



THE
JOHN CLARE SOCIETY
Newsletter

June 2016

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THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

As this issue was nearing completion we were shocked and saddened to hear of the sudden death of Peter Moyse on 26 April. Peter had been a member of the Society from the beginning, and became known to the committee as 'our man in Helpston'. Fortunately he was honoured by Peterborough Council earlier this year and there is an account of the ceremony on p.8. A full obituary will appear in the next issue. Since Peter was such a well-known figure in the Society, I would like to invite members to send in memories or comments, which can be published in the next newsletter.

There are two other obituaries in this issue. One is of Greg Crossan, a noted academic and Clare scholar (pp.10–11); the other is of Brian Blade, a founder and first chairman of the JCS (p.13).

On a more cheerful note, we can look forward to our annual Festival, which this year will run from 15–17 July in Helpston. You will find further details on pp.5–6.

Finally, as editor of the newsletter, I have to take leave of you, since I shall be handing over to Dr Stephen Sullivan at the AGM. So items for the next issue should be sent to him before 2 September 2016. As a long-term member, with academic qualifications in English literature and experience of editing a newsletter, I have no doubt that our newsletter will be in capable hands.

As usual may I express my thanks for the contributions that have been made to this issue, and for all the many and varied contributions that have been sent to me since I first took over as editor.

Valerie Pedlar

Annual General Meeting

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the John Clare Society will take place on Saturday 16 July 2016 at 10.15 am in St. Botolph's Church, Helpston. All members and those attending the Festival are cordially invited.

The 2016 John Clare Society Festival: 15–7 July *Digging and Delving – Unearthing Clare*

We are again using the church for the Annual General Meeting, talks and the concert. The stalls will be mostly in Botolph's Barn with several on the green near the Memorial. **Once again this year the School is having its fete (to which all are invited) so parking will be in the field opposite. Please look for signage on entering Helpston. There may also be limited parking at the Exeter Arms. We would rather that cars did not park along the side of the road.**

Friday 15 July

The Midsummer Cushions ceremony will once again take place about 1.15 to 1.30 pm at Helpston Parish Church, when the prize winning poems from the competition for pupils of the John Clare Primary School will be read. It is hoped that Peterborough Poet Laureate, Charley Genever, will say a few words to the children. This is always a delightful occasion when children from the school bring their trays of flowers to put around Clare's grave – do come along if you can!

Pete Shaw is, as usual, holding folk music session in the Bluebell pub on the Friday evening from 7.30 pm where there will be drinks and light refreshments available.

Saturday 16 July

On Saturday there will be coffee and tea available at the Bluebell pub from 9.30 am and in the Cottage from 10.00 am. Botolph's Barn will be open from 9.30 am, with various stalls to include three bookstalls. This year the Countryside Restoration Trust are paying us a visit and hopefully we will have a display of farm implements from Sacrewell on the village green. The Sales stall will again be in front of the gates of The Stables, 1a West Street, and will be open after the AGM. The Membership, Programme and Ticket stall will be in the church as last year.

As last year, the AGM will take place in the church in the centre of the village. For those of you who have never been to Helpston, St. Botolph's is a lovely Norman church, with Saxon roots, and we will have a church tour taking place during the afternoon. Following the

AGM, our new President, Carry Akroyd, will give her Presidential Address.

Lunches will be available in the Village Hall and the Cottage. We have folk dancing around the village and the Annakinn Gallery will be open.

In the afternoon, our Annual Lecture will be given by Margi Blunden, daughter of Edmund Blunden, the First World War poet who did so much to keep Clare's reputation alive. Her talk will be based on how her father came to 'unearth' Clare in the early part of the twentieth century.

Following the lecture you could meet up with friends for afternoon tea or go and visit the three oak trees at Swaddywell which the Society has planted to commemorate John Clare, Ronald Blythe and Edmund Blunden. A small booklet will be available to commemorate the retirement of Ronald Blythe, our President for 34 years. This will have a direction map to Swaddywell, a place that John Clare loved.

The Festival would not be the same without our poetry reading session in the afternoon. Peter Cox will take charge of this as usual, so please bring your favourite Clare poem along and make contact with him during the day.

The concert this year is to be given by the Big Fiddle Band with music related to John Clare. The concert will be for an hour starting at 6.00 pm, and tickets will be available at the Festival. Please come to this if you can, the concert is always a lovely ending to the day celebrating our poet.

Sunday 17 July

We will be having the usual Clare-related church service at 10.45 am, this year led by Canon Haydn Smart. We will finish the Festival with a glass of wine and our annual toast to John Clare on his birthday weekend.

We will be running the Friends of the Festival scheme again this year (see p.17) and an application form will be sent by a separate email. The benefits of the scheme (apart from showing your support for the Festival) include a free copy of the Programme (£2.00 if bought on the day) and a copy of the Commemorative Booklet (£2.00 if bought on the day). As a Friend of the Festival you can also buy concert tickets in advance.

We hope, as always, that the weather will be kind to us and we look forward to meeting you and your friends during the weekend.

Sue Holgate – Festival Co-ordinator



Photo: Peter Moyse.

Lifetime Civic Award (2015) To Mr Peter Moyse

Our February newsletter told of Peterborough City Council's decision to make the above award to Peter Moyse.

The ceremony took place in Peterborough Town Hall on 24 February, when Peter accepted his award with his usual jocular modesty. It was an uplifting and cheering occasion for recipients and family and friends. One hears so much about the lack of public spirit and total self-interest in our busy modern lives and here were 31 people who had given time and energy working for the public good. It was especially heartening to see many younger people among them. It was good to see that these new annual awards, founded in 2014 and recommended by the general public, encourage and recognise their actions. In Peter's case, the only recipient of a Lifetime Achievement award, Councillor David Over proposed Peter's name supported by local people in Helpston.

Mavis Leverington



Peter (far left) was one of the readers at the commemoration of the anniversary of Clare's death at Westminster Abbey in 2014.

Photo: Kelsey Thornton.

A gathered harvest

A library is like a gathered harvest
And what I seek there
Is inspiring thought and idea

That
The shining scriptures of the world
Are as vital as ever

That
Something as soft as water
Can shape and smooth
And win a way through hard rock

To be made aware that
A wall of stone
Is known by the seer
To be space condensed
Or more encouraging still
To be condensed consciousness
Nearer yet to spirit itself

That
The poet labourer John Clare
Is published in full by Oxford

My library is a harvest of thought
Read and be freed
I pass on the torch to you

Bob Kelly

Greg Crossan

Our long-term member Dr Greg Crossan died on 17 November last, aged 65. Before his retirement Greg taught at Massey University in Palmerston North, New Zealand, and his son Gabe tells me that many former students and colleagues came to his memorial service. Greg had a genius for scholarly detail, and was valued especially for his 'notes & queries' and bibliographical research on Clare (and other writers). His study, *A Relish for Eternity: The Process of Divinization in the Poetry of John Clare* (1976) is also full of valuable insights. Greg made two extended visits to the UK in the '80s and '90s, and made many good friends in the Clare community. He and Gabe stayed with my family in 1997, and I remember that Greg particularly wanted to see Wilford churchyard, because of the sonnet about it by Henry Kirke White—a name now almost forgotten in Nottingham, but he knew all about him, and included him in the talk he gave to our research seminar.

Greg's 'bicentenary essay' on Clare was called 'John Clare Our Contemporary', and has some telling family memories in it:

It seems to me that, in some ways, two hundred years is not such a long time. 1793. My own grandfather, who died just a few years ago, was born in 1893. His grandfather may well have been Clare's contemporary ... My grandfather's farm had carts and cart-horses, scythes and sickles, and stooks of hay standing in the fields—except we never called them 'fields' in New Zealand: they were always paddocks.

Having visited Northampton Asylum, Greg describes a trip to High Beach in Epping Forest where Clare lived for four years, and reflects on that sense of kinship and closeness familiar to many readers of Clare:

At both asylums—big solid, imposing buildings—I could feel, almost palpably, the homesickness and fear and the loss of identity that Clare must have felt when he entered those institutions for the first time. I'm sure this is something that makes him contemporary for a lot of us—that sense of never having life under control, of trying to achieve something good in a hostile or indifferent world.

I have compiled a little memorial pamphlet listing Greg's writings (for I share his love of detail and scholarly precision), and I hope to have it ready for the Clare Festival in July.

John Goodridge
johnagoodridge@googlemail.com



Photo: Gabriel Crossan



Sketch: Kelsey Thornton

The Ravens Nest

It's always a pleasure to hear mention of John Clare and his work on the radio, as I did at 6.00 am on Sunday 14 February, listening to BBC Radio 4's 'Something Understood' programme, when Clare's poem, 'The Ravens Nest', was broadcast.

I rushed to my bookshelf to re-read the poem that is so graphic and emphasizes how in those days ravens were accepted by the rural populace as integral to their community, which of course also valued the ancient oaks – as symbols of their latent paganism – showing their respect for nature and folk history.

The final lines are significant and summarise the respect people had for things they deemed important in their lives:

Yet even now in these adventurous days
Not one is bold enough to dare the way
Up the old monstrous oak where every spring
Finds the two ancient birds at their old task
Repairing the hugh nest – where still they live
Through changes winds and storms and are secure
And like a landmark in the chronicles
Of village memorys treasured up yet live
The high old oak that wears the ravens nest.

(Oxford Authors)

It is nice to know that ravens are now recovering and expanding their range, having suffered years of persecution from overzealous game-keepers and suchlike, who wanted to show their masters how keen they were to ensure game birds were protected and sufficient in number for their annual slaughter by the gentry.

Pete Relph

A Tribute to Brian Blade, first Chairman of the John Clare Society.

The John Clare Society should always remember and honour the Reverend Brian Blade, who died earlier this year, for it was his enthusiasm and desire that more should be done to promote the unusual genius of the Helpston poet.

I first met Brian in 1980, at a lecture I gave in Castor and Ailsworth, on the life and work of Clare. Brian had recently become the vicar of St Boltolph's and was anxious to learn more about the poet buried in his churchyard. He already knew something about him and told me that one of his favourite poems was 'The Thrush's Nest'. But now *he* had become 'part of Clare's daily world'.

After the lecture he, and the rest of the class, retired to the Fitzwilliam Arms to continue our discussion on a less formal level. It was then that Brian said, 'Why isn't there a John Clare Society?' My reply was, 'Because we are waiting for someone like you to start one.' His response was, 'Then I will, if some of you will help me.'

A week later, a letter announcing our intentions was sent to all the appropriate journals and newspapers. Soon we began receiving inquiries from people all over the UK asking how they could become members. Brian, who had a gift for enthusiasm, was overwhelmed by such immediate interest and soon organised a committee meeting at the Rectory. Later, when, as Chairman, he faced the first public meeting of more than sixty members in the village hall, he said to me: 'This is one of the happiest days of my life.'

He was a sincere, warm and honest man and his joy at this achievement saw him through those early days, which were not without criticism. Brian was a sensitive, unpretentious person who had no time for self-importance. His only ambition was to encourage others to share in his discovery of 'the glories of Clare's refreshing poetry'.

When Brian retired and left Helpston I am sure that the uncompromising spirit of Clare went with him. I, with other surviving members of that first committee, will always think of him with great fondness and gratitude.

Edward Storey



The Reverend Brian Blade in vestments that he embroidered himself. Photo: Peter Moyse.

[Editor: Peter was renowned for his beautiful photography and sent me many photographs for inclusion in the newsletter. This one, taken many years ago, was the last one he sent me just a week or two before his death.]

With Curren On Her Constitutional

Main Street and Charlotte pauses.
Soon her hill will reel back
yet another 'haply-cobbled' story
perhaps becoming quite out
of breath with itself at her passing.

Sometime later, the village gossips
will dream up even more to say
about her back'ards rooard pages,
other discover themselves making
a living off her, by her, for her, measuring
stumbling steps with hers,
some might even come directly
face to face with themselves
ginnelled tight within those same breathing spaces
trapped between their own idea
and all three sisters' words.

She gathers up her mullocked skirts
out of a shippon's flap and slart and
bending into the wind, bustles amid
their faint rustling into silence
back to those fashioned journals
her waiting pens
and their shared
permanently bereaved
parsonage.

Desperate sun escapes
niggardly frown of cloud over the tops.
A gleam leaps into her eyes
children's games; candles; bedtimes.

Night shuts up
yet another bleak day's eye
and queer as Dick's 'atband
three sister stars do
their own tipple-tails, high above
a wild moor's marked dark.

Bob Tristram

Street Epiphany

Recently I went to the Strode Theatre in Street near Glastonbury to see the film, *By Our Selves*, based on Clare's account of his harrowing journey, on foot, from Epping Forest to Northborough. Having seen a short preview of the film I had my doubts about the effectiveness of portraying Clare's painful experience in the context of our modern landscape and infrastructure. In the event the film turned out to be a bit of a curate's egg, very good in parts.

I found the use of a drone camera to convey the spaciousness of the landscape and the disorientation of the man very effective. The use of two very different actors to demonstrate the split personality which Clare's illness created worked very well, with Freddie Jones recreating the persona that I remember so well from the 1970's. I have to admit that at times I failed to see the relevance of a sequence or could only guess at what was being intimated. Also I found that the scene near the end of the film, where Clare is picked up on the road and bundled into the back of a white transit-type van, made me think of the director saying something like, 'We haven't any money, that will have to do'.

However, having said all that, there was one sequence in the film which said everything that really mattered to me in a most beautiful and unexpected way. The scene in question shows Toby Jones, as Clare, walking painfully alongside the A1 highway, which is full of traffic, whooshing past in both directions with all the noise and clamour that that involves. The camera follows close behind for some distance, as the vehicles thunder past, then slowly it pans to the left, away from the road and out over a cornfield to a view of a landscape with trees, hedges and a church in the distance. Gradually the noise of the traffic fades and we begin to hear the gentle sounds of nature, the birds and the insects, all just being in the warm sunlight. It was a magical moment, which brought the thought into my mind of 'just who is mad?'

This was followed almost at once by the realisation that the cause of John Clare's so-called 'madness' was his inability to deal with *our* madness. In order to survive, it seems that we have to be desensitised, but for some reason Clare, when fully himself, seems to have been able to always look at nature as if he was seeing it for the very first time. The feeling which most of us cannot even remember. If we could we would not treat nature in the way that we do. This scene to me was a vindication of the whole film and I have no doubt that a conventional recreation of Clare's journey would not have been as effective in demonstrating what Clare tried, all his life, to convey. Yes, a memorable evening and I will never forget my first visit to Street.

Noel Crack

October Owl

(inspired by John Clare and Samuel Palmer)

I stood and watched the night fall an hour earlier today
As the moist mist rolled silently towards me like
Eerie tumbleweed it melted over the wet meadow.
Meanwhile the fuzzy stars slowly revealed their sparkle.

The voluptuous moon rose from the other side of the world
Its buttery light made shadow of the church spire.
The brush of air-beating wings, feathers soft in flight,
The local barn owl hoots from the hollow disseminating his wisdom.

Everything yet nothing has changed as old and new times meld.
Quartering across the moon at its zenith, the raptor seeks his prey,
And the remote train whistles on its journey through the night
Taking who knows who, to who knows where, or why.

Sharon Mather



Samuel Palmer, Cornfield by Moonlight, c.1830.

John Clare commemorated in Peterborough and Northampton

My attention has been drawn to two ways in which these cities have decided to commemorate the poet.

On 15 December there was an official ceremony to 'open' a new phase of Peterborough's City centre regeneration. Although its official name is Green Square, it has apparently already been dubbed 'Clare' Square, after the beautiful granite central feature which celebrates the works of John Clare. The granite circle is surrounded by sustainable hardwood benches engraved with poems written by local schoolchildren.

On Wednesday 27 April Northampton Borough Council added a statue of John Clare to the Guildhall courtyard. This was commissioned from Sculptor Richard Austin, who has produced a figure based on the well-known watercolour portrait of the poet sitting in the portico of All Saints Church. For further information see: <http://www.northampton.gov.uk/news/article/2302/john-clare-statue-is-new-addition-to-guildhall-courtyard>.

Valerie Pedlar



The new statue in Northampton.

John Clare Society Journal: Back Issues to Go Online

The society committee has been considering for a while now how the *John Clare Society Journal* might be better served by being available online. While we think that the membership values its print copy of the journal every summer – and while we absolutely will carry on publishing it annually in the shape in which you have known it since 1982 – we do think it is high time to make journal back issues far more widely available, beyond the society, and for free.

To that end, the committee agreed to allow me to send copies of all back issues of the journal up to and including 2011's issue, to the internationally popular and widely used *Google Books* service. Uploading full texts of the journal would mean that anyone searching online for Clare or related issues the journal has covered – or any of the names of the writers we have published – would repeatedly come up with links to the journal. The great advantage of *Google Books* is that all text uploaded is fully and accurately searchable, and that they are downloadable as PDF-style files. Not only would this rich and searchable online presence help raise awareness of the scholarship and creative work we have published over three decades, it would also substantively raise the sheer quality of secondary and critical material in the widest fashion possible, ensuring that there is a far richer array of resources available for all scholars of Clare, at all levels of interest. Clare's profile would, in time, also be bolstered by this online move, as would the profile of the journal itself, and the society.

This process will begin this summer, when issues from 1982–2011 will be sent to *Google Books* for upload. Every year, a new issue will be uploaded – but we will ensure that there is always a 5-year gap between printed copy, and its freely-online availability. This will hopefully maintain the high value we place in the original print version of the publication, while also ensuring that – eventually – our authors and their ideas reach as wide an audience as possible.

This notice is partly to let members know about an initiative we hope most will consider to be exciting. But also to ensure that anyone who has published their work in the *JCSJ* who does not want it made freely available in this way has an opportunity to contact me now, to ask questions, or to request that we remove their work from the uploaded journal in question (easily done).

Simon Kövesi
Editor, *John Clare Society Journal*

Friends of Festival scheme

We are running our Friends of Festival scheme again this year, and the form for this will be sent be a separate email.

The benefits of the scheme are:

- You are supporting the Society in running its annual festival.
- You will receive a free copy of the Festival Programme, and also of the Commemorative Booklet (normally £2 each).
- You can buy tickets for the Saturday early evening concert in advance (to ensure that you get in if we sell out on the day).

Even if you are unable to come along to the festival, you can still be a member of the Friends scheme. The Programme is a lovely keepsake, with articles and photos, and not just a programme for the weekend; and the Commemorative Booklet will contain an unpublished poem by Blunden kindly donated to us by his daughter.

Linda Curry

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

16–19 June 2016 – BBC Gardeners' World Live at NEC, Birmingham, where Workbridge at St Andrew's Healthcare in partnership with the designers Helen Bass and St Andrew's Patients and Service Users will present the Beautiful Border 'The John Clare Pathway to Wellbeing'. For further details see: <https://www.bbcgardenersworldlive.com/whats-on/the-john-clare-pathway-to-wellbeing>.

2–3 July 2016 – Peterborough Heritage Festival. The Society will be running its usual stall selling books, Festival programmes and membership on Saturday 2 July inside the grounds of Peterborough Cathedral. An hour or two's help from members between 8.30 am and 5pm on that day would be much appreciated. Or just go along on either 2 or 3 July to what is always a wonderful weekend. For more details please see the Vivacity website: www.vivacity-Peterborough.com or contact Ann Marshall, JCS Publicity Officer 01400 282409, johnclaresociety@mybtinternet.com.

15–17 July 2016 – John Clare Society Festival.

7–9 October 2016 – Clare, Borrow, and the Gypsies of Epping: joint event with the Borrow Society, in Epping.

Arrangements are well in hand for this, and a booking form will appear on the website in the next few weeks. So, do check that out.

George Borrow (1803–1881) is probably best known for *Lavengro*, and *The Romany Rye*, and lived in London from 1860 to 1874. During that time, his haunts included Epping Forest and the local hostelryes. He also got to know the gypsies there, including families known to Clare. (For further see David Nuttall's paper available at <https://borrowsgypsies.wordpress.com>.) Borrow's word-book of the Romany, *Romano Lavo-lil*, has recently been reprinted in paperback (and can be read online at www.gutenberg.org). It contains gypsy poetry and accounts of certain gypsies.

The event will mainly take place on the Saturday (8 Oct), starting at 9.30 am for 10 am at Epping Hall in the centre of Epping. Speakers include Dr Anne-Marie Ford (a researcher into gypsy genealogy) on 'The ball-giving Gypsies of Epping', Dr James Canton (from the University of Essex) on 'Relics of John Clare in Epping', and David Price (a Borrow expert) on 'Borrow in the Sixties'. In the afternoon,

there will be a guided walk around High Beech by Pete Relph (an expert on Clare and on gypsy life).

The fee still needs to be confirmed but we are probably looking at £25 per head for the event. So, do put it in your diaries.

Linda Curry

MEMBERSHIP

Membership Renewal Invitation

Our membership year goes from 1 July to 30 June, and includes the Journal. Following a change of printer, the Journal will be posted out to members in early July, in advance of the Festival.

We do our best to keep costs, and therefore subscriptions, down. If you would like a membership card, would you please enclose a stamped addressed envelope with your renewal form. You will receive electronic copies of the Newsletters (by email) unless you tick the box on the renewal form to signify that you do *not* want this. **Please keep us informed of any change of email address.**

After discussion at last year's Annual General Meeting, it was decided to simplify the different membership categories from July 2016. The main change is the abolition of the retired rate. The rates are £15 for individuals, £20 for joint membership, and £5 for students.

You may renew your annual subscription at the Festival, but otherwise please complete the form which is being sent by a separate email and send it to me with your cheque as soon as possible.

Robert Heyes, Membership Secretary

New Members (from February 2016)

We welcome the following new members who have joined since the last Newsletter:

Alison Oliphant, London
William Bedford, Wiltshire
Iago Elkin-Jones, Oxfordshire
Sharon Mather, Cambridge
Jane Benton, Bourne
Nigel and Sheila Peckett, Stafford
Jack Walsh, Derby