



The John Clare & Society

Newsletter no. 129

February 2017



THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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EDITORIAL

Elsewhere in this Newsletter you will find an appeal from our Chair, Valerie Pedlar, inviting members to put themselves forward to join the Committee of the Society. I can testify from my own experience that they are a friendly and dedicated bunch of people who will soon find you something to do that will enable you to contribute to the way in which the Society is run. Having been a member of the Society for at least twenty years and retired from a career teaching English and English Literature, I welcomed the invitation to become the editor of the Newsletter and am now embarked upon my first editorial. Because of the sheer amount of material generated by the Festival (and by other less happy events) there was no room for such a thing in the October edition. This meant, of course, that my very necessary thanks to all those who offered support, advice and practical help has been delayed until now.

My greatest debt is to our former editor, Valerie Pedlar, who has set a high standard for this Newsletter and who may have felt that helping me through the production of the October issue was as much work as if she had done the whole thing herself. Sam Ward has attended to the proof-reading with diligence and tact. Our President, Carry Akroyd, has offered encouragement despite my failure to realise what year we are in, and has supplied a set of very attractive artwork to use for those moments when words fail. Other members of the Committee and of the Society have played their part, and I'd like to thank all of them warmly. There may be errors or infelicities in the final publication, but if so they are not the responsibility of those who have helped me. In the words of one of the greatest English authors, those who find mistakes should attribute them to

the defaute of myn unkonnynge, and nat to my wyl, that wolde ful fayn have seyde bettre if I hadde had konnynge.

Contributions are invited. Prose, poetry, artwork or photographs likely to be of interest to John Clare enthusiasts, reviews and notices of forthcoming events, can all be sent to the editorial address. E-mail is preferred but more traditional letters and enclosures are equally welcome. Please make sure that all individual items are clearly labelled and that you have included return postage if you wish to have them back. The Newsletter is published three times a year, in February, June and October, and the deadline for contributions is a month before the date of publication; thus, items for the June 2017 Newsletter should arrive before 1 May.

Stephen Sullivan

The John Clare Society Festival 14 – 16 July 2017

Preliminary announcement

Our annual Festival once again takes place during the weekend nearest to Clare's birthday, this year 14 to 16 July. As I write, the Festival Planning Group has not quite finalised the theme for the Festival but it will be something along the lines of 'Clare' Influences'.

We will begin, as always, with the Midsummer Cushions Ceremony at the church on Friday and the results of the children's poetry competition. As last year, the children with winning poems will receive special medals designed by the late Peter Moyse, to hang round their necks and show off to their friends and families.

On the Saturday, the main parking will be as last year, in a field opposite the school and stalls will be in Botolph's Barn, down the road from the church as well as one or two along the roadside. The AGM, the President's talk and the afternoon talk will take place, as is the previous couple of years, in St. Botolph's Church.

There will be the usual excellent lunches and teas at the Village Hall and the Blue Bell and light lunches in John Clare Cottage.

The talk in the afternoon this year is to be given by John Goodridge who will talk on Robert Bloomfield, a poet who much influenced Clare.

The evening concert will be in the church from 6.00 p.m. – 7.00 p.m. and will be given by a group of musicians called 'The Decent Scrapers' with music and readings from the life of John Clare who described himself as 'a desent scraper'!

A Clare-related church service will take place on Sunday and our Festival will be concluded with light refreshments in the church following the service.

[We are always keen to recruit helpers and if you feel you can perhaps help with a stall or stewarding, we would love to hear from you. Please contact me on 01353.668438 or \[sueholgate@hotmail.co.uk\]\(mailto:sueholgate@hotmail.co.uk\)](#)

Please make of a note of the date of the Festival in your diary – it would be lovely to see you there!

Sue Holgate, Festival Co-ordinator



A BEGINNERS' GUIDE TO JOHN CLARE

On Sunday May 28th there will be an afternoon event in Helpston, organised by the Society, to introduce newcomers to John Clare.

There will be an illustrated talk in St Botolph's Church from 2.00 to 4.15 p.m., which will include a break for tea and cake. Members are welcome of course, but this is an excellent opportunity to bring a friend (or friends) along to see the village and hear about Clare. Tickets are £5.00 to include tea. This is also a great opportunity to refresh your knowledge if you are new to the Society or to get to know the village in the company of friends if you have never been to Helpston before.

Clare, as some of you will know, used to work at the pub (The Bluebell) in the village, and if you would like to extend your day you will be assured of a warm welcome for Sunday lunch (pre-booking recommended) or you may want to go there to enjoy a pint of the local John Clare Ale at the end of the afternoon (or both!).

For tickets please send a cheque made payable to "The John Clare Society" to Sue Holgate, 9 The Chase, Ely, Cambs CB6 3DR. Please include a stamped addressed envelope if you wish the tickets to be sent to you, or you can collect them at the door.

To book lunch please telephone the Bluebell — 01733 252394

For further information please contact Sue Holgate on 01353.668438 or email sueholgate@hotmail.co.uk

FOUND IN THE FIELDS

Carry Akroyd's touring exhibition, of visual images around lines taken from Clare's poetry, will be at the Brewhouse Theatre in Taunton from 1st February - 18th March.

IN OUR TIME

Members of the Society will wish to know that Melvyn Bragg's BBC Radio 4 programme 'In Our Time' on Thursday 9 February at 9 am will be focussed on John Clare. There will be a live discussion, and the guests are Jonathan Bate, Mina Gorji and Simon Kövesi.

The programme will be repeated at 9.30 pm on 9 February and will afterwards, in common with all episodes of 'In Our Time', be available as a podcast download from the Radio 4 website, which will also feature a reading list.



At Peterborough Museum during the Clare Bicentennial celebrations, July 1993. Left to right: Roger Breeze, Peter Moyse, Tony Tipper.

We were very sad to hear of the passing of Peter Moyse. During our first visit to the Festival we were entertained by Peter in the walk around the village. His knowledge of Clare and his way of communicating it to us were enough to cement our membership of the Society. His friendly greeting at subsequent Festivals set the tone, and we have continued to enjoy his readings on CDs and, in publications, the joy of his photography. Peter was a huge part of the John Clare Society and will be greatly missed.

Mick and Jane Clare

TO YON HARE

Kathy McVittie writes: we have been enjoying John Clare festivals for many years now. One year we camped at Sacrewell, near Peterborough, before and after the activities — and used our bikes to get to and fro.

I had a rare and close encounter with a brown hare that Saturday evening in Langley Bush Road. I exhaled softly as I pedalled, and spoke out a poem as we crossed the grain of the land. Yet by the time we reached our destination, I had forgotten all the words.

Several years later I sought to revisit the memory, sitting at home far away from that July evening. This is what leap out from the hedgerow:

to yon hare

as we cycle back to the campsite
on John Clare's birthday
I'm in that liminal space
between his spring and my summer

as we cycle back to the campsite
half an hour before sunset
he leaps out from the field and crosses my way
a hare's breadth from my turning wheel

as we cycle back to the campsite
after John Clare's birthday tea
I weave stories as light as stanzas
thoughts as soft as breaths

as we cycle back to the campsite
in the crepuscular pause
I gasp at the mazement
of criss-crossing, hare-brained tracks



SALES REPORT

We have a new book to add to our stock. It is *Hidden Treasures* edited by Roger Rowe and with a foreword by Professor Eric Robinson, sharing with us a few of the intriguing, interesting and previously unpublished snippets of John Clare's poetry and prose that Professor Robinson and Roger have found in their work on the manuscripts in the Peterborough Archives. The 'treasures' range from a few words reflecting John Clare's thoughts on truth, false appearances and the Whigs and Tories, to a version of his poem 'Solitude' with the lines deleted by his publisher, John Taylor, and an enchanting short poem to 'thou little thing', a tiny chickweed. Roger Rowe discusses the background of this edition elsewhere in this Newsletter. It is an attractively produced A5 booklet selling at £6. plus p.&P.

In the next edition of the newsletter we plan to publish a list of the books left to the Society by our much-missed friend Peter Moyse. They are being offered on sale to our members and we feel there will be a lot of interest, so please look out for your newsletter and make your applications as soon as possible.

Mavis Leverington

MEMBERSHIP

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

Chen Haoran, Beijing
Lynne Farrell, Hemingford Grey, Cambridgeshire
Ian Pye, Penzance
James Blackie, Halstead
Rosemary Elgar, Cambridge
Martin Thom, Cambridge
Mr and Mrs David White-Miller, Norwich

January 2017

A Note from the Chair

We are always keen to welcome new members on to the committee. The need for 'new blood' has become particularly pressing since Norman Lee, our Treasurer, has declared his wish to stand down from that post at the next AGM. If you would like to get involved in the Society's activities, get to know fellow members, or have new ideas to offer, do think about joining us. If you would like to know more please contact me by email in the first instance.

Valerie Pedlar

A VISIT TO JOHN CLARE IN THE NORTHAMPTON ASYLUM.

In 1851 an American writer called Dean Dudley had a book published entitled *Pictures of Life in England and America* and in the book he tells of a visit that he paid, in March 1850, to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum to see John Clare. I recently obtained the author's own copy of the book and as it is a scarce item which is not readily available I thought that our members might like to read the interesting account that he gives:

John Clare the Peasant Poet.

I have called at the lunatic asylum to see John Clare, the peasant poet. He is a short stout man, of light complexion and blue eyes. The expression of his countenance is very child-like. His head is uncommonly large, long and deep, resembling that of Horace Greeley. His hair is grey, but his beard red. A person would suppose his age to be about 35 but he says he is 56. He had been in the asylum ten years. His insanity consists in believing his fancyings to be realities and what he reads to be his own experience.

I told him that I lived in America, but I had read his poems and admired them.

He said that he had been in America, at a place called Albania, on the Hudson river, and saw Irving and Bryant there. He also saw Corduroy and was delighted with him. "Corduoy," said he, "dwelt in a delightful cottage — a poet's cottage, encircled by trees and flower gardens. Hundreds of gentlemen and ladies, in their splendid carriages, came to see the poet's cottage."

"I saw Whittier and Dana," said he. "Dana was formerly a clerk in some office, but he became a poet."

I referred to the British and Scotch poets. He spoke of Burns as a brother, assuring me he had been in Scotland and seen his grave at Dumfries church.

He said the monument he saw was about as high as the table before us, but now a higher one had been raised. These stories are all fiction: for he had never been further from home than London.

When I mentioned Byron, he drew a volume from his pocket, saying he had borrowed it of someone to read. It was half of Byron's poems.

I asked him about his farm at home. "Oh! Dear," said he, "I don't know how things go on there now. I want to go home and be free." "Why" said I, "this seems a pleasant place." "O yes, but it is a *mad-house* and nothing else. They won't let me go; I'm a *prisoner* here. Oh! I want to be a free man again and go where I please. I am sick of this place, where I have no companions but mad-men."

His early life etc.

I inquired about his early life. He said he learned to read and write at the free school in his native village. The only grammar he ever studied was Cobbett's. He only followed common sense in writing. "I never made much progress in figures," said he. "I used to write songs to be sung in the street at fairs and sell them for a ha'penny each. Nobody knew who made them, for I was ashamed of them and didn't sign my name. I never tho't they would be printed;

but the book-sellers got hold of some of my verses, and then I began to write in earnest."

He said he had forgotten all his poems, and wrote none now. He could not repeat a single line to me.

Finally, at my request, he gave me his autograph, writing in my memorandum book, in a large clear hand, the following words:

 "John Clare,
 Northborough,
 Northamptonshire.
Born
 at Helpstone
 in the same county."

Thanking him for the pleasure he had afforded me by his presence and conversation, and wishing him health, freedom and happiness, I bade the unfortunate son of Apollo farewell.

Noel Crack

MATTHEW ARNOLD'S 'John Clare Cantata'

This rarely-performed piece, an attractive setting of poems by Clare, will be part of a concert, "Wind, Rain and Snow" by the William Byrd Singers at Christ Church, West Didsbury M20 2DZ, on Saturday 20 May at 7.30pm.

Tickets are £10 (£9 concessions) and are available on the door.

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

Weekend in Scotland, 2 – 4 June 2017

Members of the John Clare Society are welcome to attend the ALS AGM weekend in June. The event is hosted by the Wilfred Owen Association and Siegfried Sassoon Fellowship, at Craiglockhart (the complex including the original Military Hospital used during WWI), at Napier University, Edinburgh. The short AGM and talks take place on the Saturday — so, if you are in the area and just want to come for the day, I would encourage you to give us a try. These events are always enjoyable. There will be a welcome address from Prof Andrea Nolan, Napier University VC; and speakers include Prof Alistair McCleery and Dr Hazel Hutchison. There will also be a guided tour of the War Poets Collection, led by the Curator. The Saturday dinner will be held in the Rivers Suite at Craiglockhart.

Activities are also being arranged for Friday afternoon and Sunday morning, including a guided walking tour of Edinburgh. Attendance on Saturday costs £20, including lunch and refreshments; plus £35 for those attending the annual dinner. Booking forms should appear on the Alliance website (www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk) in February. Enquiries to me at ljc1039@gmail.com.

Linda Curry (Chair, ALS)

HIDDEN TREASURES **(Edited by Roger Rowe)** **Arbour Editions (Aug 2016)**

It was around ten years ago in the Primary School in Helpston, on the Saturday of the annual John Clare Society Festival. As part of the Committee of the Society, I was on the lookout for those who seemed to be alone, and who might be in need of some direction. An elderly gentleman I did not know came into the room blinking from the strong sunlight, looking a bit lost. I pounced on him: "It's so good to see you, sir," I stammered. "Can I be of help?" Little did I realise that this would be the start of a decade of stories, laughter, meticulous study and the prompting of John Clare publications of my own.

Professor Eric Robinson (for it was he) smiled at me beatifically, and asked if there might be somewhere that we might get a cuppa? A friend pointed us into the school kitchen, and we began a conversation that lasted two hours that morning, several more in the afternoon, and is still not finished all these years later. Sometime later I admitted to him that when we had first met I had no idea whatsoever to whom I was speaking — yet within minutes he had launched into the perils and tribulations of transcribing Clare's (at times seemingly impenetrable) handwriting. So *this* must be the famous Professor of whom I had heard so much.

Asking him recently how long he considered it would be before the Clare manuscripts had given up all their secrets, he replied after some thought, "Decades and decades, my friend."

Two or three summers ago, we were sitting opposite one another in the Clare Archive in Peterborough Central Library, when after a particularly intricate piece of pencilled text had been deciphered, Eric looked up, with that mischievous twinkle in his eye and said, "Roger, you're not much of a scholar, are you?" My heart sank. He looked me straight in the eye. "More of a gifted amateur, I'd say." Praise indeed!

Hidden Treasures is the result of years of work both by Eric and myself, seeking out those poems and prose that are unfamiliar to us, and to the Clare-reading public. We make no grand claims for them, previously dismissed as they might have been; but here, we believe, are many hidden treasures gleaned from our joint endeavours.

Clare was, of course, an inveterate scribbler who, because of his poverty, was forced to write upon whatever came to hand, using ink, pencil or an ink concoction he created himself. Within the Peterborough Archives many of these scraps can be seen: newspaper and parcel labels, old bills, prospectus pages for future books, old account ledgers, as well as exercise books and loose pages.

The collection has been gleaned from such jottings, often in margins, sometimes barely legible, but all worthy of consideration even though sometimes fragmentary. Whilst we make no claims of quality, we

believe that further examination of these works will interest, excite and entrance readers.

Hidden Treasures is available direct from me (email arborfield@gmail.com) for £7.50 including P&P , from John Clare Society Sales, or from Amazon if you prefer.

Postscript

I am currently working toward publication, hopefully in March or April 2017, of Clare's aborted Novel, started in 1821 and discarded by the early years of 1830. His notes are extensive, some 200+ pages in total. Coming across them from time to time in the Peterborough Archive, I was at first dismissive, then intrigued and finally resolved to bring these writings to the notice of Clareans worldwide.

Here is a short extract from my draft 'Foreword' :

Very few seem to realise that Clare wrote in the novel form, part of which he gave the title, "Memoirs of Uncle Barnaby". This novel may be incomplete and almost entirely lacking a continuous plot, but seems to have been always intended to be a completion of stories, essays and letters. Featured are country people such as the vicar, the butler and housekeeper of some gentleman or other, an adventure at a lonely house experienced by two soldiers returning from the Napoleonic Wars, and the tale of a mother & her daughters, walking in the country, meeting a gipsy fortune-teller and during a stage coach ride.

I hope to write more, together with a short extract from Professor Eric's 'Introduction' to the book, in the next edition of this Newsletter in June 2017.

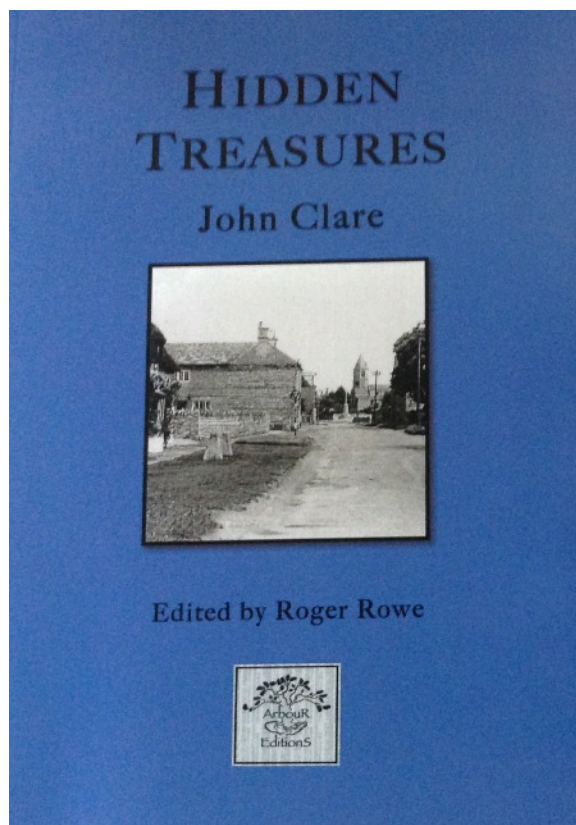
Postscript 2

As I have over the past few years, I spent ten days in October 2016 with Eric and Victoria in their home in Falls Church, just south of Washington DC. He asked me to pass his kind regards to all his old colleagues and friends in the Society. He devours the Newsletter and Journal as soon as they arrive, and as ever is interested in all the doings of the Society.

Postscript 3

A few new Clare words... can you decipher them?

'Dick son eery' - 'Pye anna forty' - "Indenti kalls' (!)



Roger Rowe

THREE LINES

*and the remote train whistles on its journey through the night
taking who knows who, to who knows where, or why.*

(from the poem by Sharon Mather in Newsletter 127)

Three clean, clear-cut lines of Victorian rails
like modern Ermine Streets, stole in on his country
armed with relentless desire to establish progress.

In the space of half his life they changed the nature
of that land he loved so dearly, from Barnack, Bainton,
Helpston, and beyond, to, almost, the Cathedral itself.

Then dogged speed of each horse drawn cart was fast
replaced by twin, powerfull, robust, alien, harnessed
forces, from above and below earth, water and coal.

Some never really saw it coming, but they heard it all right.
Like the course of Torpel Way today, it had its own say.
Cut across fen and farm, over trackway and road, as

if the inevitable were bound to happen and nothing on
God's earth, not even local lads, could stop it. Only
each gated level of village and drove able to check it.

Even today, a century and a half on, with only main
of those intruder lines not dismantled, each gate
insists itself on landscape and over the surviving line.

LC. LC. LC etc on our OS Map. Stop. Listen, Watch, Wait.
That future JC barely lived to see stays with us, in passing,
Uffington to Gatehouse Farm, a bold seven, in all, hold sway.

Bob Tristram

BORROVIANS AND CLAREITES

A Joint meeting of the John Clare and George Borrow Societies in Epping, Essex, on 8 October 2016.

Almost forty members of the two Societies met in the Epping Hall to consider the two writers, their interest in Gypsies, and, in Clare's case, his residence in Epping Forest. Ann Ridler, Chairman of the George Borrow Society and Linda Curry, lately Chair of the John Clare Society, took it in turns to preside over the proceedings.

The first speaker, Jessica von Kaenel-Platt, was this year's winner of the George Borrow Trust essay competition. Her long title told us accurately what to expect: "The Heath and the Drawing-Room: Representation and reality in *Lavengro* and *The Romany Rye*". Jessica raised and considered several questions about Borrow's depiction of Gypsies in the two books. Did he romanticise Gypsy life? What is myth and what is the reality of Gypsy sexual behaviour? Certainly Borrow did not stress the harshness of Gypsy life, and he tended to "step back" in his narratives. The loss of Gypsy culture, especially their language, was a sensitive subject, and Borrow respected that. The Gypsies' connections with wider society are implicit rather than explicit in Borrow's work. The judgements of nineteenth and of twenty-first century critics naturally differ, while the twentieth century seems to have taken little notice of him. Jessica's paper was very well-received and provoked several questions.

The second speaker was Dr James Canton of the Department of Literature, Film and Theatre Studies in the University of Essex, and his title was "Relics of John Clare's Time in Epping Forest". He reminded us that Clare was not the only writer to spend some time in Essex; others included Joseph Conrad, Arthur Ransome, Daniel Defoe and Margery Allingham. James set himself the task of "re-imagining a literary landscape". He started in Matthew Allen's asylum and found Clare's name in the Admissions Register, labelled "labourer and poet". Nearby in the Register was a nine-year-old child from Woodford, committed by her father. What a tale is there. In the forest Clare met JB Wandesford, a young man, sketching. He gave the artist some poems, scribbled on scraps of paper. These eventually went with Wandesford to America and were published by him after Clare's death. It seems that Clare 'escaped' from the asylum where he laboured, into the forest where he could be a poet. James traced the 'rout' given to Clare by the Gypsies, from the Asylum over the hill, into and across the Lea Valley marshes, now covered by large reservoirs. He also searched inconclusively for a pub called 'The Labour in Vain' where Clare had halted. The poet's route from Enfield Highway to the Great North Road remains unknown. James's talk and illustrations provoked good discussion.

After a short coffee break, Borrowian David Price, who is director of the Gutenberg Project (putting books onto the Internet) gave an illustrated talk about "Borrow in the 1860s", when he lived in Hereford Square in West London. It is in the area between Chelsea and Kensington, now totally built up. When Borrow lived there, his house was on the edge of a fairly rural landscape of farms and market gardens. He could obtain milk, eggs and vegetables very close by, and also visit a Gypsy encampment. Other places around London, including Epping Forest, also attracted Gypsies, and Borrow visited them. David showed us old photographs of



Gypsies and their wagons, illustrating the poverty and harsh conditions of their lives. He gave us a very good picture of Borrow's milieu and opportunities at this period.

Lastly, before lunch, Pete Relph of the John Clare Society gave an introduction to our afternoon walk in the forest, with a visit to one of Allen's houses. Pete is the author of *Four Forest Years* (2006) about Epping Forest and Clare's years in it, and it contains countless insights into the biology, ecology and history of the forest in Clare's day and since.

After a pleasant buffet lunch, we drove the few miles to Fairmead Bottom, originally marshy pasture. We stopped in a little car park beside the Epping New Road, in Clare's time a gravel track through the forest, now a major road out of London to the M11 and M25. We walked the short distance to Fairmead Pond, subject of Clare's poem 'The Water Lilies'. The pond itself had been dug to contain potential waterlogging of the nearby grazing lands. In recent years the open grassland of Fairmead has been

much reduced by encroaching trees and bushes. We walked towards the asylum houses while Pete told us about the old chapel, now replaced by High Beach Church, and Fern Hill and the 'brook without a bridge' which were all mentioned in Clare's poems. Pete quoted two poems of the asylum years, 1837-41:

I love the Forest and its airy bounds
and

I loved the Forest walks and beechen woods.

We reached Lippits Hill Lodge, a handsome Georgian House, restored by its present owner, Eddie Kirkland, who has placed blue plaques on it to record Clare's time there. The interior and the grounds are not as Clare would have known them, but we could enjoy the quiet forest setting, which had not changed much.

We retraced our steps to the car park. Some stayed in Epping for a dinner at the Theydon Oak, celebrating 25 years of the George Borrow Society.

We warmly thank Ann Ridler and Linda Curry for making all the necessary arrangements for this very successful and enjoyable day.

Peter Cox



Valerie Pedlar

The Joint Meeting of the John Clare Society and the George Borrow Society was an educative, inspiring and successful morning. I was certainly educated — I actually met a number of 'voices' I had spoken to by phone over the years, for the first time in the actual flesh.

We certainly have some very able and hard-working persons beavering away and leading our John Clare Society. I was especially pleased to meet Linda

Curry, Mavis Leverington and Valerie Pedlar and, nice to meet yet again, Peter Cox — we are both ex-Buckhurst Hillians, or in John Clare's day would have been described as Buckets Hillians.

In the afternoon we adjourned to John Clare's happy hunting ground — Fairmead, which he knew so intimately. We met in the car park, close to the Epping New Road that had opened a few years prior to Clare's arrival. It was then gravel-surfaced and seldom used. As we were there on a pleasant Saturday with good weather, the road was nearly as busy as Oxford Street. So, having wedged our cars like sardines into the limited space available, we held up the traffic as we — some thirty or more — trooped across the road. Thus, we created a traffic jam that stretched far back up the road towards the Robin Hood pub. However, the motorists were sympathetic and patient. Thanks!

At last we were walking on the closely-cropped turf of Fairmead, which is manicured by the now numerous rabbit population. Too late for any floral delights, though. Next stop, 'The Lake', in which Clare describes the 'Ladies of the Lake' — water lilies — and notes the presence of a moorhen. Lo and behold, there on cue were the identical lilies and a moorhen. Some things don't seem to change, do they?

Then a real-life drama. A sparrow hawk seen flying off by one of our more



observant ladies had just murdered a wood pigeon and had already plucked its chest — feathers everywhere. It had been enjoying a succulent still-warm pigeon breast for its late lunch. Did it return to its feast?

We crossed the lane that winds downhill from the heights of High Beech proper — a track that Clare followed many a time across the then more-extensive Fairmead for a longer walk to Buckets Hill. A Wayfaring tree or Wild Service tree guarded our entrance to the clean sweep of Fairmead that would take us direct to Lippets Hill Lodge, where Clare lived for some indeterminate time — our destination.

We arrived at Lippets Hill Lodge, amazingly spot on time as agreed with our hosts Eddie and Lorna Kirkland, who are members of the John Clare

Society and proudly display not one but two plaques commemorating John Clare's stay at this house. Eddie welcomed us with some warm words — he's especially proud of his success in rearing rare breeds of birds, particularly songsters and the wild fowl that feature on his ornamental lake. We were allowed a circular tour around the house and grounds, which have been impressively and expensively reinstated — the house had been allowed to deteriorate by previous owners. The main body of the house is exactly as John Clare would have remembered it. All this time the cameras and mobile phones were flashing away.

Last and not least, thanks again, Eddie and Lorna, for allowing us to invade your private home and ornamental grounds, including the renovated Victorian folly, 'the catacombs', which aroused a lot of interest.

Pete Relph

Spellings: Please note that 'High Beech' and 'High Beach', 'Lippets Hill', 'Lippits Hill' (and indeed 'Leopards Hill') are all, or have all been, in use. In choosing a particular form here, we are not making any claim to authority or priority.

Photographs: The credits have become detached from the two photographs of Lippets Hill Lodge. If the photographer(s) will make themselves known to the editor, he will happily acknowledge them in the next Newsletter.

JOHN CLARE JOURNAL ON-LINE

As announced in the *Newsletter* for July 2016, Simon Kövesi, the Editor of the John Clare Society *Journal*, has been busy working to make all the back numbers of the *Journal* more than five years old available free on-line. The 30 issues now available amount to the single most significant collection of Clare criticism and commentary ever published. This of course should be very useful in widening interest about Clare among students and academics, and it will also enable members to fill some of the gaps in their reading.

Possibly the simplest way to access the collection is to go to 'Google books' and then type 'John Clare Society Journal' into the search box.

If you want to search for a specific term or issue, you are best using the Advanced Search, here:

https://books.google.com/advanced_book_search

Printed copies of many of the past issues of the *Journal* are still available from John Clare Society Sales, although their numbers are decreasing.

BOOK REVIEW:

Mike Sharpe, *Getting There: Late Poems*

Small Press Publishing, 2016, 52pp. £7.

The first newsletter I edited (June 2007) included my review of Mike Sharpe's 2006 collection of poems, *Almost*. Now, nearly ten years later, I'm delighted to review his latest volume, a booklet of 40 poems, beautifully printed by the Glasgow Print and Design Centre. It is designed and typeset by Gerry Cambridge with a note at the end on the type. Mike's father was, I recall, a printer — and the elegant presentation of the poems certainly adds to the pleasure of reading this volume.

The poetry itself makes an immediate appeal to the visual sense: in 'Plumstone Mountain' we see a murmuration of starlings 'brushing patterns' in the sky, and 'Storm' describes the wild buffeting of the trees. None of the poems make specific reference to Clare but, like Clare, Mike is an acute and sensitive observer of the natural scene, not simply making pictures in words, but ever aware of the intertwining of the human and the natural worlds. Sometimes it is a very small and apparently trivial detail that catches his attention — a moth settling on a sleeve, for instance ('Angle Shades'); sometimes it is a larger phenomenon, like the flooded fields ('Water Meadows') to which the seagulls adapt more easily than he does.

Death hovers over this volume: a lamb dead in the snow ('Vertebrae'), a still-born calf ('Still Birth'), a hawk diving for a shrew ('Quarry'). A poem about falling sycamore leaves that the poet sweeps up 'for burying' is followed by one about digging that ends with the reflection, 'I know I'm digging into what I shall become'. But the poems are concerned too with life and growth: how 'Kate' 'soaredfar beyond/my small imagining', how 'Steven' has found a way of declaring just who he is, untrammelled by the past.

Two Epithalamions speak of the love which nourishes and holds couples, young and old, together, and the final poem 'on my Eightieth Birthday', is a tribute to his family: 'It is their accomplishment to crown my retrospective show'. It brings to an end a volume imbued with the sense of a life lived in love.

Valerie Pedlar

Order from the author at Ffynnon Ddewi, Wolfscastle, Haverfordwest, Pembrokeshire, Wales SA62 5NS. Price £7, including postage in UK.



THE MISTAKE

I say to him, "It is impossible for any man,
Any scholar, any machine, to transcribe
Anything without ever making a mistake.
Humankind is imperfect. That is our nature,
And God intended that it should be so."

The original, written by the poet himself,
Inspired by God, is also imperfect.
Trying to be true to the inspiration
Is only trying. I cross something out
Because it is not true to God's inspiration.
I say that the goose is 'waddling'
Instead of 'gadding', because 'gadding'
Is overdoing it. It's banal;
And the alliteration is unnecessary.
When I read it again the word seemed
To be 'gilladdling'. "What brilliance!"
I said to myself, and the alliteration
So true to the 'geese'. I was amazed
By the poet's inventiveness,
And it took me some time to retreat
From such genius to the mundane.

If God does not have accidents,
How did he have the discovery,
The glorious revelation of accident?
Surely God must have what we have,
In Spades?

"You are going the wrong way
About this," my Indian friend Ahsan says.
"God foreknows all and cannot make mistakes.
Your bible, whichever it is, makes mistakes,
But not the Koran. Mohammed saw
The mistakes and corrected them,
Because they were not God's mistakes
But the mistakes of Matthew, Mark,
Luke, John, Isaiah and Moses, etc."

I told him a story about the Sunday
When the lesson was taken from St. Matthew,
About the woman who was driving
The disciples crazy with her pestering.
"Please, speak to her!" they said to Jesus,
"She's driving us nuts." So he did.
"What do you want from me?" he said,
And she replied, "Teacher, I need your help."
She was not a Hebrew, and Jesus told her:
"It is wrong to take the bread intended

For the children, and give it to the dogs."
"But," said she, "even the dogs may catch
The crumbs from their master's table."

And God became wiser, taught by a woman,
And not even a Jewish woman at that.
Being God, of course, he knew that her daughter
Was dying. "Go home, your daughter
Is healed."

That Sunday I learned my lesson.
God can make a mistake and be corrected.
Thank God!

Eric H Robinson

JOHN CLARE: Landscape and Learning University of Northampton 11 November 2016

A roomful of environmental, musical, literary and artistic enthusiasts, all brought together by a common interest in John Clare, met at Northampton University on 11th November for a day of short presentations and discussions organized by JCS President Carry Akroyd and Charles Bennett, Associate Professor in the Department of English and Creative Writing at Northampton.

Carry Akroyd started the day telling us about, 'Found in the Fields', her touring show of visual images around lines taken from John Clare. She was followed by Jeff Ollerton, Professor of Biodiversity in the Department of Environmental Science, who explained how species of bumble bee could be identified as present in the poetry of Clare, giving a valuable insight into species distribution and decline when compared with modern findings from the Helpston area.

From the JCS Committee, Erin Lafford ('Clare and Weather') and Stephen Sullivan ('The Nightingale's Nest') gave more traditional 'close readings' and, after a very good student canteen lunch, the afternoon session was introduced by Clare Abbatt and Andrew Castley of the Big Fiddle Band, with music from Clare's collection, which brought us back to the matter in hand.

Christy Edwall, from New College, Oxford, considered John Clare's Sonnets, and Charles Bennett ('Pairings and Comparings') placed six of his own poems in parallel with six by Clare to show the creative energy of language and location.

The final session was given by Professor John Goodridge, who took us through 'Martinmass', an earlier version of 'St Martin's Eve', appropriately for 11th November, reminding us that this was a time for children working away to return home to their families, and was also the day for the slaughtering of cattle and pigs for the winter.

Our day involved neither but we enjoyed a day of wide ranging topics that produced some equally interesting discussion.

Mavis Leverington

2016 AT THE JOHN CLARE COTTAGE

Thanks to the support of a great team of volunteers, the Cottage and Café continued to be open on Friday, Saturday and Monday for general visiting and it is planned that this will continue into 2017.

Operating in this way allowed us to offer the Cottage for private group visits — of which we had a significant number — during the other days. The societies visiting during the year included poets, writing groups and other people interested in the works of John Clare and how he lived. We also had some school visits, the largest of which was 53 pupils from Oakham; for this group we had the help of Mavis Leverington.

Music events continued to be a major part of the events put on at the Cottage. Our regular monthly Acoustic Café, in conjunction with St Botolph's church, continues to be well supported. We also held Jazz and Blues evenings. Our final musical event was of songs from the Great American Song Book with the Meena Lee Quartet.

The outdoor theatre group, The Pantaloons, proved to be very popular with their versions of *Gulliver's Travels* and the *Canterbury Tales*. In 2017 they are returning to the Cottage with *A Midsummer's Night Dream*.

Arts and crafts events were well supported. We had a series of Art Workshops in the Cottage, led by local artists Heather Mizen and Sally Hammerton. These Workshops allowed people to create work in the unique environment of the Cottage and the gardens. Our exhibitions of different artists in the Café continued to bring people to the Cottage and the schedule for 2017 is already planned. Our open crafts day in August proved to be a great success with many visitors.

Thanks to our team of volunteers in the gardens there was a good display of flowers and vegetables in the Cottage Garden. The Chelsea Garden has now become established and is a very pleasant area to walk around. These gardens will continue to be maintained and developed.

We are putting the 2017 events programme together and details will be released on our website — www.clarecottage.org.

We look forward to seeing you at the Cottage.

David Dykes



Blues Night at the John Clare Cottage

© TracyLouise Photos



The Pantaloons with The Canterbury Tales.

John Clare Trust

CENTRE FOR JOHN CLARE STUDIES

The next meeting of the Centre for John Clare Studies discussion group is planned for Tuesday 21 February, 1–2pm, in Finella, Queens' Road, Cambridge CB3 9AH.*

All are very welcome. You are encouraged to bring your lunch; drinks will be provided. It is suggested that you should contact the group at cjcs@english.cam.ac.uk to register your interest and allow for any changes of programme.

The programme for the remainder of the academic year is as follows:

21 Feb 2017 Richard Hunt

2 May 2017 Corinna Russell

6 June 2017 Anne Secord

*Finella is a large, pinky-orange building on Queens' Road (i.e. along 'The Backs'). The gateway to the building (which is set back slightly from the road) is between Sidgwick Avenue and West Road. Metered parking is available on Queens' Road, West Road and Sidgwick Avenue, and the new 'Universal' bus between the Railway Station and Madingley Road Park and Ride stops at the University Library on West Road; all of these are a short walk from Finella. A location map can be found at <http://map.cam.ac.uk/Finella#52.201702,0.111794,15>.

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

SALES ORDER FORM

FEBRUARY 2017



The John Clare Society, founded in 1981, publishes books, CDs, DVDs, pamphlets and postcards, an annual Journal and a members' newsletter every four months.

Please support our activities by purchasing from this catalogue. Each sale helps the society to continue our work.

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B20113	<i>John Clare, The Trespasser</i> by John Goodridge & R.K.R. Thornton	£6.99	75g
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JOHN CLARE SOCIETY YEAR JOURNALS

1982 - 2016	£4 for each year inc p&p
Journal Index (1982-2011)	£0.50 inc p&p

MISCELLANEOUS

M20071	<i>In Clare's Footsteps</i> . Coloured map of Helpston with notes. Unlaminated folded A5	£0.30	5g
M20092	John Clare leather bookmark, gold on dark green.	£2	10g
M20031	JCS gummed labels 100 labels in pack.	£1	150g
M20028	High quality cream cotton tea towel with scenes from Helpston.	£3	50g
M20001	John Clare Perpetual Calendar	£2	150g

DVDs and CDs

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