



# The John Clare & Society

Newsletter no. 130

June 2017



# THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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## Notice of ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the John Clare Society will take place on Saturday 15 July 2017 at 10.15 am in St Botolph's Church, Helpston. All members and those attending the Festival are cordially invited.

## EDITORIAL

Most of our members will know the statue by Peter Edwards and Gay Galsworthy in the courtyard of the John Clare Cottage in Helpston, in which a determined John Clare, wearing a coat many sizes too large for him, thrusts aside a notice saying 'Keep Out'. We know how intensely Clare felt that *On paths to freedom & to childhood dear / A board sticks up to notice 'no road here'* and a reading of John Goodridge and Kelsey Thornton's recently-published *John Clare, the Trespasser* will remind us how his writings are "full of images of land boundaries, and of the main functions of boundaries, to enclose and exclude, to mark territory and to limit free movement."



Photo: Stephen Sullivan

In England and Wales we have a network of footpaths, bridleways and tracks providing our access to the countryside. Some of these routes are statutory Rights of Way, some are by permission of the landowner, and some are of an undetermined, contentious or ambiguous status. It sometimes happens that a route may be well-marked and firmly established, but that part way along it may disappear from the definitive map. With the intention of giving certainty to landowners about the status and precise nature of the routes that exist on their land, and of course giving security to those who wish to use these routes, the government intends to close the definitive maps to the inclusion of any further 'historic' paths, as from 1 January 2026. This will have the effect of extinguishing any right of way that might exist on

any path, or part of any path, that is not included in the definitive maps by that date. It is therefore of vital importance to ensure that all such routes which are useful or may be of potential use in the future should be claimed and entered properly upon the definitive map before that date.

You can obtain further information from environmental organisations such as the Open Spaces Society or from your County Council's website, where you can arrange to inspect the definitive map and discover how to begin the complicated process of adding to it or correcting it. Please think about the routes that you use in the countryside, and make sure that their status has been established before 2026.

They may otherwise be suddenly and irretrievably lost.

We are always looking out for members to join the Committee and to take an active role in the Festival and in the life of the Society. Everyone from car parking stewards to computer programmers and designers will be welcomed, and several members of the current Committee have expressed their wish to step back from their activities. If you feel that you would like to help, in whatever kind of role, do please get in touch with Valerie Pedlar or any Committee member.

**Stephen Sullivan**

## **JOHN CLARE FESTIVAL Midsummer Cushions**

Our much-loved Midsummer Cushion ceremony, when we present prizes to our young poets, has been judged for many years by Pauline and Rodney Lines, who have decided to step down. It has been my privilege to help them for the past two years and they have our sincere thanks for their hard work and dedication. (I will be introducing our new judges at the Festival.)

**Mavis Leverington**

## **MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL INVITATION**

Our membership year goes from 1 July to 30 June, and therefore includes the Journal, which will again be posted to members in early July, before the Festival. You will receive electronic copies of the Newsletters (by email) unless you tick the box on the renewal form to request a print copy. **Please keep us informed of any change of email address.**

The subscription rates are £15 for individuals, £20 for joint membership, and £5 for students. As you know, 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 may renew your annual subscription at the Festival, but otherwise please complete the form enclosed with this Newsletter and send it to me with your cheque as soon as possible.

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

John Handley, Wilmslow  
Susan Lawson, Corby  
John S Smith, Welwyn Garden City  
Kate Merrell, Huntingdon  
Elaine Wisdom, Saltburn  
Alison Wallace, Watford  
Mike Smith, Howden, East Yorkshire  
Richard Ough, Harpenden  
Kelvin Ravenscroft, Whalley Range, Manchester  
Roy & Lois Thwaites, Ludlow  
Bob Horne, Lightcliffe, Halifax

*May 2017*

**Robert Heyes**  
**Membership Secretary**

# THE 2017 JOHN CLARE SOCIETY FESTIVAL

14-16 July

## *Influences on John Clare*

**As we have done for several years now, we are using the church for the Annual General Meeting, talks and the concert. The stalls will be mostly in Botolph's Barn with a couple on the green near the Memorial. The field opposite the school will be used for parking. There will also be limited parking in the car park at the Exeter Arms. Disabled parking only will be allowed outside the church.**

### **Friday 14 July**

The Midsummer Cushions ceremony will once again take place at **1.30 p.m.** 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 as she did so well last year. 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 a folk music session in the Bluebell pub on the Friday evening at **8.00 p.m.** where there will be drinks and light refreshments available.

### **Saturday 15 July**

On the Saturday there will be coffee and tea available at the Bluebell pub from **9.30 a.m.** and in the Cottage from 10.00 a.m. Botolph's Barn will be open from 9.30 a.m. with various stalls to include three book stalls. We have some old farm implements on display on the village green, and a bee-keeping display. The Langdyke Trust will display information about Roman Helpston. The Sales stall this year will, we hope, be in the courtyard, 1a West Street; the Membership, Programme and Ticket stall will be at the back of the church.

**At 10.15 a.m.** there will be the AGM 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 again be using it for talks, poetry readings and the evening concert. Later in the morning our Presidential Address will be given by Carry Akroyd.

Lunches will be available in the Village Hall and the Cottage. We have Morris dancing around the village and a recorder group will be playing outside during the lunch break. The Annakinn Gallery will be open as usual

**At 2.00 p.m.**, our Annual Lecture will be given by John Goodridge, a long-standing member of the Society. His talk will be based on Robert Bloomfield – a poet who much influenced Clare.

Following the lecture you could meet up with friends for afternoon tea in the Village Hall and there will be two guided walks around Helpston. There will also be an Open Studio/Garden at the back of Helpston House.

**At 4.00 p.m.** There will be the poetry reading session in St Botolph's Church. 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.

**At 6.00 p.m.**, the Concert this year is given by the folk group – Decent Scrapers. The concert will be a performance of music and readings from the life of

John Clare, who described himself as “a desent scraper”. You can read more about the group at [johnclaremusic.com](http://johnclaremusic.com). Tickets will be on sale at the Festival at £5.00 each.

### **Sunday 16 July**

We will be having the usual Clare-related church service at **10.45 a.m.** and we will finish the Festival with a glass of wine and our annual toast to John Clare!

**Sue Holgate, Festival Organiser**

### **FRIENDS OF THE FESTIVAL, 2017**

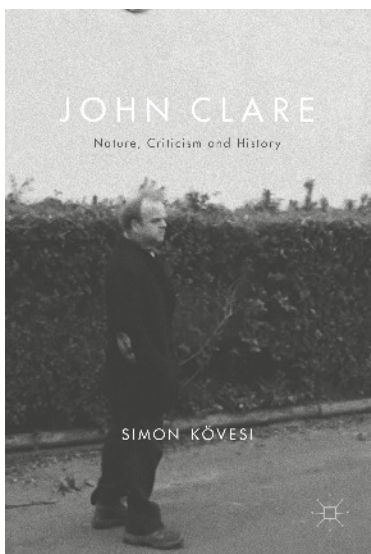
As most of you will know, this is an annual scheme, run in support of our July Festival in Helpston. For £8, you get an advance copy of the programme, a lovely poetry pack, and priority booking for the Saturday early evening concert (which, this year, will be The Decent Scrapers). The pack is posted out to you before the Festival. Even if you are not coming to the Festival, you might like to subscribe in order to receive the programme (which is more than a mere programme of events) and poetry pack.

The support we receive via this scheme is greatly appreciated – especially if you are able to Gift Aid it. Please consider subscribing, and we look forward to seeing you at the Festival.

The application form is included with this Newsletter.

**Valerie Pedlar**

### **JOHN CLARE: Nature, Criticism and History** by Simon Kövesi. Palgrave Macmillan 978-0-230-27787-8 £66.99.



This book investigates what it is that makes John Clare’s poetic vision so unique, and asks how we use to Clare to contemporary ends. It explores much of the criticism that has appeared in response to his life and work, and asks hard questions about the modes and motivations of critics and editors. Clare is increasingly regarded as having been an environmentalist long before the word appeared; this book investigates whether this ‘green’ rush to place him as a radical proto-ecologist does any disservice to his complex positions in relation to social class, work, agriculture, poverty and women. This book attempts to unlock Clare’s own theorisations and practices of what we might now call an ‘ecological consciousness’, and works out how an ‘ecocentric’ mode might relate to that of other Romantic poets. Finally, this book asks how we might treat Clare as our contemporary while still being attentive to the peculiarities of his unique historical circumstances.



*Photo: Peter Leverington*

## **Sale of BOOKS ON JOHN CLARE from the Library of Peter Moyse**

Peter Moyse, former Vice-President of the John Clare Society, bequeathed his collection of Clare-related books to the Society and, as promised in the last Newsletter, these are now being offered for sale to JCS Members.

In order to make the sale as equitable as possible, members are invited to apply by post (without sending any payment) for the books that they wish to buy. Applications will be opened at random on 2 July. You will find the conditions of the sale set out on the next page. Please note in particular that it will not be possible for the Sales department to answer any queries or enquiries about the sale or the individual books.

The books are listed and priced on the two pages following the Conditions. We hope you will agree that the prices are more than reasonable. The sale is open only to members of the John Clare Society.



## **DONATED BOOKS - CONDITIONS OF SALE:**

- 1. SOCIETY MEMBERS wishing to purchase at the listed sale price, one or more of Peter Moyses's donated books, please send by post a written note of your order to Mavis Leverington the society sales officer at the address below, quoting the book reference number(s) giving your name, postal address and e-mail (or telephone number if necessary). Mark the front of your envelope "Peter Moyses books". The closing date for receipt of orders is 1 July 2017.**
2. The conditions of the sale are such that members may find it advantageous to send a separate posted note for each order, but multiple orders listed in one note will be considered and accepted if at the listed price.
3. DO NOT SEND MONEY or any form of payment at this stage.
4. It will not be possible to deal with any queries or enquiries before 1 July. All books are pre-owned by the John Clare Society and are offered in good faith to members at a fair price that the Society believe reflects their good condition and rarity. Some of the books are signed by their authors.
5. Only posted orders received by the closing date will be opened at random on July 2 by the JCS sales officer. In all cases the first opened posted order for each book that meets the listed sale price shall be deemed to be successful.
6. Mavis Leverington will contact successful buyers by e-mail to arrange payment to the John Clare Society either by cheque or bank transfer. Prompt payments to be made if by cheque to the JCS sales officer or into the bank no later than 8 July so orders can be dispatched. Cheques should be made out to the John Clare Society.
7. It will not be possible to confirm members' unsuccessful orders, so if you have not been contacted by 8 July, please assume your order has not been successful. Please do not telephone as all our workers are volunteers and will be busy preparing for the forthcoming JCS festival.
8. Posted orders received a few days after 1 July may be accepted if any listed books remain unsold.
9. The books that have not been sold by July 8 may be available for inspection and purchase at the forthcoming JCS festival in Helpston by contacting Mavis Leverington at the Society sale stall.
10. The listed prices do not include postage & packing. To cover this an additional cost of £2 will be added to the purchase price of each book. If you are successful in buying a rare or more expensive book, you may wish to consider recorded delivery or similar, in which case the Society would ask that you pay all the additional delivery charges.

**Mavis Leverington, John Clare Society Sales Officer, 36 Peakirk Road,  
Glinton, Peterborough PE6 7LT**  
e-mail address [mavisleverington@aol.com](mailto:mavisleverington@aol.com)

## BOOKS FOR SALE DONATED TO THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY BY THE LATE PETER MOYSE

All the books are used copies and in good condition. Books are hardback unless listed as paperback (PB).

### **1.. MISCELLANEOUS**

						<b><i>Sale price (£)</i></b>
1.1	EPPING FOREST	William Addison	1945	Literary Association		2
1.2	THE POET'S WIFE	Judith Allnatt	2010	Doubleday		2
1.3.	KEATS' PUBLISHER	a memoir of John Taylor	1975	Edmund Blunden	Augustus Kelly	10
1.4	A PUBLISHER AND HIS CIRCLE	the life of John Taylor	1972	Tim Chilcott	Routledge	5
1.5	THE QUICKENING MAZE	Adam Foulds	2009	Jonathan Cape		2
1.6	A WANDERER in NORTHAMPTONSHIRE	George Harrison	1946	Mitre Press		10
1.7	A NORTHAMPTONSHIRE GARLAND	Trevor Hold	1989	Northamptonshire libraries		5
1.8	FOR JOHN CLARE	John Lucas	1997	John Clare Society	PB	5
1.9	THE FIRST FIFTY YEARS	1955	Kettering Naturalist Society		PB	10
1.10	GREENHORN	A twentieth century Childhood	1973	Anne Tibble	Routledge	2
1.11	THE SEASONS	James Thomson	Illustrated 1859 edition		James Nisbit Co	10
1.12	THE ENGLISH PATH	Kim Taplin	1979	Boydell Press		2
1.13	THE POET and the LANDSCAPE	Andrew Young	1962	R Hart-Davis		2

### **2. BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM**

2.1	ITCHING AFTER RHYME	Arnold Clay	2000	Parapress		10
2.2	JOHN CLARE his life in poetry	Patricia Barnard	2007	Pipers Ash	PB	5
2.3	THE IDEA OF LANDSCAPE and Sense of Place	John Barrell	1972	Cambridge Press		10
2.4	TALKING ABOUT JOHN CLARE	Ronald Blythe	1999	Trent	PB	15
2.5	JOHN CLARE THE PEASANT POET	Arnold Clay	1999	Jet Set Printing	PB	2
2.6	JOHN CLARE the poet and the Place	Peter Moyse	1993	Crossberry Press	PB	10
2.7	JOHN CLARE the poet and the Place	Peter Moyse	1999	Crossberry Press	PB	5
2.8	JOHN CLARE THE LIVING YEAR 1841	Tim Chilcott	1993	Trent	PB	2
2.9	JOHN CLARE & Picturesque Landscape	Timothy Brownlow	1983	Clarendon		10
2.10	JOHN CLARE and the folk tradition	George Deacon	1983	Sinclair Brown		10
2.11	JOHN CLARE and the Place of Poetry	Mina Gorji	2008	Liverpool Press		5
2.12	JOHN CLARE AND COMMUNITY	John Goodridge	2013	Cambridge Press		10
2.13	THE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT	John Goodridge	1994	JCS & M Grainger Memorial Trust	PB	5
2.14	JOHN CLARE in CONTEXT	Haughton, Philips, Summerfield		Cambridge Press		10
2.15	THE LIFE OF JOHN CLARE 1964	Frederick Martin	1964	Frank Cass		15
2.16	FOUR FOREST YEARS	Pete Relph	2006	Ben Hyde	PB	2
2.16	A RIGHT TO SONG	1982	Edward Storey	Methuen		20
2.17	CLARE THE CRITICAL HERITAGE	1973	Mark Storey	Routledge		10
2.18	JOHN CLARE HIS LIFE & POETRY	1954	John and Anne Tibble	Heinemann	library copy	15
2.19	GREEN SHADOWS	The life of John Clare	1951	June Wilson	Hoddle & Stoughton	5
2.20	JOHN CLARE	1994	John Lucas	Northcote House	PB	2
2.21	JOHN CLARE	2003	Jonathan Bate	Picadour	PB	5
2.22	JOHN CLARE selected poems	2004	Jonathan Bate	Faber	PB	5
3.23	THE POETRY OF JOHN CLARE	1974	Mark Storey	Macmillan		5

### **3. POETRY & OTHER WORKS**

3.1	JOHN CLARE POEMS chiefly from manuscript	1920	signed Edmund Blunden	Cobden		30
3.2	SELECTED POEMS OF JOHN CLARE	centenary edition	1964	Leonard Clark	Arnold	5
3.3	JOHN CLARE POEMS selected by Paul Farley	2007	Faber		PB	2
3.4	THE WORKS OF JOHN CLARE	Wordsworth Poetry Library	1995		PB	2
3.5	JOHN CLARE selected poems	1968	Elaine Feinstein	UTP publisher		15
3.6	DWELLERS IN THE WOODS	two poems illustrated	1967	Harold Goodwin	Macmillan	5
3.7	SELECTED POEMS OF JOHN CLARE	1978	James Reeves	Heinemann	PB	2

3.9	JOHN CLARE the Oxford Authors	1984	Eric Robinson & David Powell	Oxford Press	15
3.10	JOHN CLARE the Oxford Authors	1984 ed.	Eric Robinson & D Powell	Oxford Press	PB 5
3.11	VOLS 1&2 THE EARLY POEMS OF JOHN CLARE 1804 -1822		CLARENDON PRESS	1989	
	Eric Robinson & David Powell		complete set of two volumes		100
3.12	VOLS 1-5 JOHN CLARE POEMS MIDDLE PERIOD 1822 -1837		CLARENDON PRESS	1998 - 2003	
	Eric Robinson & David Powell		complete set of five volumes		400
3.13	VOLS 1&2 THE LATER POEMS OF JOHN CLARE 1837 -1864		CLARENDON PRESS	1985	
	Eric Robinson & David Powell		complete set of two volumes		100
3.14	CLARE SELECTED POEMS AND PROSE	1975	Eric Robinson & G Summerfield	Oxford	PB 5
3.15	SELECTED POEMS & PROSE JOHN CLARE	1988	Eric Robinson & G Summerfield		PB 5
3.16	THE MIDSUMMER CUSHION	1979	Anne Tibble & RKR Thornton	Mid Northumberland Arts	10
3.17	THE RURAL MUSE poems by John Clare	1982	RKR Thornton	Mid Northumberland Arts	10
3.18	THE PARISH	1985	Eric Robinson	Viking	5
3.19	THE PARISH	1986	Eric Robinson	Penguin	PB 2
3.20	THE SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR	1973	Eric Robinson & Geoffrey Summerfield	Oxford	PB 5
3.21	THE SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR	1983	Eric Robinson & Geoffrey Summerfield	Oxford	PB 5
3.22	JOHN CLARE edited by RKR Thornton		Everyman		PB 2
3.24	JOHN CLARE SELECTED POEMS	1975	JW & Anne Tibble	Everyman	library copy 5
3.25	VOLS 1&2 THE POEMS OF JOHN CLARE	1935	JW Tibble	set of two volumes	Dent 50
3.26	JOHN CLARE FLOWER POEMS	2001	Simon Kovesi	M & C Services	PB 10
3.27	LIFE AND WORKS OF JOHN CLARE	1966	Dr. Xenophontos	M & C Nichols	PB 2
3.28	JOHN CLARE BIRDS	1982	Eric Robinson & Richard Fitter	Oxford Press	15
3.29	BIRDS NEST POEMS by JOHN CLARE	1973		Northumberland Arts group	10
3.30	BIRD POEMS	1980	Peter Levi engraving Thomas Bewick	Folio edition in slip case.	15
3.31	THE WOOD IS SWEET chosen by David Powell	1971	Bodley Head	Hardback edition	15
3.32	JOHN CLARE SELECTED POETRY & PROSE	1986	Merryn & Raymond Williams	Methuen	PB 5

#### **4. PROSE**

4.1	JOHN CLARE'S AUTOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS	1983	Eric Robinson	Oxford Press	5
4.2	JOHN CLARE'S AUTOGRAPHICAL WRITINGS	1983	Eric Robinson	Oxford Press	PB 3
4.3	A DESCRIPTIVE CATALOGUE John Clare	1973	Peterborough Museum	Margaret Grainger	PB 5
4.4	THE LETTERS JOHN CLARE	1951	JW & ANNE TIBBLE	Routledge	15
4.5	JOHN CLARE the Journals & the journey from Essex	1980	Anne Tibble	Carcenet	10
4.6	THE SONG OF SUMMER	2001	John Mackintosh	Laverlock Press	PB 2
4.7	JOHN CLARE VERSES FOR HIS CHILDREN	1981	Eric Robinson & Nicholas Parry	Tern Press	50
4.8	THE NATURAL HISTORY PROSE WRITINGS of John Clare	1983	Margaret Grainger	Clarendon	70
4.9	THE PROSE OF JOHN CLARE	1970	JW & Anne Tibble	Routledge	10
4.10	THE LETTERS OF JOHN CLARE edited by Mark Storey	1985		CLARENDON PRESS	50

#### **5. JOHN CLARE CARCANET PAPERBACK BOOKS**

5.1	THE MIDSUMMER CUSHION	1990			10
5.2	BY HIMSELF	1996			10
5.3	COTTAGE TALES	1993			10
5.4	NORTHBOROUGH SONNETS	1995			5
5.5	THE SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR	2006			5

Mavis Leverington –John Clare Society Sales Officer      mavisleverington@aol.com

## APRIL

I saw into the eye of the month with its moist buds  
not quite contained on quivering branches  
and an embroidered sky beyond white mazes  
of yellow-cream green-shining almost-leaves  
mere prickings spinning webs with sunlight  
and the wild plum tree hazy with dabs of thick leaf.

A crazy Crow clowned an April trick  
balancing a leg a wing a hooded beak  
on one slender single-budded branch  
bending low with him and springing up  
against the sheer cliff-top blue  
as the carrion trampolines and grinned gleaming.

Sky is all-at-once a whipped and curling ice-cream sea  
with wave-tops flashing peaking into one another  
and down here grass reflects its silver in these bending blades  
that goldfinches skim on the surface light  
and carry its message in their joy lifting and flowing.

April's music laced with wings rejoices in its murmurings  
it is all surprises at the heart of it, is a gift for us  
an unfolding of the ceaseless year that is happening again.

I tasted April sharp and clear  
a spring of a day bubbling out of the gill  
it wet my lips filled my cold throat and flowed  
like light lapping tree-tops fresh through me  
and my toes shot sparks in the icy dew:  
in the warming sun my skin became April.

**Jean Whitfield, 1931-1984**

From her illustrated, collected poems *Moments* (1985)  
Reprinted with permission of Bakery Press

JCS member David Smith has recommended Jean Whitfield's poems to readers of John Clare. Her keen observations of her surroundings and nature merit a wider audience and it is perhaps not a surprise to learn that Clare was "a great hero" to her. The poems are not widely-known; *Moments* was a posthumous publication, although Jean did have a continuing input into its design. It was a limited edition of 500 copies and the sole publication of Bakery Press, but it has recently been accepted by the National Poetry Library. You can find more poems by Jean Whitfield, and others, on David's blog: [poetryparc.co.uk](http://poetryparc.co.uk). I should like to thank David for obtaining permission for this reprint.

**Stephen Sullivan**



Photo: Peter Moyse

## **MOLLY MAHOOD: An Appreciation**

Molly Mahood died peacefully on Tuesday 14<sup>th</sup> February 2017, aged 97, with her niece Janet Wallace reading John Clare's poetry to her.

Despite her advanced years, Molly's most recent book, *A John Clare Flora*, published in November 2016, has been well received by those interested in John Clare's botany and poetry enthusiasts alike. Her thorough research, helped by Philip Oswald, resulted in a high degree of accuracy. The cover picture was taken by Bridget Smith, a JC Society member who died in December 2014.

Professor Emeritus of English Literature, University of Kent, Canterbury, Molly was originally a Shakespearean scholar, with an interest in third world literature.

A transcript from a Tanzanian magazine called *The Citizen*, November 2016, by Prof. Austin Bukonya, sums up her early achievements: "Molly Mahood, or MMM as we called her, was a dazzling Anglo-Irish woman who taught in Africa in the 'golden age' of the African literary renaissance in the 1960s."

On her retirement Molly undertook a biology degree, and thereafter combined her interests in literature and botany with the publication of *The Poet as Botanist*, which had an important chapter on John Clare, followed by *A John Clare Flora*. I believe she had another botanical project on her mind but time ran out.

**Jean Stowe 23.4.17**

## Our memories of Molly Mahood

The John Clare Society lost one of its most distinguished members with the death of Molly Mahood. Her funeral took place at the Clayton Wood natural burial ground, close to her home in Hurstpierpoint. The large number of people present testified to the breadth of Molly's interests, and the manifest love and respect in which she was held. The service was, unusually, conducted according to the Book of Common Prayer. As her coffin was lowered into the ground, it was covered with a spectacularly beautiful African tapestry, which recalled Molly's many years in Africa, where her students ranged from Robert Mugabe, with whom she read the metaphysical poets, to such giants of African literature as Chinua Achebe and the Nobel Prize winner, Wole Soyinka. Former colleagues from the University of Kent, Canterbury were also present, recalling her time as a professor at the then new university.

We will treasure the memory of our last visit to Molly in her beautiful home, looking out across the valley to the South Downs. After showing us her usual hospitality, Molly took us to Wolstonbury Hill to look for orchids. We left the car at the foot of the hill and Molly strode ahead. Although she was already well into her nineties, and we were both more than twenty years younger than her, we struggled to keep up. We returned home with a gift of delicious rhubarb from her garden.

**Robert Heyes and Susan Savva**

## SALES REPORT

A JOHN CLARE FLORA

M. M. MAHOOD



  
TRENT EDITIONS

We are very pleased to add Molly Mahood's *A John Clare Flora* to our sales list. It is an attractive illustrated soft cover book published by Trent Editions. Professor Mahood's deep knowledge of John Clare's work and her respect for his love and knowledge of his local flora shines out of the book. It is both a scholarly book, fully indexed by scientific and common names, and at the same time a fascinating collection of anecdotes concerning where and when John Clare found each plant.

We are also pleased to add two more of the works edited by Roger Rowe from the research he and Professor Eric Robinson have been busy with in the Peterborough Archives. *Drinking with John Clare* is a collection of his drinking poems, no. 1 in a chapbook series. *Memoirs of Uncle Barnaby* (the "Lost Novel") consists of a collection of stories, essays and letters

woven together.

Peter Moyses gifted a collection of John Clare-related books to the Society as part of his generous legacy. As promised, the list of books and the terms and conditions of their sale are included with this newsletter.

**Mavis Leverington**

## April the Ninth

6.45 a.m. Sun just up, sky blue and gold.  
I rest my bicycle against the back of a bench  
next to Emily Jane Lister, 'Beloved wife...'  
Across Till Carr Lane Chris Green's cattle  
catch the warmth as the last of a light mist  
lifts from the valley below. Birds everywhere,  
soaking the air with their songs of spring.

From the top of an oak a woodpigeon,  
still as the windless morning,  
weighs up the world. An early bee  
forages amongst last year's leaves.  
Drum roll of a distant woodpecker.

Pale yellow primroses, keys of Heaven,  
flower of love, huddle on the graves  
of Sam Watkinson and his neighbours.  
Jackdaws carry twigs to the top of the bell tower.  
Daffodils, that die on Easter Day, glow  
against the dewy grass's glossy green.

A duet of wrens defends the headstone  
of Samuel Baines. Five crows float by.  
From all corners a chorus of blackbirds  
celebrates the sun's slow resurrection  
further north each morning.  
A lengthening of light:  
triumph, again, of day over night.

**Bob Horne**

New JCS member Bob Horne lives in Lightcliffe, near Halifax. The graveyard of St Matthew's Old Church (demolished 1973, although the tower still stands) is now being looked after by a group of local people, the Friends of St Matthew's Churchyard, whose website is: [www.lightcliffechurchyard.org.uk/](http://www.lightcliffechurchyard.org.uk/). Although it is perhaps a light-hearted gesture, Bob has recently been appointed as Poet in Residence, and has agreed to write a poem per month to be published on the website. Future plans include a reading, with other guest poets, one summer evening, and the eventual publication of a pamphlet. He says that the great lesson that he has learned from John Clare is that "it's always possible to open ourselves to the natural life which surrounds us."

## JOHN PLUMMER'S VISIT TO JOHN CLARE

In July 1864, just over a month after the death of John Clare, a ten-page obituary of the poet appeared in the *St. James Magazine*, written by a John Plummer. Plummer was a fellow poet from Kettering whose *Songs of Labour, Northamptonshire Rambles and Other Poems* had been published in 1860.

In this obituary Plummer gives a short account of a visit that he made to the poet in the Northampton asylum and also some details about the poet's last few months. Apart from two short extracts from the beginning and end of the obituary in Mark Storey's *Clare, the Critical Heritage*, (Routledge, 1973), I do not think the obituary has been reprinted since its first appearance in 1864. Therefore I think that the two extracts below will be of interest to members.

### JOHN CLARE.

Some few months since, we visited the asylum, where we found him in a large and comfortable-looking apartment. He was seated at a window, intently perusing a volume from the library. The window looked out into the garden, and as the sunlight streamed on the poet's features, we could not help noticing how kindly time had dealt with him. His fine, fresh-coloured, and well-formed countenance impressed us much in his favour, an impression which was not decreased by the intimation that he was one of the most harmless and docile patients in the establishment; but it was in vain that we strove to arrest his attention; he merely looked at us with a vacant gaze for a moment, and then went on reading his book. In his lucid moments he showed that he had not lost the power of composition; indeed, many of his most pleasing and touching little poems have been composed whilst in the asylum. In one of them he says,-

"I found the poems in the fields,  
And only wrote them down".

Towards the end of the obituary, following the inclusion of two of Clare's best-known poems, "To John Clare" and "On a Lane in Spring", the following interesting passage occurs:-

Considering that when Clare penned these pieces he had been for eighteen years an inmate of the lunatic asylum, the almost childish love of nature and truth of description is remarkable; but Clare's powers were fast waning, and he again refused to resume his pen. About six months ago, however, he penned a few lines in the old manner, but the attempt only showed the rapid decay of his physical energies. He became too feeble to walk and a wheel-chair was prepared for him, in which he was taken about the grounds attached to the asylum, the last time he visited the garden being on Good Friday in this year. Until within three days of his death he might frequently be found at the window where we first beheld him, and where he would sit for hours silently gazing on the grassy lawn and richly foliaged trees. On the 18<sup>th</sup> of last May, Clare found himself unable, by reason of a paralytic seizure, to leave his bed. The end of

the drama was rapidly approaching. For three days he lingered on, and then died, without a struggle, as if merely going to sleep, – thus, at the age of seventy-four [*sic*], terminating a life in which the glimpses of sunshine were few and far between.

The final short section of the obituary is an interesting account of events after the poet's death :-

After Clare's death, preparations were made for the internment of his body in Helpstone churchyard, in pursuance of the desire repeatedly expressed by him when alive. Intelligence of his death was also forwarded to Mrs Clare, who resided at Northborough; but by some mischance the letter was not received by her until the morning of the day appointed for the funeral. She however, with a son and a daughter, managed to be at the sad ceremony; but it was evident that the sudden shock had completely un-nerved Her. She thought of the happy days, "long, long ago" when poor Clare made her the theme of his simple and unpretending strains, and sang her praise in softly flowing verse. Poor creature! she had long expected the blow, but when the time came, she found it hard to bear. She knew nothing but what was good of her husband, whose domestic virtues afforded the truest test of his guileless and worthy nature. A handsome sepulchral monument is to be erected in Helpston Church, to the memory of the poet; but we trust that, in honouring the dead, the living will not be forgotten, for the widow of Clare has a claim on our sympathy which deserves attention. The cottage at Northborough, in which she resides, still presents the same appearance that it did twenty-two years since, when Clare amused himself with the violin, which yet hangs on the wall, or read the books which are even now placed as he himself placed them before his reason had become clouded with the darkness of insanity. To those who admire an earnest love of nature, expressed in simple yet appropriate language, breathing a pure and reverent spirit, touching from its utter simplicity, the poems of John Clare will always be welcome; and should they be published in a collected shape, there will be few bookshelves on which their presence will be unknown.

It seems as though we have quite a way to go.

**Noel Crack**



## AVIRHYMES

Whip-poor-will  
Lying still  
In the hay  
Through the day;  
Other fowl  
But the owl  
Now do creep  
To their sleep:  
Darkness falls  
Then he calls  
All night long  
On and on,  
Endless tune  
To the moon.  
July dawn  
Heralds morn;  
Suddenly  
Ceases the  
Whip-poor-will.

Just five sad tones expressive of his grief  
As he sits sheltered 'neath a withered leaf,  
With piercing, long-drawn, mournful notes  
The white-throat's music from the maple floats.

When ploughmen their day's work have done  
And evening shadows o'er the fields do creep,  
The Gulls, reflecting still the setting sun  
High homeward speed toward salty sleep,  
Uttering now a happy cry  
As they traverse the darkening sky.

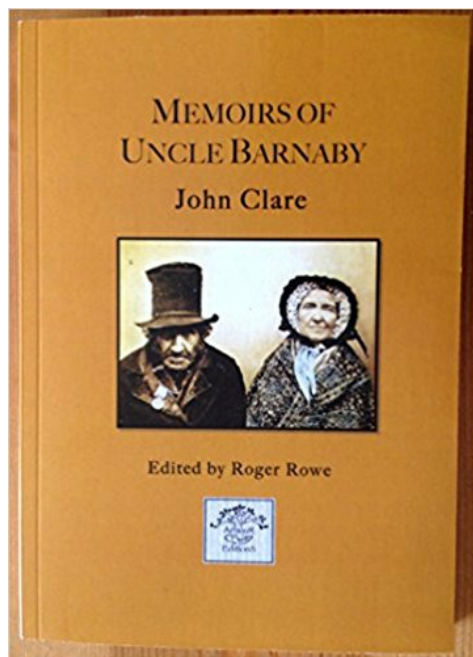
Come morning, once again they'll be  
Leading inland from the sea,  
Their yellow bills for grubs to burrow  
Amid some new-turned clayey furrow.

**DP Chubb**

Peter Chubb has been an RSPB member for many years and has an interest in wild flowers, and admires the accuracy of Clare's observations of natural history. In the "Avirhymes", written in the 1950s, he had the idea of capturing in verse what ornithologists call the "jizz" of a bird. Note that the white-throat of the second poem is the North American sparrow ("maple" is a clue) and not the English warbler. He concedes that readers of these lines will be able to see that he studied Wordsworth for "A" Level.

# MEMOIRS OF UNCLE BARNABY

(Edited by Roger Rowe)  
Arbour Editions (March 2016)



Very few seem to realise that Clare wrote in the novel form, to part of which he gave the title, "Memoirs of Uncle Barnaby". This is the first time that any attempt has been made to bring all the fragments of the novel together. In an effort to create some continuity, we have occasionally split up a continuous passage in Clare's manuscripts into a small number of parts and re-ordered them. We confess that the result is speculative.

One thing that may surprise readers of Clare is how much there is that contributes to these preliminary sketches for a novel, and the number of links that can be made between the fragments. The larger part of the material is concerned with the religion of a village, most likely the village of Helpston. Other themes woven into the narrative are: pretention and social competition; the relationships between professional men, such as clergy and teachers; their relationship with the parishioners;

the distinctions between Church and Chapel, and the charitable customs of the village.

There is no continuous narrative, though at one time there may have been more than we have now. Clare had a number of novels in his library and had read several more. He owned novels by Fielding, Smollett, Sterne, Goldsmith, Hogg and Scott, but he was most influenced in this undertaking by Smollett's *Humphrey Clinker* and Goldsmith's *The Vicar of Wakefield*.

With little doubt the most riveting part of the novel, and certainly the most challenging, is the correspondence between Mrs Lettys and Mrs Hubbelgubbel. Because the language is difficult, we provide a translation. but no translation will give the reader the double meanings that constantly occur, and close reading of these letters is recommended. For example, "mayoral books" or "books of mayoralty", recommended by Mrs Lettys to her son are, of course, books of morality – but also books about imitating the values of a mayor. Similarly "grey matical" does mean "grammatical", but our translation does not provide the reader with the grey matter necessary to understand this use of language.

Clare had already tried his hand at this sort of writing in two letters to Drakard's *Stamford News* as early as 3 August 1821 and 18 January 1824. The first letter is given with a translation, while the second, written in the cockney accent of the 18th and 19th centuries, should not need a translation.

Above all, what we have of the novel shows Clare's intense enjoyment of the English language, spoken and written, educated and rustic, contemporary and historical – and its publication will mean many new entries into the glossaries. The novel (which will be available at the Festival) takes us deep into Clare's world, and makes excellent and amusing reading.

**Professor Eric Robinson**  
**Roger Rowe**

## Available at the Festival

Clare's novel is the fifth Arbour Editions volume produced from material gleaned from the Clare archives. All five will be on sale at the Festival in July.

In parallel with the long editing work on 'Barnaby', I have been working on a series of inexpensive but high quality 'Chapbooks' (32-page paperback books) exploring one aspect or another of Clare's voluminous writings. The first was published in April 2017 and is entitled ***Drinking with John Clare*** in which I collect some of his 'drinking' poems together with a Foreword in which I outline in brief my own theories on why he drank just so much.

The second, ***Helpston's Fountains***, is a collection of Clare's poems relating to the two springs that people of the village relied upon for water, Eastwell and Round Oak springs. It was published in May.

In June I will be publishing ***With the Gypsies***, a collection relating to Clare's many 'gypsy' poems, with a Foreword that seeks to explain why these people have been so reviled.

Each of these Arbour Editions Chapbooks is 32 pages in length with high-quality gloss covers, and all for the price of a coffee, £3.50. My idea is not to make money from this project, but to bring Clare's poetry to a wider audience. They are priced simply for me to break even, and thus to continue the series.

I am hoping in the autumn to produce the 4th and 5th books, the first an exploration of Clare's state of mind in the year of two asylums, 1841, and the second a discussion by Professor Eric Robinson of Clare's recurrent theme of Childhood. The first three Chapbooks will of course be available at the Festival in July at a discount, with all my other titles, and in due course will be available by mail-order from John Clare Sales.

**Roger Rowe**

## IA REDISCOVERED DOCUMENT ON THE DEATH OF MARY JOYCE

The meeting of the Centre for John Clare Studies on 21 February was addressed by Richard Hunt, previously the archivist of the Peterborough Museum John Clare Collection, now Director of Culture at Vivacity, Peterborough. For the first part of his talk he told us about the history of the Peterborough collection, serving as an introduction to the description of the new document in the second half.

In 1864 Joseph Whitaker, the founder of *Whitaker's Almanack*, bought the "rights" to some documents that he obtained from the Clare family. John Taylor of Northampton visited the family for the same purpose rather later, and his collection is now perhaps the better known. Whitaker sold his collection of documents to the Peterborough Museum in 1893.

Additions to the Peterborough archive since that time include the Godfrey collection of 1941 (Godfrey was the secretary of Northampton Asylum). Some papers were obtained from John Clare Billing, who claimed to be a direct descendant of the poet. There have also been occasional purchases. Prior to the major conservation work in the 1980s and 1990s, the papers were bound loosely in books, and have suffered from ink decay and acidic paper.

Incidentally, although the collection includes a recipe (not in Clare's handwriting) for home-made ink, Richard Hunt assured us that there is no evidence that Clare ever made or used any. In 2012 the Museum collection was moved to the Central Library, where storage, conservation and access are better.

The Peterborough collection is mainly manuscript (the printed books went to Northampton), although it does include the family Bible. It was catalogued by Margaret Grainger; her *Descriptive Catalogue of the John Clare Collection in Peterborough Museum and Art Gallery* (1973) is still available from the Peterborough Museum Society at £10, and it may also be downloaded free from the National Archives in pdf form.

When discussing Mary Joyce's death certificate (14 July 1838, 41 years old) which records the cause of death as "Accidentally burnt", Jonathan Bate says that the Coroner's Report is lost "so that we do not know the exact circumstances of the fire". Nevertheless, and with some prescience, he gives an account from the *Lincolnshire Chronicle* of a few months earlier describing the death of 16-year-old Miss Dannatt of Caistor, whose dress was ignited by a stray spark when she was attending to a brewing fire, and says that such deaths were distressingly common.

Richard Hunt told us that the Coroner's Report is not lost any longer. In 2014 Peterborough Library was given, from a private collection, two hundred previously "missing" Coroner's Reports from the period 1813-1841, and Mary Joyce's has been found among them.

Such Reports are still in summary form, and not by any means a full transcript. Nevertheless we learn more: the Inquest took place on 16 July 1838 at the Blue Bell in Glinton and a list of jurors is given, which might give grounds for further research. The document is printed for the reign of George IV and has been corrected by hand.

There are no witness statements, but the summary specifies that Mary Joyce was "infirm of body" at the time of her death, and was alone in the brewhouse standing by the fire, so that she "accidentally, casually and by misfortune" caught fire. She suffered severe burns at 12 noon, "languishing" for six hours before she died at 6pm. It would be worth comparing the style of other Coroner's Reports of the period to see how the narrative is being handled.

Richard Hunt reminded us that such deaths among women, the inevitable result one might think of open fires and voluminous clothing, were so common that Patrick Brontë insisted that his daughters should wear non-flammable materials.

In the "Journey out of Essex", Clare refers somewhat confusingly to "the old story of her being dead six years ago which might be taken from a brand new old Newspaper printed a dozen years ago" (which he refuses to believe) but if there was such an account it has yet to be discovered.

The Centre for John Clare Studies continues to meet in Cambridge, although the previously-announced programme is subject to alteration. Simon Kövesi will be the speaker on 13 June, and it is hoped to arrange a meeting with Stephanie Kuduk Weiner. A symposium on Clare and Ornithology is planned for 15 September, but full details are not available at the time of printing; it is suggested that you should contact the group at [cjcs@english.cam.ac.uk](mailto:cjcs@english.cam.ac.uk) to register your interest.

**Stephen Sullivan**

## THE BUTCHERED NIGHTINGALE

Few readers will, I think, have read the version of John Clare's poem "The Nightingales's Nest" which appeared in *Friendships Offering...for 1833*, and was published in the autumn of 1832. This was the first publication of John Clare's masterpiece, but what appeared was but a shadow of the poem that he had written. Mutilated by the editor, Thomas Pringle, the poem had lost much of its original vitality and heartfelt feeling. Nearly every line is changed in some way, with words removed, others inserted and whole lines deleted. As an example of the extent of Pringle's interference with the manuscript I give below a section of fourteen lines from Clare's original version, some of the most beautiful in the poem :-

But if I touched a bush or scarcely stirred  
All in a moment stopt – I watched in vain,  
The timid bird had left the hazel bush  
And at a distance hid to sing again  
Lost in a wilderness of listening leaves  
Rich extacy would pour its luscious strain  
Till envy spurred the emulating thrush  
To start less wild and scarce inferior songs  
For cares with him for half the year remain  
To damp the ardour of his speckled breast  
While nightingales to summers life belongs  
And naked trees and winter's nipping wrongs  
Are strangers to her music and her rest  
Her joys are evergreen, her world is wide

In the edited version that appeared in *Friendship's Offering* these have been reduced to just the following nine depleted lines :-

If I but stirred a branch, she stopt at once;  
And, flying off swift as the eye can glance  
In leafy distance hid, to sing again.  
Anon, from bosom of that green retreat,  
Her song anew in silvery stream would gush,  
With *jug-jug-jug* and quavered trillings sweet;  
Till, roused to emulate the enchanting strain,  
From hawthorne spray piped loud the merry thrush  
Her wild bravura through the woodlands wide.

Readers must make their own judgements as to the merits of these two extracts, but to me they bear no comparison. I know of no poem which demonstrates so clearly the gulf that existed between Clare and his editors and their non-understanding of his art. Here we have an intelligent man, with many years of editorial experience, thinking that he is improving the poem when in fact he is taking the heart out of it.

One other interesting fact regarding this first publication is that this edited version of the poem also appeared in the *Stamford Bee* on Nov.30 1832. I wonder if John Clare approved of what they printed.

**Noel Crack**

## JOHN CLARE

*"I am, yet what I am  
None cares or knows.  
My friends forsake me like a memory lost:  
I am the self-consumer of my woes...."*

With simple gratitude  
I view your life  
For most part hidden,  
The heart encased in all but poetry.  
Long years in an asylum spent,  
Emotions pent, forgotten out of heart  
And mind, by those who once  
A peasant poet found.

Tastes change – even in rhyme.  
The simple country lore  
So lovingly observed  
And detailed from the heart that knew its kinship  
With the natural world,  
No more kept pace  
With public taste.  
The long obscurity began.

Yet I,  
Two hundred years ahead  
Am fed,  
Your spirit breathes its life into my own.  
I recognise your country world  
And am enhanced in mine,  
Your words, each chosen  
For the secret world of hare and bell and bird  
Reflect my own desire to catch  
The fleeting glimpse  
Of beauty and reflective thought.

Your hidden life  
Feeds mine - the 'self-consuming woe'  
Is passed. All that remains -  
Your gift to us  
Who know you through your works -  
And care.

**Rosemary Wells**

JCS member Rosemary Wells finds in John Clare's poetry a reflection of her own love of the countryside. This poem appears in her first book of poems, "God is an Onion" which can be ordered via email: [rosemarymaywells@gmail.com](mailto:rosemarymaywells@gmail.com)

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