



The John Clare & Society

Newsletter no. 132

February 2018



THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

Patrons: Richard Mabey, and the Rt. Revd. Donald Allister, Bishop of Peterborough.

President: Carry Akroyd

Past President: Dr Ronald Blythe CBE

Vice-Presidents: Professor Eric Robinson, Edward Storey,
Professor Kelsey Thornton, Rodney Lines,
Professor John Goodridge.

Chair: Dr Valerie Pedlar (vpedlar@yahoo.co.uk)

Vice Chair and Journal Editor: Professor Simon Kövesi, Dept. of English, Oxford
Brookes University, Oxford OX3 0PB (01865 483587) skovesi@brookes.ac.uk

Hon. Secretary and Festival Co-ordinator: Ms Sue Holgate

Hon. Treasurer: Mrs Linda J Curry

Membership Secretary: Dr Robert Heyes, 53 Judd Road, Tonbridge, Kent TN9 2NH
(01732 358272) bob.heyas@yahoo.co.uk

Newsletter Editor: Dr Stephen Sullivan, 3 Primrose Hill, Little Gransden, Sandy, Beds.
SG19 3DP (01767 677906) ssullonly@aol.com

Archivist: Dr Sam Ward

Sales Officer: Mrs Mavis Leverington

Publicity Officer: Mrs Ann Marshall

John Clare Cottage Liaison: David Dykes (david.dykes@btopenworld.com)

Committee Members: Noel Crack, Mrs Anna Kinnaird, Dr Erin Lafford

North American Representative: Professor James McKusick

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

For any queries please contact Sue Holgate: 013353 668438 or
sueholgate@hotmail.co.uk

The John Clare Society is a UK Registered Charity, no. 1124846

© The John Clare Society

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

Newsletter no.132

February 2018

EDITORIAL



John Clare in the Snow. Photograph by courtesy John Clare Cottage Trust.

Sometimes one can feel a great deal of sympathy for those involved in local government. They have the unenviable task of carrying out the austerity programmes imposed by central government, while being very limited in the ways that they can raise money. They have responsibility for local services such as social care, transport, and libraries, but they do not necessarily have control over the policies and direction that these services take. And when things go wrong, they are first in line to take the blame.

Northamptonshire County Council needs to find £115 million in savings over the next four years. The claim is that these savings are needed 'predominantly' to meet increased social care costs. The Libraries service (which has already been subject to considerable savings and cuts over the past few years) is one of the 'softer' areas where these savings might be

made. Therefore, Northamptonshire have been organising a public consultation on the future of their Library service. This consultation offered a choice between three 'options', which were all more or less drastic (in each 'option', for example, the mobile library service is to be closed) and between which the public were invited to choose. The consultation ended on January 13th, and will not have been widely-known among those living outside Northamptonshire, although their local councils will probably have been organising similar consultations about the future of their own libraries. The full details of the consultation are probably still available on the website at: <http://www3.northamptonshire.gov.uk/councilservices/council-and-democracy/budgets-and-spending/Pages/review-of-library-services-in-northamptonshire.aspx>.

Northampton Central Library is of course the home of one of the major collection of John Clare manuscripts and of his books. It is not listed for

closure in any of the three options. But if professional and qualified staff are to be replaced with volunteers, services to be merged, hours to be cut and stocks to be sold off, we would have a justified fear for the future of the John Clare archive.

With this in mind, our Chair Valerie Pedlar has replied to the consultation as follows:

Dear Northamptonshire County Council,

I write with grave concern about all three Options in the 'Review of library services in Northamptonshire' and its consultation.

All options would enact a massive reduction in qualified and experienced support of library provision in your county. As you know, Northampton Central Library, on Abington Street in Northampton, holds many important archival and manuscript materials, the most prominent of which is the world's most important collection of the manuscripts and books of John Clare – an internationally celebrated nineteenth-century poet – and a resource accessed by scholars across the world.

The curation of Clare's work, and the continuing maintenance and secured access to these publicly-owned materials is a determined responsibility of your library service. At the moment, it is served by an expert body of qualified staff who have cared for this unique treasure for many years. All of that expertise, care and knowledge is set to disappear under your proposals. The threadbare nature of the proposed structures – at the level of staffing but also in terms of seniority, qualification and sheer commitment of the roles that will be created in the wake of so many staff having their roles deleted – means that we cannot feel that any of the three Options offers a safe future for the manuscripts, books and associated materials in your John Clare collection.

*Yours sincerely,
Dr Valerie Pedlar*

Simon Kovesi, the editor of the John Clare Society Journal, and 27 other scholars, academics and poets, signed a letter in *The Guardian* (10 January) and Jonathan Bate was interviewed on the same subject on Radio 4's *World at One* (11 January). Everyone has rightly drawn attention to the national and indeed international importance of this archive, and it would be valuable if members of the Society who are not necessarily resident in Northamptonshire would write to the County Council on the subject, or to a Member of Parliament, even though the formal period of consultation has ended.

It would also be worth remembering that, across the country, other similar literary and social archives that have been entrusted to other County Councils are likely to be under similar threat. We do not know how effective, or how genuine, these consultation exercises are likely to be. But it is clear that, if we don't take part at all, we have only ourselves to blame for the outcome.

Stephen Sullivan

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY FESTIVAL

Helpston, 13 – 15 July 2018

Our annual Festival once again takes place during the weekend nearest to Clare's birthday, this year 13 to 15 July, 13 July being the 225th anniversary of his birth.

We will begin, as always, with the **Midsummer Cushions Ceremony** at the church on Friday at 1.30 p.m. 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 Moyses, to hang round their necks and show off to their friends and families.

The Saturday events start with the **AGM at 10.15 a.m.** to be followed by the Presidential Address. These and the afternoon talk will take place, as in 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. There will be stalls around the village and in Botolph's Barn and Morris Dancing and an Open Studio/Garden at the back of Helpston House.

The talk in the afternoon this year is to be given by Professor Fiona Stafford who has recently produced an excellent book, *The Long, Long Life of Trees*. She also wrote a piece on the sycamore for the last *Journal*. She is a keen Clare enthusiast and good speaker and I am sure her talk will be of interest to everyone.

The **evening concert** will be in the church from 6.00 p.m. – 7.00 p.m. and will be given by the Leicester Grammar School Folk Group. They will perform Clare-related music. We are especially pleased about their willingness to play for us as we are very keen to encourage younger people to participate in our Festival. Tickets will be available at the church door during the day and just before the concert

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 to which all are welcome.

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

We would love local people to come along to the Festival – it is for everyone and not just members of the Society. It is also free of charge! Please make a note of the date in your diary – it would be lovely to see you there!

Sue Holgate, Festival Co-ordinator

MEMBERSHIP

We should like to welcome the following new members, who have joined the Society since the last issue of the Newsletter:

Lois Crofton, Worthington, Leics.
Lisa Ridley, Hayes, Middlesex
Kevin Cox, Buckfastleigh, Devon
Dr Edwin Epps, Spartanburg, South Carolina
Revd J. Michael and Ms Sheila Waters, Whitby, Yorks.
Jeremy Bruce, Ifold, West Sussex
Dr D.A. and Dr A.J. Elliman, Carshalton Beeches, Surrey
R.M. and E.J. Bulkeley, Orton Longueville, Peterborough
Pauline Taylor, Halesworth, Suffolk
Edward Fenton and partner, Charlbury, Oxon.
David Kerlake, Calne, Wilts.
Colin Wolfe, West Bridgford, Nottingham
Rachel Sackman, Erith, Kent
M.C. Hyland, New York
Ken and Judy Butler, Stanground, Peterborough
Evelyn and Martin Lander, Stamford, Lincs.
Pamela Brothwell, Werrington, Peterborough
Simon and Claire Bysshe, Glinton, Peterborough
Virginia Cox, Newton Abbot, Devon

Bob Heyes, Membership Secretary

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES WEEKEND 2018

Members of the John Clare Society are welcome to attend this and other ALS functions. The 2018 weekend will be in Birmingham on 18 – 20 May, based at the Ibis Hotel in Ladywell Walk, just a short walk from New Street Station. Speakers will include Claire Harman, representatives from the Jerome K Jerome, Tolkien, Francis Brett Young, and Housman Societies, as well as the new Director of the Royal Society of Literature, Molly Rosenberg. There will be plenty to do in Birmingham, including a pre-Raphaelite tour in the Museum and Art Gallery. The full programme and booking form should appear on our website (allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com) towards the end of February, or you can always contact me for details.

Linda Curry (Chair, ALS. ljc1049@gmail.com)

THE RETURN OF THE NIGHTINGALE

They serenade o'er the summer eve
Alongside the river's roving way.
No longer rare, there's many a pair,
The Nightingales: lesser known by day.

They've braved wild storms, survived fierce gales
And travelled a thousand miles and more
From tropical Africa, so far south,
And now arrived on Albion's shore.

They bless the night with their varied notes,
Hidden in thickets, largely unseen.
Their voices so clear, they cheer the eve,
Provide magical music – romantic scene.

In the Press we're told they're very rare,
Their numbers down, a worrying state.
Yet in our local riverside banks –
Numerous Nightingales, a welcome spate.

Pete Relph

Wednesday 10 June 2015
Roding Valley, Essex

At the end of May 2017, five pairs of nightingales were living in one small area of the Roding Valley, Loughton (approximately two miles from the 'asylum' Clare lived in at Lippets Hill). This area, a flood plain, has never known the plough or intensive modern agriculture which, of course, includes using vast amounts of chemical sprays, so it is still species rich. May it long stay so. PR.



JOHN CLARE'S LOST AND FOUND NATURAL WORLD

For me John Clare is primarily a lover and acute observer of his local natural environment who used poetry to capture the love he felt for the wildlife and landscapes around his home, rather than a poet who used nature as a theme through which to express his creative voice. As such and as a resident of Helpston, I find it always fascinating to think about Clare's natural world and compare it to the landscapes and the environment in which we live, work and walk today.

At one level, perhaps Clare would feel very much at home in today's Helpston-centred landscape. If he looked at a map he would see the woods in the same places and the villages occupying largely the same footprint as they did in the nineteenth century. The basic shape of the fields is also pretty much as set out through the 1809 enclosure act; the rivers Nene and Welland continue to run north and south of the area and the main estates at Burghley and Milton remain intact with much of the local land still in their stewardship. Royce Wood shelters Helpston to the south and Maxham's Green Way joins the village across to Woodcroft Castle, which still stands, and on to Marholm. The church spire at Glington still strikes straight up to the sky and if you stand at Swaddywell Pit, one of Clare's favourite spots and the subject of two of his poems, as Clare would have, you can look out down towards Helpston and out across to what would have been the Great Fen at Northborough and count at least five church spires in your view at Helpston, Maxey, Etton, Barnack and Glington. Superficially, from a map, Clare might then see much that is familiar, but even without taking into account the many facets of 21st century life that would baffle and bewilder him (mobile phone masts, broadband boxes, cars, TV aerials, street lighting, aircraft etc.), his landscape has of course changed remarkably. The woods may have the same names but most of them are newly-planted after being felled in the rush for timber of the 1950s and 1960s. Royce Wood was completely cleared in the 1960s and is now a young wood, not the ancient woodland that Clare knew. Swaddywell Pit too exists on the map, but it is not the Swaddywell of Clare's poems; despite being one of the very first nature reserves in England from 1912 – 24, it was ploughed up and now lies under a line of electricity pylons. The river Welland has even (partially) changed its course; the Maxey Cut now diverts much of its water through a new deep channel, removing the floods and the wetland where villagers used to graze cattle and geese, and the scene of the Maxey geese wars of the 18th century. Equally, new wetlands have arisen on what would have been farmland – the extensive (and wildlife-rich) Bainton and Maxey Pits are the results of decades of local gravel extraction, with much more to come.

And if the landscape itself has changed, that is nothing compared to the changing fortunes of the wildlife that Clare knew and loved and which is the subject of so much of his writing. Some species he wrote about have gone altogether, like the nightjar, redstart or polecat. Some species we value today would be completely unknown to him, such as the muntjac deer, collared dove or little egret. There are even some species that

vanished locally after Clare's death and have now come back, such as the red kite and buzzard.

Most starkly there is just far less wildlife around our villages; even the common species are much scarcer than they were when Clare lived and worked here. The lapwing which Clare described as 'common as crows' in the fields are now reduced to a few scattered pairs in the whole of our landscape. Some of the figures that describe the loss of birdlife are a frightening indictment of our environment and modern land-management: cuckoos have fallen in number by 65%, nightingales by 48%, skylarks by 59% and starlings by a terrible 81%. As farming has intensified, higher use of insecticides and the loss of hedgerows, meadows and scrub means that there simply isn't the shelter or the food in the wider countryside to sustain their populations.

I am pretty sure that if Clare returned today he would be horrified at what we have done to the landscapes and natural world that he treasured so dearly. He would despair, I suspect, at the scale of that loss. We should worry too and be asking ourselves and our politicians what we are going to do about it? There is much to be concerned about if the wildlife that lives around us is dying, not just because of the tragedy of extinction on a local scale but also because of what it tells us about the quality of our environment.

Perhaps though if we were able to have a quick chat with John Clare we could persuade him that there is hope too. At a small scale the current residents of John Clare Country are doing what they can to stem the tide of habitat loss and to help local wildlife to regain its strength and its numbers. That is the primary purpose of the **Langdyke Countryside Trust**, founded in 1999, and now with over 160 household members and five nature reserves within two miles of Clare's cottage in Helpston.

Perhaps Langdyke's most obvious achievement is the rebirth of Swaddywell Pit. This nature reserve lies just to the east of the original pit that was celebrated by Clare and set up as a nature reserve in 1912 by Lord Rothschild, the founder of the modern nature conservation movement. In 1997 after being filled in as a rubbish tip, it became the site of a VW Owners' Club track, with regular races and meetings. Now, since Langdyke took over the management of the site in 2005, it is home to many rare species of insect and plant, and a small flock of Hebridean sheep, an oasis of wildlife in an intensively farmed landscape. This year we discovered a seventh species of orchid on site, proof indeed of the sheer resilience of nature!

Elsewhere we have taken over a rather run-down pony-paddock at Torpel Manor Field and are restoring the meadows and exploring the archaeology of this site – this year the Trust published a book on its history. At Etton-Maxey we are managing 90 acres of wetland created through gravel extraction and helping create meadows full of lapwing, snipe and brown hare – just as Clare would have known. At Etton High Meadow we have planted a traditional orchard of local species of apple, plum and cherry and have set up allotments for the villagers, while at Bainton Heath we have cleared vegetation out of the large ponds to encourage dragonflies and even otters!

There is much more to do and we are starting to think about how

we can acquire more land and, most importantly, link it up with wildlife corridors to create bigger, better, more joined-up wildlife havens. This is a huge task but an exciting one. We have already seen so much nature return as a result of our efforts – more orchids at Swaddywell and more lapwings at Etton-Maxey are two obvious examples. We hope to do much more in the future!



If you would like to stay in touch with the Trust you can visit our website www.langdyke.org.uk or like us on Facebook <https://www.facebook.com/groups/langdyketrust/> or even better become a member and help us to restore John Clare's lost natural world. email me for details at richard@athene-communications.co.uk. We'd be very happy to arrange a Clare Country wildlife tour for members of the John Clare Society; let me know if you are interested!

Richard Astle, Co-ordinator, Langdyke Countryside Trust.

JOHN CLARE'S NORTHBOROUGH COTTAGE

The following letter appeared in the Bedford Times of June 30 1863 and, as it gives us a very good picture of the cottage and Patty in the year before Clare's death, I thought that it would be of interest to our readers.

JOHN CLARE THE POET

The following appeared in the Northampton Herald of last week: "Sir, I perused with much pleasure your recent article on 'John Clare the Poet of Helpstone' and a few days later I strolled to Northborough to visit the poet's cottage, and inspected it with great interest: some particulars of my visit may not, perhaps, be unacceptable to you. On my arrival I was ushered in by Mrs Clare, 'the Patty of the vale', who cheerfully entered into conversation with me and pointed out her husband's library, and many framed pictures on the walls, consisting of a sketch of Clare's cottage at Helpstone, the church at Helpstone, a curious piece of pavement discovered by Clare in one of the fields on the south side of Helpstone, called Pall Grounds, adjoining Oxey Wood and Wood Lane, portraits of Lords Fitzwilliam, Spencer, Radstock and Londonderry (all zealous patrons of the poet), the poet himself, etc. Having inspected these objects of attraction, Mrs Clare proceeded with me to the neat and tastefully arranged garden at the back of the cottage and directed my attention to two prettily trimmed yew trees planted by her husband, and flowers of many kinds of blooming beauty, all of which I admired with delight. Mrs Clare also drew my notice to the creeping thorn and ivy on the side wall of the cottage, the pretty appearance of which much pleased me. I may here observe that the cottage itself is a neat structure, principally of stone, with a thatch covered roof.

It is well known that Clare never liked Northborough so much as his birthplace (Helpstone). His removal from the latter place was suggested by the late Lord Fitzwilliam, who thought that the large garden at Northborough would keep him occupied and that he would not apply himself so closely to his studies,

which had at that time materially injured his health.

After quoting two short extracts from poems, it continues:-

Helpstone abounds much more with rural scenery than Northborough. Indeed, the latter place to such a poet as Clare, compared with the former, would seem flat and uninteresting. It may seem superfluous on my part, so little able as I am to criticise, to attempt any comment on the works of Clare, but I cannot refrain from saying that, as a descriptive poet of rural scenery I consider Clare may justly claim a place in the foremost ranks.

Extracts from two poems, Summer Morning and Summer Evening, follow, plus the complete I Am before continuing:-

In conclusion, I can only remark that I have derived much pleasure and gratification from the perusal of Clare's poems and I think the same may be said of them as was of the poems of Robert Bloomfield (another of our rural bards), that no one can read them without improvement as well as delight.

Yours very obediently C. Marter, Market Deeping June 6th."

I feel that Marter, in his account of his visit to Northborough, gives us a first hand indication that Patty was a capable and naturally intelligent woman well able to look after herself. Perhaps all Clare admirers need to realise just how big a debt we owe to her for the way that she supported her husband while bringing up a large family. At times, living with someone like Clare could not have been easy, and I would even go so far as to say that had she not been the person that she was, some of his best poetry may never have been written.

Noel Crack



Photograph by Shelly Rolinson from Roger Rowe's forthcoming chapbook.

FULNESS

Can you show me a picture
A snap of a Tree in Winter
To represent the North
Not one that has struggled
But one perfectly formed

Well spaced and healthy
Set against the sky
Like a Mind
Open to the Air
Branching in Hope

Intimating Spring
Feeling the Ray
Of the Sun

Full of Life
To the Tip
Of the Bud.

Bob Kelly, Dec. 02

FIREWEED

Like a faith neglected
beyond the pale
That spreads like fire
When recognition comes

Dawn coloured
Flowers
Visited by the bee
Blooming high
Above the flood

Slender
Leaning
To the sun
In the wind

Swaying

Bob Kelly



Bob says that the poems by Clare that most appeal to him are the 'birds' nest' poems, but also the transcendent lines such as 'A soul unshackled - like eternity' (from the Sonnet version of 'I Am').

JOHN CLARE AND THE ART OF BIRDWATCHING

Cambridge, 15 September 2017

Slightly too late to be reported in the last Newsletter, the Centre for John Clare Studies organised a second all-day seminar in Cambridge. Bringing people together from the fields of literature, art, conservation and scientific study, the meeting was held in the David Attenborough Building, described as a collaborative space in which experts can work together in order to shape the relationship between people and the natural environment.

The day began with Sarah Houghton-Walker taking us through three Clare poems, including the 'Robin's Nest', setting the tone for the rest of the day by demonstrating the various nuances of what we might (broadly) call Clare's identification with the birds that he describes.

Mina Gorji's paper, 'Crank, Squawk and Chatter: John Clare and Cacophony' highlighted Clare as a watcher and listener, focussing upon 'The Fern Owl's Nest' and his Natural History Letter on the Fern Owl (Nightjar) emphasising his sensitivity to sound and movement, the way that he draws upon a wide vocabulary including dialect and onomatopoeia, not just listening but exploring the interaction between human and bird. Mina concluded with the insight that in 'The Nightingale's Nest', 'When we listen to the birds, they are listening to us'.

Our President, Carry Akroyd, gave a presentation, 'Birds with Everything', pointing out, among other things, that birds do not respect the artificial boundaries of ownership that we impose upon the landscape, that they have yet to learn 'When they go there, they must no further go'. Carry's piece introduced at least the present writer to Gordon Tyrrell's musical settings of Clare's poetry. This was followed by 'Murmuration x 10', a short film by Sarah Wood and Helen Macdonald, looking at how our view of the natural world is determined by what we are programmed to see.

After a sandwich lunch we were taken on a tour of the Museum of Zoology and its stores. The Museum has been closed for major refurbishment since 2014, and is due to reopen in 2018, so we were privileged to have this backstage tour and see the staff working on rebuilding the various displays, the most striking of which was probably the drawer containing Darwin's Galapagos finches.

Tim Dee and Jos Smith introduced us to Common Ground, a charity that has worked since the 1980s to 'revive, preserve, and celebrate diverse local and intimate connections that people and communities have with the landscape that surrounds them'. In particular, they considered Clare's sense of the limits of what he could capture, as expressed in his account of getting lost as a child: 'I eagerly wandered on and rambled among the furze the whole day till I got out of my knowledge when the very wild flowers and birds *seemed to forget me*'.

The final speaker, whose work seemed to encompass the rich variety and wealth of cross-currents of the day as a whole, was Alex Preston, author of *As Kingfishers Catch Fire*, a kind of literary history and autobiography of birdwatching or, as he says himself, 'the deep joy that comes from looking up and writing down.'

Stephen Sullivan

CONSTABLE AND CLARE

Gresham College Lecture 1 November 2017

Gresham College was founded in 1597 and has been providing free lectures within the City of London for over 400 years. There are more than 130 lectures a year and most are free, although sometimes tickets need to be issued to deal with the demand. Recent lectures have been recorded and are available online at no cost. 'Constable and Clare' is the second in a series of three on English Landscape by Professor Malcolm Andrews, Professor (Emeritus) of Victorian and Visual Studies at the University of Kent.

It is actually useful to know about the first lecture in the series in order fully to understand the second. The appreciation of the unique features of the English landscape was achieved by an understanding of the Picturesque taste, informed too by a growing appreciation of Dutch landscapes, as opposed to the neoclassical, symmetrical and spectacular qualities of what we might call a 'French' style. The central example of this more English taste in landscape is Constable's 'The Cornfield' (1826), alongside which Professor Andrews quotes Clare's lines from 'Pleasant Places':

Old narrow lanes, where trees meet over head
Path-stiles, on which a steeple we espy,
Peeping and stretching in the distant sky....
Old ponds, dim shadowed with a broken tree –
These are the picturesque of Taste to me.

Clare is involved in 'a very deliberate challenge' to traditional pastoral, and shares with Constable an attachment to childhood scenes and neglected spots. They also share a roughness and richness of sound (Clare) and of texture (Constable), which becomes 'an accidental confusion and profusion of natural detail.'

Professor Andrews concludes with Clare's sonnet to de Wint (he concedes that Clare would not have known Constable), in which Clare praises de Wint's depiction of

the sunny truth
Of Nature, that doth mark thee for all time,
Found on our level pastures: - spots, forsooth,
Where common skill sees nothing deemed divine.

A video of the lecture is available online at:
<https://www.gresham.ac.uk/lectures-and-events/english-landscape-constable-and-clare>

and from the same pages you can download the transcript and the very rich range of pictures and quotations which Professor Andrews uses.

It is also worth continuing to the third lecture, on Samuel Palmer and the pastoral tradition, which would be of considerable interest to those who know the poetry of Clare.

Stephen Sullivan

UP THE GOLDEN VALLEY

Sometime after my wife died in 2002, following twenty years of travelling the country together selling second-hand books, I wrote this poem about my recollections of that time, including the yearly highlight – our visit to the John Clare Festival at Helpston in July.

Early morning set outs, sky just turning pale,
Light mist clearing down a dawning Wensleydale
Empty roads before us, sun rising over fell,
Driving by the meadows with their hay time smell.
Riverside at Langholm, ducks around your feet,
On our journeys northward, favourite spot to eat,
Sun glinting on the water, rooks busy overhead,
Warm anticipation as further on we sped.
Yearly trip to Helpston, John Clare's golden ground,
Poppies in the cornfields, hum of insect sounds,
Hot midsummer sun burning on my skin,
Sweating morris dancers, at the Blue Bell inn.
Wide horizon shimmers cross the distant plain,
Twenty years of visits, seldom saw the rain.
Evenings on the campsite, celebrations done,
Watching orange sunsets, till the darkness won.
Harbour side at Whitby, standing by the quay,
Watching fish crates landed, arm in arm with me.
Seagulls swooping closely, snatching at the prize,
Your face bright with laughter, sparkling your eyes.
Up the Golden Valley, on the road to Hay,
Sunshine after showers, wheels sending up spray.
Ploughed furrows glisten, subtle shade of red,
Leaden clouds behind us, bright blue skies ahead.

Noel Crack



Bob Woodroffe, *Pick of the Crop. The poetry collection.* The Greenwood Press, 2017. 64pp. ISBN 978-0-9957290-1-8. Price £8.99

Pick of the Crop

The poetry collection



***Bob
Woodroffe***

Shakespeare's Theseus compared the poet with the lover and the lunatic. At the other extreme, I'm tempted to compare the poet with the scientist; both are concerned with the precise use of words, for in this precision they can reach through to the particularity, the truth of things. Bob Woodroffe is both a poet and a scientist and his language conveys a detailed observation of the world around him that will be appreciated by lovers of Clare's poetry. Like Clare, Woodroffe uses little punctuation and, since his syntax is rarely complex, the lack of punctuation doesn't cause any difficulty of understanding. Many poems are structured as the accumulation of details of a scene ('Locked', for instance) or an undertaking such as the picking of plums in the title poem, 'Pick of the crop'.

The volume of Woodroffe's poems I reviewed in Newsletter no.98 (Dec 2007) describes rural scenes from various places in Britain; this one speaks of a life lived in the Vale of Evesham. One slight quibble I have concerns the way the contents are listed, which caused me some confusion until I worked out the rationale. The book is divided into seven sections, three of them concerned with particular places in the West Midlands. Several poems are written in dialect, and there is a section of poems inspired by the time Woodroffe spent as a National Trust volunteer at Croome. 'The herb garden' (next page) was one of several poems included in this volume that had been written at workshops in Worcester. Another in this section, 'A peal of flowers', particularly appealed to me because of its exuberant synaesthesia:

a wash of bells peals through
the sunlit blue of anemones
ringing welcome to the light

There is great vitality in these poems and a playfulness, often, both in the use of language – as in the first poem, 'Cutting Edge', where the language denotes the activity of scything, and at the same time has connotations of writing – and in the subject matter. In one section where the poems are inspired by famous poems, such as Auden's 'Funeral blues' and Masefield's 'Cargoes' (and a couple I'm afraid I didn't recognise!) the one based on 'The Lake Isle of Innisfree' concerns the desire to find a loo free. In 'T is for.....', every line beginning with a word whose initial letter is 'T', the lists of words imply a criticism of unthinking consumerism that is confirmed in the final line.

My favourites, though, were the scenes described in closely observed, sensuous detail: the powerful, almost visceral images of 'Five furrow reversible'; the sense of movement in the apparently static scene conjured up in 'The Vale'; the rich bird life in 'The Owl's seat'. Woodroffe's avowed fascination with and passion for nature is evident in these poems and will endear him to the lover of Clare's poetry.

Valerie Pedlar

THE HERB GARDEN

A thousand fingers point the way.
Steer the chariots drawn by doves
twixt devil's and dunny nettles.
Follow the trail the blue sailors sail.

Find jack behind the garden gate,
the herb of grace, the green ginger,
mary's milk-drops, the freckled face.
Beware marsh malice and snake's pie.

Listen to the church bells chime to
welcome the queen of the meadow.
Lad's love beds ladies in the hay,
fairy fingers pick their lockets.

Watch golden drops of evening fall
as long legs dampen in the dew.
The flicker of moth's moonflower
lit by the glow of evening star.

Bob Woodroffe

Common names of herbs used

thousand fingers	- sorrel	snake's pie	- horsetail
chariots drawn by doves	- monkshood	church bells	- comfrey
devil's nettle	- yarrow	queen of the meadow	- meadowsweet
dunny nettle	- black horehound	lad's love	- southernwood
blue sailors	- chicory	ladies in the hay	- sweet woodruff
jack behind the garden gate	- field pansy	fairy fingers	- foxglove
herb of grace	- rue	ladies lockets	- solomons seal
green ginger	- wormwood	golden drops	- cowslip
mary's milk-drops	- lungwort	long legs	- cowslip
freckled face	- cowslip	moth's moonflower	- evening primrose
marsh malice	- marshmallow	evening star	- evening primrose

ARBOUR EDITIONS CHAPBOOKS

Those who had the privilege of attending the Festival in July will have encountered, either on my bookstall in the Clare Cottage or in the Bluebell, one or other of my **Arbour Editions Chapbooks**. Clare knew chapbooks well, and it is in his honour I resurrected the form for my 32-page books.

Historically chapbooks came in many different sizes, but were often made up of one or more full sheets of paper on which 16 pages of text were printed, which were then folded three times to produce eight leaves. Each leaf of an octavo book thus represents one eighth the size of the original sheet. These eight leaves are also known as 'signatures'. So my chapbooks, being 32 pages in length, are two signatures long, or 16 octavo (A5) sheets.

Chapbooks first came about in 16th century England with popular fairy tales like 'Jack the Giant Killer' which Clare mentions of course:

To JOHN CLARE

Well honest John how fare you now at home
The spring is come & birds are building nests
The old cock robin to the sty is come
With olive feathers & its ruddy breast
& the old cock with wattles & red comb
Struts with the hens & seems to like some best
Then crows & looks about for little crumbs
Swept out bye little folks an hour ago
The pigs sleep in the sty the bookman comes
The little boys lets home close nesting go
& pockets tops & tawes where daisies bloom
To look at the new number just laid down
With lots of pictures & good stories too
& Jack the jiant killers high renown

(written around 1861)

Chapbooks were cheaply constructed and often roughly printed, but during the 17th Century and later they were purchased by people who otherwise weren't able to afford books. Very few survive as they were often thrown out after reading, or often (it is said) used as toilet paper!

The number of chapbooks printed in England is mind-boggling. During the 1660s, as many as 400,000 almanacs were printed every year, enough to distribute to one of every three households in the country.

I've been planning such a series for several years, to introduce the general reader to a wider range of 'Clare-related' subjects, each book concentrating on just one topic. In keeping with their history my **Arbour Editions Chapbooks** are very inexpensive but, in a break with tradition, the books are high quality productions with gloss covers.

I have around a dozen titles planned, and have to date published five, all at £3.50:

1. *Drinking with John Clare*
2. *Helpston's Fountains*
3. *With the Gypsies*

4. *Playing Games with John Clare*
5. *'Accursed Wealth'*

The sixth, *Trees – In a Strange Stillness* is of double length (64 pages) and the first chapbook in full colour – 17 colour photographs illustrating Clare's text – priced at £6.50 including post and & packing. The idea for this book came from an essay written by Professor Eric Robinson in 1989 which has not been widely read, so with his permission *Trees* was created with the 'Introduction' by Professor Eric and myself. Here is a extract:

Clare's map of boyhood was full of trees, from the elm trees that rocked over his cottage to the hollow oaks and old willows in which he hid from pelting rain and prying eyes. They were his cradle, his robbers' cave, his pulpit, his study and his refuge. They were his friends and he knew them as individuals whose passing he mourned as he mourned the loss of his first love, Mary Joyce. There seems little doubt that he felt for them the same constriction of the heart and the bottomless stomach that the rest of us experience from human loss.

Trees were the signposts of his daily rambles, the monuments of his tradition, the guardians of his dead and the symbols of changing time. Twice at least in his Journal Clare comments on stories about the rapid growth of trees in the Helpston neighbourhood and in terms that demonstrate the particularity of his tree-observations.

Clare was concerned about maintaining the tree population of his environment, and in a sense the history of Helpston and of our poet, is that partly told in trees. Then came enclosure when, for the trees, a wholesale devastation took place.

So there we have it; inexpensive, paperback-sized, quality productions – the ideal gift for the lover of Clare. Or perhaps that friend who just might love Clare if only they had opportunity to read the great man's work.

Roger Rowe
arborfield@gmail.com



'Langley' by Mike Hobson. From the forthcoming chapbook, Trees – In a strange stillness.

THE GATEWAY OF LIFE

The gateway of life – it is open
The view – it is sere and serene
A life of adventure is calling
Don't let it pass by in dreams

The key to the world's education
And health will see you right thro'
So – look well after your body, lad,
And the body will look after you.

The soul's the deciding factor
Between you and your God and "the blue"
Education – and health – and a mind that is good
And – to yourself – always be true.

James Gibson ('Jock') Edgar (signed as 'Dad')
Tripoli
10-7-50

We featured the poem, 'I Was' by Robin Edgar (1936 – 2017) in the last Newsletter. This poem, 'The Gateway of Life', was written by his father, 'Jock' Edgar, into his son's notebook when the family were living in Tripoli. Jock Edgar had connections with Glinton, moving there in the 1970s to be with his daughter and family, who still live there. The poem is reprinted by permission of Jon Edgar, and can be seen as written at <https://worstverse.wordpress.com> which is a memorial site to Robin Edgar.





© David Dykes

The John Clare Cottage in Snow: Photograph courtesy of John Clare Cottage Trust.

The John Clare Society

BOOK SALE

We should like to thank those who have purchased books from, or expressed interest in, the sale of these books donated to the Society. A few titles still remain, and we list the details on the next page, together with the arrangements should you wish to purchase or enquire.

CONDITIONS OF SALE:

1. Those wishing to purchase at the listed sale price, one or more of these books, please send an e-mail or a written note by post to Stephen Sullivan at the address below, quoting the book reference number(s) giving your name, postal address, and EITHER an e-mail or a telephone contact.
2. DO NOT SEND MONEY or any form of payment at this stage.
3. All books are pre-owned 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. Books which are worn or marked are described as such, and this is reflected in the price.
4. Stephen Sullivan will contact successful buyers by e-mail or telephone to arrange payment to the John Clare Society, preferably by cheque. Cheques should be made out to the John Clare Society.
5. The listed prices do not include postage & packing. To cover this an additional cost of £2 will be added to each order (irrespective of the number of books ordered)

**Stephen Sullivan, 3 Primrose Hill, Little Gransden,
Sandy, Beds. SG19 3DP e-mail: ssullonly@aol.com**

MISCELLANEOUS

	£
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.D THOMAS GRAY Writers & their Work 104. British Council pamphlet 1958	1
1.E A WRITER'S DAY BOOK Ronald Blythe 2006 Trent Editions PB signed	10

BIOGRAPHY AND CRITICISM

2.2 JOHN CLARE His Life in Poetry Patricia Barnard 2007 Pipers Ash PB signed	5
2.10 JOHN CLARE & THE FOLK TRADITION George Deacon 1983 Sinclair Browne Signed	10
2.B JOHN CLARE & THE FOLK TRADITION George Deacon 1983 Sinclair Browne	10
2.23 THE POETRY OF JOHN CLARE Mark Storey 1974 Macmillan	5
2.A A REAL WORLD & A DOUBTING MIND Tim Chilcott 1985 Hull UP PB	15
2.C TALKING ABOUT JOHN CLARE Ronald Blythe 1999 Trent Books PB	10
2.D JOHN CLARE The Poet and the Place Peter Moyse 1993 Crossberry Press PB Signed	10
2.E John CLARE THE CRITICAL HERITAGE. Mark Storey 1973 Routledge PB Signed	15
2.F THE INDEPENDENT SPIRIT John Goodridge 1994 John Clare Society PB	5
2.G JOHN CLARE A Biography Jonathan Bate 2005 Picador	10

MORE VALUABLE ITEMS

4.D POEMS OF THE MIDDLE PERIOD VOL.5 (only) Robinson & Powell 2003 Clarendon	60
--	----

CARCANET PAPERBACKS

5.2 BY HIMSELF Robinson & Powell 1996 Carcanet PB	10
5.A BY HIMSELF Robinson & Powell 1996 Carcanet PB	10
5.5 THE SHEPHERDS CALENDAR Tim Chilcott 2006 Carcanet PB	5
5.B A CHAMPION FOR THE POOR Dawson et al 2000 Carcanet PB	10
5.C NORTHBOROUGH SONNETS Robinson & Powell 1995 Carcanet PB	5
5.D COTTAGE TALES Robinson & Powell 1993 Carcanet PB some wear	5

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

SALES ORDER FORM

FEBRUARY 2018



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

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

BOOKS

CODE	ITEM	PRICE	WEIGHT
B20023	<i>John Clare: New Approaches</i> Eds. J Goodridge and S Kovesi (p/b essays).	£2.50	400g
B20028	<i>John Clare, the Northamptonshire Poet</i> ed. J L Carr (p/b pocket sized poetry book).	£1	20g
B20030	<i>John Clare: The Living Year</i> . Prose and poetry of 1841, ed. Tim Chilcott.	£7.99	350g
B20033	<i>The Wood is Sweet</i> . Clare poems selected by David Powell & illustrated by Carry Akroyd.	£6	200g
B20112	<i>.By Ourselves</i> ed. Andrew Kotting	£20	650g
B20113	<i>John Clare, The Trespasser</i> by John Goodridge & R.K.R. Thornton	£6.99	75g
B20114	<i>John Clare, A Poet for all Seasons</i> , Peter Moyse.	£10	500g
B20115	<i>This Happy Spirit</i> . Clare poems selected by R.K.R Thornton & Carry Akroyd, illustrated by Carry Akroyd.	£7	200g
B20116	John Clare, A Collection of Songs, Airs & Dances for Violin (1818). Edited by Tony Urbainczyk. Volume 1 Volume 2	£9 & £14 inc p&p	
B20117	John Clare <i>Poems descriptive</i> , 1986 Edn.	£5 inc p&p	
B20118	<i>Hidden Treasures</i> Edited. Roger Rowe.	£6	125g
B20119	NEW John Clare Flora Molly Mahood	£15	inc p&p
B20120	NEW <i>Memoirs of Uncle Barnaby</i> – John Clare novel from research edited by Roger Rowe	£12.50	250g
B20121	NEW <i>Drinking with John Clare</i> – chapbook of John Clare Poems edited by Roger Rowe	£3.50	100g

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

M20060	CD 8 songs by Terence Deadman with Clare poetry read by Peter Moyses, Rodney Lines & Norma Weller.	£5	200g
M20061	John Clare, A 65min DVD photographic journey with poetry readings by Peter Moyses.	£5 inc p & p	
M20062	<i>Clare's Journey</i> . A musical journey through his life, sung by Maida Vale Singers. Composer: Terence Deadman. Lyrics: Trevor Harvey.	£9	200g
Joint special offer : M20060 and M20062 £10 plus £2.50 for p & p.			

POSTCARDS (for each card allow 5g in weight)

P20020	Helpston, birthplace of John Clare.	£0.30
P20021	Clare's cottage, Helpston.	£0.30
P20022	John Clare (Hilton portrait, 1820)	£0.30
P20023	John Clare (Behnes bust).	£0.30
P20024	John Clare (Grimshawe portrait, 1844.)	£0.30
P20025	Orchid flower card with prose extract.	£0.30
P20026	Wood Anemone flower card with poem extract.	£0.30
P20027	Cowslip flower card with poem extract.	£0.30
P20028	Pasque flower card with poem extract.	£0.30
P20029	The Hedge Rose flower card with poem extract	£0.30
P20030	The Primrose flower card with poem extract.	£0.30
P20031	Set of six flower cards allow weight 10g	£1.50
P20032	The John Clare Rose	£0.30
P20103	The Midsummer Cushions around Clare's grave	£0.30
P20104	John Clare's grave	£0.30
P20105	John Clare's Memorial Westminster Abbey	£0.30

POSTAGE AND PACKAGING (p&p)	UK	Europe	Elsewhere
0 -100g	£1	£3.50	£4
101 -250g	£2	£4	£5
251 - 500g	£3	£5.50	£8
501 - 750g	£4	£7	£12
751 – 1000g	£5.50	£9	£15
1001 – 1250g	£6.50	£10	£18
Greater than 1251g	£9	£13	£22

To work out cost of p&p for your order note the weight given in grams for each item in the weight column on the ORDER FORM below. Total up and find the price for this weight from the above table.

ORDER FORM

CODE	ITEM	PRICE	WEIGHT
Total purchase price and total weight			
Add p & p from table for the total weight			
TOTAL PAYMENT			
<i>I enclose a cheque payable to The John Clare Society for £</i>			
NAME:			
ADDRESS:			
POST CODE			
Return to: Sales Officer, John Clare Society, 36 Peakirk Road, Glington, Peterborough PE6 7LT tel. 01733253263 mavisleverington@aol.com			