Festival in 2011 and in April that year at Buckden Festival.

The CD was recorded at The Henry Wood Studio, London by The Maida Vale Singers, conducted by Christopher Dee with Ieuan Jones (harp) and Glen Capra (piano).

It tells, through spoken narrative and music, of John Clare's relationships with Patty and Mary Joyce, his brief rise to celebrity as a poet and his admittance to the asylum at Epping followed by his arduous journey on foot back to Helpston.

It will retail (distributed by Naxos) for £14 but will be available to Society members at the discounted price of £9.00, of which £6.00 will be donated to The John Clare Society, and will be available in hard copy, including a booklet, from 20 May this year. From 1 June the CD can be obtained from the JCS Sales Officer, Mavis Leverington: mavisleverington@aol.com.

MEMBERSHIP

Renewal of Membership 2013-2014

You are invited to renew your subscriptions for membership of the Society for the year 2013-2014. As you will know, the Membership Year runs from July to June and subscriptions are now due. We have managed to keep the subscription the same this year but it would be much appreciated if you could enclose *a stamped self-addressed envelope* with your renewal form to enable us save on postage.

You may renew your annual subscription at the Festival, but otherwise please complete the form (see email attachment) and send it to Jim, our Treasurer (his address is on the form) with your cheque as soon as possible. Thank you.

Sue Holgate, Hon Secretary

New Members

We welcome the following new members since our last Newsletter.

Clifford Cook from Wigtownshire
Mr and Mrs Dorman from Gloucester
Mr John Dunn from Filgrave, Bucks
Robert Hamberger from Brighton
Anders and Sheila Linder from Eye, Suffolk
Kay and Geoff Nichol from Helpston
Colin Wills from Mayfield, East Sussex