The John Clare Society

Newsletter no. 137 October 2019

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

The John Clare Society

Newsletter no. 137

October 2019

EDITORIAL

This is another very crowded issue of the Newsletter, which reflects the busy life of the Society and particularly, of course, the Festival, which took place in Helpston on the weekend of John Clare's birthday. Planning for this year's Festival began with the intention of introducing new features and encouraging local involvement. However, Simon Bysshe resigned as Festival co-ordinator part way through the year and we owe a particular debt of thanks to Sue Holgate and her team for taking up the task once again, and for the work involved, 'on the day' and in the planing stages.

Thanks to Bridget Somekh and Ellis Hall for their 'Personal View', which follows, and I'd like to add to it here. The use of the Scout Hut for the first time enabled us to accommodate Society Sales and the Helpston Local History Group with the 1820 Enclosure Map; Open Gardens were at Helpston House and Vicarage Farm, the latter featuring a visiting artist, which meant that Sylvia and myself were able to renew our acquaintance with the bird sculptor Joel Walker after 25 years.

Our Keynote speaker, Dr Mina Gorji, was unwell, and we are grateful to Richard Astle of the Langdyke Trust for stepping in, to entertain a full church with a talk on Clare's birds, the first fruits of which will be a series of articles, starting in this Newsletter.

On Sunday, in addition to the church service, there were John Stafford and Richard Ollier presenting their 'Beginner's Guide to John Clare' (which has something to offer even those who are not beginners!) and the Langdyke Trust organised two five-mile 'Wallks with John Clare' – I understand that these were fully-booked in advance.

There is still more, and I apologise that some names may still be missing. But we should include thanks to the volunteers at the John Clare Cottage, where the Beauvale Recorder Ensemble were also performing, and to the ladies of Helpston who provided lunches and teas at the Village Hall. It would have been impossible for a visitor to sample everything, no matter how briefly – and that is before we add the warm and sincere invitation from the John Clare Primary School for Festival-goers to visit their own Summer Fair from noon on Saturday. The winning poems from the School's Poetry Competition on Friday are printed in this Newsletter, although we cannot do justice to their colourful and artistic original presentation.

Joel Walker's 'Wren Baby' at the Memorial.

Stephen Sullivan

VICE-PRESIDENCY

The John Clare Society Committee is pleased to say that Peter Cox has accepted our invitation to become a vice-President of the Society.

JOHN CLARE SALES

It is now autumn and the Clare Festival some three months ago in July – but for me still a bright memory. It was great having the sales-stall of 'books and ephemera' in the Scout Hut and meeting so many enthusiastic people interested in Clare and the village of Helpston over the two days I was there. Thanks to all the visitors who chatted and bought assorted books and items.

It must be a record! The week up to and including the Festival we sold twenty of the Helpston illustrated tea-towels.

I am always happy to receive requests for books by post or email; the order form covers the stocks I have currently, though sometimes only single copies if the publisher's 'out-of-stock' actually means 'out-of-print'. I can't hold all the books on Clare but I am always interested in hearing opinions on new titles and maybe getting some copies to sell.

Before this newsletter's appearance I will have set up stall at the Clare/Edward Thomas event in September. Hopefully we will have had a good time learning, meeting, talking – and maybe I will have sold some of the 'books & ephemera', and tea-towels!

David Smith

MEMBERSHIP

Many thanks to those who have renewed their membership for 2019/20. If your copy of the Newsletter, whether print or electronic, contains a renewal form, this means that you have yet to renew your membership. I will take this opportunity to remind members that you have the option of paying by standing order, and if you get in touch with me I will send the appropriate form for you to complete.

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

David and Mrs F M Osborne, Broughton, Northants

Adrian Mark Johnson, Smethwick

Kerry Kelleher, Studley Green, High Wycombe

Mina Gorji, Cambridge

Julian Philips, Long Wittenham, Abingdon

Adrian Leibowitz and Deborah Morgan, Great Linford, Milton Keynes

Caroline Chew, Little Shelford, Cambridge

Ian and Marilyn Rogers, Helpston

Peter Grieve, West Wickham, Cambridgeshire

Sister Mary Cuthbert, Ely

John M Sanders, Wellingborough

Philip Lane, Sutton

Robert Heyes, Membership Secretary

THE JOHN CLARE FESTIVAL 2019: A Personal View

On Friday afternoon at the church, a goodly gathering of parents waited for the procession by the path, and festival-goers clustered around Peter Moyse's bench. The children laid their midsummer cushions in meticulous order, spiraling round John Clare's grave. It was very sunny with a cool breeze, a glorious day to honour Clare. Mrs Rachel Simmons, the Headteacher, said 'This is the best display of cushions we've ever had … also the most we've ever had, 113'. Inside, the church was packed with children and parents, including some mothers with babies. Sun filtered through the open door. Clear glass in the windows let in lots of light and the stained glass in the East window looked spectacular. The theme of Birds and Words had inspired the children in the Clare Poetry Competition. 'Language changes all the time. Like Clare, the children love trying out words'.

Then, we headed back to the Bluebell to meet friends and have our first tankards of poet's beer. Pint of Poetry from Stamford, led by Chris and Pete, kicked off at 6.30 with live stand-up and a welcome to all-comers. The session was very informal and a good way for people to start feeling part of the Festival crowd – not always easy for newcomers. Bridget read a poem about Clare playing his violin for his father's singing, on these very flagstones in the Poet's Bar, surrounded by neighbours.

The Midsummer Cushions *V Pedlar*

A couple of hours later, Mike Stevens led the folk music evening, honouring Clare's reputation among folk singers as an important collector both of words and music. As in previous years, the event had attracted a strong local folk group: this time the Captain Backwash band from Peterborough. Mike got things started on his viola with 'The Battle of Prague Quickstep' and 'Astley's Ride'. Among others, there were songs from Andy and Malcolm, poems from John and Mike, and two stories from Lynn. Memorably Backwash sang 'Cousin Jack', a Cornish protest song by Show of Hands: 'The English live in our houses, the Spanish fish in our seas', accompanied by guitar, melodeon and whistle. Ollie, from Peterborough Morris Men, performed his competition entry: a jig with a great leap and a special flourish of the raised right foot and knee. The Raffle in the interval raised £100 for the John Clare Society.

On Saturday, after the AGM, Carry Akroyd's Presidential Address focused on the conference theme of birds. Her new book, a collection of her paintings of birds from *The Oldie*, has a Clare quotation as its title: *A Sparrow's Life is as Sweet as our Own*. Carry's interest in birds developed from sitting drawing in the landscape. 'Birds have always hopped and flown into my pictures'. She read from Clare's 'Morning Walk'. Like her, his job as an artist was 'to notice things'. With a family of six children, Clare writes outside for quiet, and his writing is like Carry's drawing; birds are drawn into it. Looking for the right word. Distracted by a bird or flower. She read from 'The Robin's Nest'. The robin stays all his life in one place. Carry loves the Robin's song because he sings in the dying days in autumn, and does not migrate. She seeks to understand land as habitat. Carry finished by singing one of Clare's bird songs, honouring his love of birds.

Between the Presidential Address and the afternoon's guest lecture, we spent time in the Scout Hut, where members of the Helpston Local History Group were displaying Helpstone's Enclosure Map. Someone was on hand throughout the day to explain why it was drawn up and how the decisions about the allocation of land were made. Unfortunately, no comparable map exists for ten years earlier, but it still helped to clarify how the village had changed during Clare's teenage years.

Richard Astle gave the invited lecture on 'John Clare, Birds and Artificial Grass'. His talk was beautifully prepared and greatly enhanced by spectacularly good recordings of bird song. He was also very knowledgeable about Clare and able to make comparisons with bird poems by other poets (D.H. Lawrence, G.M. Hopkins, Ted Hughes). Richard is joint founder and chair of the Langdyke Trust which aims to preserve the John Clare countryside. Richard started by exploring what birds and bird song meant to John Clare – as an egg collector, a guide to birds, a recorder of bird song and an observer of behaviours and lifestyle. He sees Clare as a naturalist who is also a poet, in contrast to Hopkins who uses the bird in 'The Windhover' as a means of exploring human emotions. He then focused on seven different birds, playing their calls: the lapwing, the nightjar, the nightingale, the corncrake, the wren and the swift. The range of sounds was extraordinary and overwhelming, bringing home to us all the huge reduction in bird numbers since Clare's day and the comparative silence of the country as a result.

And what of artificial grass? – Don't do it. Birds can't get worms.

This year's Poetry Reading, led by Mike Mecham, was the usual eclectic mix of Clare's poetry including his best known, 'I Am', and 'The Invitation to Emma', properly titled for the first time, which appears in the Clarendon edition under the title 'Song'. Hayden Thongthay, aged 7, read 'The Little Maid' and 'The Cowslip' right at the end.

The final session of the day was the Pennyless Concert in the church at 6 pm, introduced by Norman Goodman. Their name derives from the first two members of the band: Penny, violin/viola, and Les, guitar, wearing a red hat with a brim; Graham, flute/pipes/melodica and Colin, bass guitar and melodion, complete the line-up. They had a stylish informality of dress and spoke to the audience with welcoming ease. They are all singer song-writers and exhibited very beautiful harmonies in their part singing. Some numbers were music only, again their own compositions. The ensemble work was excellent, with several surprise endings perfectly timed to be provocative and fun. Several songs were about local places, such as 'Eels for Ely'. It was lovely when Penny slipped from violin to viola and produced some glorious long low notes. The melodica was a nice touch in the second half, being the only keyboard instrument in the band.

A welcome new session on the Sunday morning was John Stafford and Richard Ollier's 'Beginner's Guide to John Clare', introduced by Karen Lakey with Clair Wordsworth providing refreshments. This was a combination of a carefully researched presentation of biographical information and readings from Clare's poems, beautifully delivered, with music and projected images. It took place in the Scout Hut where blinds were drawn down to allow the projections to be seen. It was well attended by newcomers to Clare, but was also a lovely way to round off the festival for regular attendees. The readings were particularly well delivered with a full range of voice including a plausible Northamptonshire accent where necessary and easily audible whispers for dramatic effect once or twice. The emphasis of the last reading was on 'the Poet in his joy'.

Bridget Somekh & Ellis Hall

INTRODUCING ERIC ROBINSON TO JOHN CLARE IN HEAVEN

Another editor to meet you, John;
Brusque, perhaps at first, but you'll soon get on.
He's spent a lifetime taking careful note
So we could see exactly what you wrote:
Nine volumes in the end, book after book –
You can't imagine quite how long it took.
Deciphering all you wrote since early youth.
You left things quite a mess, to tell the truth.
He got it sorted out – that was his way –
He'd started, so he'd finish, he might say.
You needed him to make your poems sure
So both your reputations will endure.

Kelsey Thornton 20.7.19

The small bouquet of flowers from Eric Robinson's memorial service were fading, so I painted them with some of his books to keep a memory.

JULY 12 2019

Late Friday, I walk back from Helpston to my digs in West Deeping. From The Bluebell, north through the village passing the church and out on the Maxey Road.

Over the widest of level crossings, then leaving behind the village and its lights. No torch (a light at night is the way to limit your horizon to just a few yards). Enough light to see my way and where the water lies, white on the darkest grey. I cross a bridge over a narrow, straight drain; further north and east lie the fens proper it hints at; and on past a farm.

A blaze of light comes towards me, one of only half a dozen cars I see in the hour the walk takes. I step onto the verge, an extra precaution despite the company-issue hi-vis I had decided to wear for safety. The car passes; a sudden total blackness fades back to my night vision, revealing a green l.e.d. on the ground by my feet; no, it's a glow worm!

So onwards to Maxey Church, which appears to be on the edge, almost outside, of the village. Perhaps the centre of activity has shifted, or was it one of those churches associated with the manor house or hall originally, or was Maxey a 'non nucleated settlement'? It's late and I am ignorant so let it pass and turn left up High Street towards Lolham and West Deeping.

This is a shorter length of road, passing a farm, I think, though it has a grim industrialised aspect; large low black buildings, occasionally lit, hum menacingly. A bungalow adjoins the site; I am glad I don't live there. Then it is right over the Lolham bridges; it is close to too-dark-to-see for short stretches where the road narrows over the bridges and large trees overhang. Ahead now the streetlights of West Deeping. Into the village, to the Red Lion and a turn opposite the pub to my temporary residence.

Clare walked these lanes of a night, but this hardly feels as if I am in his footsteps, so much has changed in the intervening years.

Graham Gibson

Graham's account reminded me of the following passage from *Childhood's Glory* (Arbour Chapbook No.12):

> Hedges, paths, stiles and trees are the fingerposts of Clare's 'map of boyhood', but that map is not the usual map showing only directions, distances and places. It is also a map of sensations, a map of superstitions, a map full of songs and stories, as well being a map of the deep history of the village and its surrounds.

Here in the greensward & the old molehills
Where ploughshares never come to hurt the things
Antiquity hath charge of – fear instills
Her footsteps – & the ancient fairey rings
Shine black & fresh & round – the gipseys fire
Left yesternight scarce leaves more proof behind
Of midnight sports when they from day retire
As in these rings my fancy seems to find
Of fairey revels – & I stoop to see
Their little footmarks in each circling stain
& think I hear them in their summer glee
Wishing for night that they may dance again
Till shepherds tales told neath the leaning tree
While shunning showers seem bible truths to me

(from 'The Fairey Rings')

Roger Rowe

THE JOHN CLARE PRIMARY SCHOOL
Poetry Competition July 2019
Prizewinners & Highly Commended:

AS ELEGANT AS A FEATHER

He says hello with his husky song,
Forever repulsive, forever long.

He was monstrous and his feathers were grey
He found it arduous to hunt for prey.

He pursued his fanfare of swan fellows,
To a nest in the gracious reeds of greens and yellows.

They entered, admiring the hush of the flowing stream.
Suddenly they laughed at him; it felt like a horrible dream.

He waddled away disappointedly with his arched neck hung low,
He built a nest in the blooming flowers, very secretive to the unknown.

When days later he progressively changed,
Into the elergant swan that he became.

He says goodbye with his luscious song,
Forever beauty, forever long.

By Annabelle Peat (Torpel) 1.

SWANS

Their snowy white feathers glistening in the sun,
While the babies are protected by their mum.
Their long necks help them reach for food,
They glide along, showing their mood.

Swans, swans, lovely and serene,
When they're annoyed, they're very mean.
Swans reach for the very fresh bread,
Caring for their babies on their nest bed.

Standing out in the shining light,
Soon it's turning into night.
The majestic swans owning the lake,
Their time, no rush, they will take.

by Isaac Baker (Torpel) 2.

THE SWALLOW

The calm bird flies beautifully
In the sky
It is so sad that you
Are so shy
Swooping in the sky with ease,
Your aerial display sure to please.

You are so small, you loop the loop
Living quietly with a wonderful group,
Making a nest in a beautiful wood,
Your building skills oh so good.

Living close to your friends so dear
Your lovely colours oh so clear,
In your cosy bed you stay,
Waiting for a bright new day.

by Constance Tighe (Torpel) 3.

THE RAVEN

At the break of day the scream of the ghastly raven
Echoes through the silent London streets.
Through the silence of this still haven
It is ready to find its food and eat.
The raven heads for the bright lights,
It hears the loud cries from the people below,
The piercing shriek as the raven fights,
Their home the Tower built years ago.

by Harry Fulcher (Torpel) Highly Commended.

TINY ROBINS

I looked out of my window and saw tiny robins,
So I took my camera and ran down the stairs,
A nest full of robins, cute and scared,
I looked around, afraid they didn't have their mummy,
I thought she was gone,
But in the distance a robin flew; she came
Down to the nest and I got a picture for you.
I felt so happy for the robins. You should, too.

by Kitty Hutton-Smith (Broadwheel) Highly Commended.

I AM A BIRD

I am a Barn Owl that's strong and I believe I can be a Bluetit.
I am a Bluetit, a bright Bluetit I shine as bright as the moon. I believe
I can be a Black Bird. I am a Black Bird I have a Black Bird
And I'm so sneaky nobody can see me. I believe I can be a Robin.
I am a Robin I've got a ruby red tummy that is enormously big.
I believe I can be a Goldfinch. I am a Goldfinch a glamorous
Goldfinch and I've got a spotty bottom and I've got a stripey
Head and I believe I can be a Woodpecker. I am a Woodpecker.
I've got a sharp nose it hits the tree like TNT
I AM A BIRD

by Harry Collins (Broadwheel) 1.

KINGFISHER

A flash of colour the Kingfisher zooms into action to catch a fish from the clear water, it makes it look so easy but at night it's like a knight battling to eat,
You will see an exploding lake of fish flying out like rushing water,
Something for the bird, nothing for the fish,
Millions of species of birds will be watching the mighty Kingfisher taking over lakes, rivers, streams and ponds,
Zooming like an arrow straight to bulls eye,
The brilliant bird spreeads its wonderful wings in front of the beautiful sunset,
The Kingfisher perches proudly on a tree stump and that's why Kingfishers are kings at fishing

by Hasan Ali-Said (Broadwheel) 2.

I AM NOCTURNAL

I live in a tree trunk,
I swoop down and catch prey in the night sky
I make a sound just like twit twoo
I have big round eyes,
I come back to my nest with food for the owlets,
I go to sleep and curl up in a ball,
I am a beautiful bird,
I'm now searching for prey,
I have beautiful bright and dark feathers.
I am a barn owl!

by Harvey Webb (Broadwheel) 3.

Birds Fly Anywhere

Birds fly anywherer,
They fly to the south,
And to the north,
Or to the east or west.

Birds fly anywhere,
Beautiful Chaffinches and tiny Sparrows,
The red-chested Robin and handsome
Kingfisher,
The mean-spirited Magpie.

Birds fly anywhere,
All around us,
Some big and some so small,
I love birds.

by George Clarkson (1)

Birds Nest Anywhere

In trees
On rooftops,
In holes,
Under guttering,
On branches,
In a forest,
On farms,
In France, China and Antarctica,
In all countries,
In the hottest of places,
And in the coldest of places,
Birds nest anywhere

by Estella Ray (2)

Anywhere Birds

Woodgate Class

Birds Fly Anywhere

Birds fly from house to house and street to street,
Birds fly from city to city,
Some fly from country to country.
Some even fly to Antarctica,
Birds fly anwhere.

Birds fly very high
In the big blue sky,
Birds fly over tall trees,
Houses and seas,
Birds fly anywhere.

Wild birds fly through villages,
Herons fly and eat fish,
And red kites circle their prey.
All the time a bird is flying high up in the
sky,
Birds fly anwhere.

There are tall birds and short birds,
Large and some so small,
Gliding gracefully on the breeze,
They fly very high up there in the sky,
Birds fly anywhere.

by Walter Smith (3)

Birds Fly Anywhere

Birds fly anywhere,
A different country,
Across the continents,
Up there in the vast, blue sky.

Birds fly anywhere,
They swoop down to bathe in water,
To catch their prey – a worm maybe?
Or a fish from your garden pond.

Birds fly anywhere,
Above the tall, green trees,
Over forests, lakes and seas,
They soar through the clouds.

Birds fly anywhere,
They look for the bird table in your garden,
Or the bird feeders hanging from your
ornamental trees.
I love birds.

by Georgina Kirk (Highly Commended)

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

Sweet worms

Juicy millipedes

Soft pancake butterflies

Slimey snails

Muddy puddle water

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

by Sebastien Donaldson

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

Squishy worms

Puddle of water

Honey bees with nectar

Smooth seeds

Juicy apples

Butterflies on flowers

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

by Dylan Anderson

Poems by Buttercross Class

Come to my Bird café What would you like to eat today?

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

A fluttering butterfly

A slimy snail

A buzzing bee

A crawing worm

A black spider spinning webs

Three tiny flying ladybirds

And four small seeds to crack with your beaks

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

by Lucy Edmonds

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

Wriggling caterpillars

Juicy worms

Tickling millipedes

Fast fish

Spiders creeping

Hovering hoverflies

Or a hanging chrysalis

Come to my bird cafė
What would you like to eat today?

by Hugo Stephens-Dunn

JOHN CLARE'S BIRDS

In the first of an occasional series of articles, Richard Astle, chair of the Langdyke Countryside Trust, will look at different aspects of John Clare's relationship with birds, noting his early career as a bird-nester, exploring his role as one of the first chroniclers of bird behaviour; and his proto-type role as a bird-guide, using his poetry to lead his readers on nature walks similar to those the Langdyke Trust runs for its members today.

In this article, Richard looks at Clare's intriguing attempts to put bird song into words. It should be read with the recordings of bird-song that can be found on the Langdyke website – www.langdyke.org – to allow you to compare the words of the poet with the actual sound of the song.

John Clare and Bird Song

John Clare's attempts to capture bird song in words – both prose and poetry – are a defining and singular feature of his work and indicator of how birds and indeed wildlife of all kinds intrigued the poet. He wasn't just a nature lover; he was a naturalist.

As Robinson and Fitter point out in the introduction to *John Clare's Birds* (1982), the poet's ability to describe bird song matures and emboldens during his career. In early poems doves 'coo' and swallows 'twitter' while owls of course 'whoop' and magpies 'chatter'. All reasonably standard stuff, and quite comparable to other writers of the early 19th century.

As his style and perhaps confidence develop, so do his verbal descriptions. In later work Clare invents onomatopoeic words that he feels can better describe the sounds he hears. So, redstarts (firetails to Clare) 'tweet tut' and flycatchers whistle 'eejip eejip'.

Clare's description of the song (if it can be called song) of the quail, takes us down a rather different pathway of song-description, using common words – in this case 'wet-my-foot' – strung together to capture the sound. It is impossible to know if Clare borrowed this phrase from local custom or made it up himself. As noted by Mark Cocker and Richard Mabey in *Birds Britannica* (2005), other early renditions of the sound include 'Wet-my-lips' and 'Quick-me-dick'.

You can hear this call on the website and compare it yourself.

> I wandered out one rainy day
> And heard a bird with merry joys
> Cry 'wet my foot' for half the way;
> I stood and wondered at the noise,
> When from my foot a bird did flee—
> The rain flew bouncing from her breast
> I wondered what the bird could be,
> And almost trampled on her nest.

Clare's descriptions of bird sounds weren't restricted to his poetry. This is his description in prose of the call of the bittern. Again, you can find this on the website – personally I am not sure he gets this one quite right!

> Some describe the noise as something like the bellowing of bulls but I have often heard it and cannot liken it to that sound at all. In fact, it is difficult to describe what it is like, its noise has procured it the above name (the butter bump) by the common people. The first part of its noise is an indistinct muttering sort of sound very like the word butter uttered in a hurried manner and the bump comes very quick after and bumps a sound on the ear as if echo had mocked the bump of a gun just as the mutter ceased.... I have often

thought the putting ones mouth to the bung hole of an empty large cask and uttering the word 'butter bump' sharply would imitate the sound exactly. After its first call that imitates the word butter bump it repeats the sound bump singly several times in a more determined and louder manner

Bitterns were found in the fenland that stretched out from Northborough in the earlier 19th century, subsequently drained and now expanses of arable farmland with no bitterns. They have, however, started to turn up regularly at the wetlands created by gravel extraction between Etton and Maxey, an exciting if accidental recreation of the marshes that separated the villages in Clare's day, home to flocks of ducks and the grazing geese that caused the goose wars of the 18th century!

But perhaps above all it is in the description of the song of the nightingale that Clare's abilities to describe bird song in words are best displayed. First there is his prose description of just how hard it is to record:

I attempted to take down her notes but they are so varied that every time she starts again after the pauses seems to be something different to what she uttered before and many of her notes are sounds that cannot be written in the alphabet having no letters than can syllable the sounds

Then in 'The progress of Ryme' he tries to solve the problem:

The more I listened and the more
Each note seemed sweeter then before
And aye so different was the strain
Shed scarce repeat the notes again
Chee chew chew chew and higher still
Cheer cheer cheer cheer more loud and shrill
Cheer up cheer up cheer up and dropt
Low tweet tweet tweet jug jug jug and stopt
One moment just to drink the sound
Her music made and then a round
Of stranger witching notes was heard
As if it was a stranger bird
Wew wew wew wew chur chur chur chur chur
Woo it woo it could this be her
Tee rew tee rew tee rew tee rew
Chewsit chewsit and ever new
Will will will will grig grig grig grig
The boy stopt sudden on the brig
To hear the tweet tweet tweet so shrill
Then jug jug jug jug till all was still
A minute when a wilder strain
Made boys and woods to pause again

This is Clare's poetic voice at his most distinctive and a comparison with other famous early writers and poets of nature makes that distinction clear. Keats, in his 'Ode to the Nightingale' makes no attempt to capture the actual sound at all, while Gilbert White notes in prose only that 'nightingales make a plaintive and a jarring noise'. Much more recently Ted Hughes offers only

Your lightning and thunderclap nigh-voice
Shuts back with gaggings and splutters

Perhaps only Gerard Manley Hopkins comes close to Clare's attempts to capture bird song in verse, using sounds not words to try to illustrate the call of the woodlark:

Teevo cheevo cheevio chee
O where, what can that be?

Weedio-weedio: there again!
So tiny a trickle of song-strain

Even this hardly stands comparison with Clare's efforts. Perhaps this simply demonstrates the uniqueness of Clare – an outstanding observer of the natural world, ever curious to discover more and always ready to experiment in verse and prose how to record that world, for himself and his readers.

Richard Astle
Chair, Langdyke Countryside Trust

FOR JOHN CLARE

He was – and many more are like him now
Searching for a place of rest
As he had once followed the plough
And gazed upon the thrush's nest
So many more have held employ
Known the warmth of family joy

Her left asylum to wander roads
Aiming for a home he knew
Still I see others bearing his load
And every month another new
Some wounded by the life we lead
Others feeling that they've been freed

I know these should not be hidden
Imprisoned as though there'd been a crime
No one welcomes the madness unbidden
But these are witnesses to our time
For any land that cannot protect the weak
Has little good for us to speak

Cardinal Cox

As a poet in Peterborough you are continually reminded of John Clare, though other poets have been associated with the local area (Robert Mannyng, John Dryden, T.S. Eliot (part of whose Four Quartets *is named after Little Gidding) etc. This verse was inspired by Clare's powerful 'I Am'.*

THE SPOTTED FLYCATCHER

Reading the July 2019 Newsletter reminded me of something that I had observed several years ago regarding John Clare's poem 'Birds Nesting'. Roger Rowe told us how the original manuscript had been lost by being left on a train between Peterborough and Cambridge. All we have now of the complete poem is Professor Eric Robinson's transcript done before it disappeared. This transcript was first published by Nick and Mary Parry at their Tern Press in 1987 with a long introduction by Eric. The book is a large, folio-size, limited edition of only 90 copies, with fine coloured linocut illustrations by Nick.

On looking through this beautiful book, I soon noticed that when illustrating the flycatcher described in the poem, Nick had in fact drawn a pair of pied flycatchers instead of the obvious spotted flycatcher so well portrayed by Clare. This seemed strange to me; how could such an obvious mistake have occurred?

This section of the poem had also been included by John and Anne Tibble as a single poem – 'The Spider Catcher' in their 1935 collection, *The Poems of John Clare* (vol.2, p.227). There are only very slight variations between the two versions. That printed in the Tibbles' book is as follows:

There is a stranger comes with May
To haunt the homestead's orchard tree.
Sings 'eejip, eejip' all the day
And many cheated folks there be
Whose fancies lead their ears astray
Think bible Egypt is the home
And marvel at the mighty way
That birds without a guide will come.

It sings its strange and foreign call
All day in motion and at rest
And in the orchard's hollow wall
It makes a large and curious nest
Of straws that from the yard it gains
Of cobwebs fine as very down
And lays six eggs of tawny stains
Besprent with dots of darker brown.

Its back is of a slaty blue,
Its paler bosom ashen grey
Its wings are of a darker hue
And now and ever all the day
The orchard trees are its retreat
And there this ever busy guest
A some thing every moment meets
To catch and carry to its nest.

Neath cot and hovel eaves it drops
And flies and insects often gets,
And round the barn-hole fluttering stops

Where spiders spread their flimsy nets.
And boys from what they've seen and heard
Them oft as spider catchers call,
But yet the busy eejip bird
Remains a guess and doubt with all.

The description is precise and accurate but I could right away see where the confusion had arisen. It is in the line 'It's back is of a slaty blue' and two different interpretations. Generally nowadays the term 'slatey blue' brings to mind a dark blue-grey colour of the sort of slate that we often see on roofs, usually of the Welsh kind. To Clare it meant something else. The type of slates that he would be familiar with would be the locally-produced Collyweston variety, still seen on some of the houses in Helpston. The colour of these thicker, sandstone slates is a brownish grey with just a hint of blue, very similar to that of the back of the spotted flycatcher. On the other hand, the back of the pied flycatcher is of the dark blue-grey colour that we are used to seeing on buildings everywhere.

Nick Parry has obviously based his illustration of Clare's bird on our modern sense of his description 'slaty blue', and chosen the wrong bird. Clare himself used the name pied flycatcher to refer to what was obviously the spotted flycatcher, possibly because he had not encountered it himself and had only read about it in books. The pied flycatcher is a summer visitor to the western part of Britain, and confined mainly to oak woodland. It is, and was in Clare's day, very uncommon in Clare's part of the world.

In his Journal for June 10 1825 Clare wrote:

> Saw the Blue Grey or lead coloured Flycatcher for the first time this season they are called 'Egypt Birds' by the common people from their note which seems to resemble the sound of the word 'Egypt' they build in old walls liked the redstart and the Grey Wagtail

The whole of the 'Spider Catcher' is a superb example of the precise nature of Clare's observations and his ability to convey these to the reader. The exactness of his presentation is probably only appreciated if you have some knowledge yourself. Having said that, Clare was not infallible. As James Fisher wrote in his paper 'The Birds of John Clare' (1955): 'As a naturalist he was a natural, not a scholar. He fell into some pitfalls, as can be seen, but the combination of keen observation with poetic skill, of accuracy with emption, in his poems is unique in British verse.'

Noel Crack

THE MYSTERY OF THE ROSE AT THE MEMORIAL

Eagle-eyed regular attendees of the John Clare Society Festival in Helpston will have spotted a single solitary red rose, placed annually at the foot of the stone Memorial on West Street, during the weekend celebrating the anniversary of the Poet's birth in Helpston on 13 July 1793.

If the identity of the person who first placed the rose there were ever known to others, it has long since been forgotten. Spotting the mysterious red rose is now an integral part of the annual festivities for regulars, some of whom, I'm told, may prefer never to know the name of the person who started it all or why they did.

This seems a shame to me, as I feel that person's story is, in its own small way, just as relevant and valuable as John Clare's. They were both drawn to nature and the written word. They may have lived over one hundred years apart, but their lives continue to be intertwined. One inspired the other in their daily life and profession and, one has brought new people to appreciate the joy and importance of Clare's words.

So, I'm giving you a choice. Should you prefer the romance of it all to the reality, then, with this short article, I'm giving you some not inconsiderable advance notice to make up your mind.

Should you be happier with your own fantasy and not want to know more, then I urge you to skip pages 12 & 13 of the printed programme for next year's John Clare Society Festival in Helpston (10, 11 and 12 July), when all will be revealed.

Next year's Festival Programme,will include a proper tribute to a very special lifelong John Clare fan, who kept festival-goers entertained and intrigued for decades and is loved by his family and friends.

Clair Wordsworth

WHERE SHE TOLD HER LOVE by John Clare

I saw her crop a rose
Right early in the day,
And I went to kiss the place
Where she broke the rose away
And I saw the patten rings
Where she o'er the stile had gone,
And I love all other things
Her bright eyes look upon.
If she looks upon the hedge or up the leafing tree,
That whitethorn or the brown oak are made dearer things to me.

I have a pleasant hill
Which I sit upon for hours,
Where she cropt some sprigs of thyme
And other little flowers;
And she muttered as she did it
As does beauty in a dream,
And I loved her when she hid it
On her breast, so like to cream,
Near the brown mole on her neck that to me a diamond shone;
Then my eye was like to fire, and my heart was like to stone.

There is a small green place
Where cowslips early curled,
Which on Sabbath day I traced,
The dearest in the world.
A little oak spreads o'er it,
And throws a shadow round,
A green sward close before it,
The greenest ever found:
There is not a woodland nigh nor is there a green grove,
Yet stood the fair maid nigh me and told me all her love.

CLARE IN CAMBRIDGE

John Clare Society president Carry Akroyd gave a well-attended talk at Stapleford Granary on 26 June. This award-winning building was the scene of an exhibition of Carry's prints and paintings. Her lecture encompassed a summary of Clare's life and countryside, how his poetry informs her work, and some of the more technical aspects of how she makes various kinds of prints.

I have heard Carry speak on several occasions: through the flies and beetles that settle on her sketchpad on a sun-filled afternoon or a gleaming glow-worm on a summer's night, she never fails to pique one's interest in the art of nature and to draw a new perspective on John Clare.

The Centre for John Clare Studies arranged two meetings during the Easter term – in May Lily Dessau (Geneva) introduced discussion with a paper entitled 'From humming clocks to chiming bees: the soundscapes of Clare's labouring community'. In June Dr Sarah Houghton-Walker (Gonville and Caius, Cambridge) introduced discussion with a paper on *The Shepherd's Calendar*, concentrating on November and the poet's use of repetition.

The group usually meets during the lunch hour between 1 and 2 p.m. All are very welcome. You are encouraged to bring your lunch; drinks will be provided. Email cjcs@english.cam.ac.uk

Sylvia Sullivan

NEWS FROM THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

Our annual AGM weekend next year takes place 12 – 14 June at Robin Hood's Bay, hosted by the Walmsley Society. They celebrate James Ulric Walmsley (the painter), and his son Leo Walmsley was born in 1892 and was best known for his *Bramblewick* series of (mainly autobiographical) books, depicting life in the fishing community around the Bay. It should be a great weekend and all are welcome. More information will appear on the ALS website in the autumn.

The theme for our 2020 edition of the ALS journal is 20:20 Vision, and I am inviting article contributions. If you go to the Publications area of our website (www.allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com), you can pick up a copy of this year's journal – with some suggestions for interpretation of the 2020 theme. There is also a downloadable style guide.

Linda J Curry
Chair, ALS

CHAPBOOK no.14:
A Cag of Small Stripes

From the Introduction:

I have had it in the back of my mind for some while to produce a book, in the Chapbook series, that concentrates on Clare's sometimes odd-seeming, or unusual use of language. *A Cag of Small Swipes* if you will. After all, Clare has a wide acquaintance with specialised vocabularies of all kinds.

Clare's passion for words was founded on his knowledge of chapbook nursery-rhymes and fairy-stories, and the games of his childhood. He was also intimate with the language of the hedger, the ditcher, the thatcher, the ploughman, the shepherd and the cowman – paralleled by the language of the 'ranter-preacher', the village school-master and the pretentious local lawyer. Plus all those words used in the many traditional songs he knew so well. His language was that of village streets, fairs and fields. It is the language of proverb and of popular, often vulgar rhyme. So it is clear that Clare is an important source, one of very few, for finding words that were commonly used in Eastern and Northern England, as well as in Scotland, during his lifetime.

Clare often used words that he employed in his own speech and that he heard every day in the village street, and having great fun writing this way. He is not looking down at his fellow-villagers for their speech-habits but enjoying, as we should, its vigour and variety.

So, this as a book full of strange words and phrases, sometimes hiding sexual imagery, yet full of laughter and an ebullient sense of humour. Most especially when describing the love lives of the young people living all around him in Helpston, and the advice they are proffered or choose to reject:

> Peggy ye might bin my death wi yer scorning
> Im sure tis yer pleasure to do as ye may
> For ere sin I helpd ye to milk in the morning
> Yeve 'ployd all my thoughts for the rest of the day
> Yer sweet slender body so light & so jimping
> Yer arms so well shapd & yer brown curley hair
> Yer gait so belady like spoilt wi no limping
> Left ye the power to gi joy or despair
>
> (From 'Hodges Confession')

A Cag of Small Swipes is available from me at £5 plus £1 postage and packing: arborfield@gmail.com

Roger Rowe

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

SALES ORDER FORM

October 2019

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

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

BOOKS

CODE	ITEM	PRICE	WEIGHT
B19971	**For John Clare** ed. John Lucas. An Anthology of poems about John Clare	£4.50	180g
B20023	**John Clare: New Approaches** ed. J Goodridge & S Kovesi (p/b essays)	£2.50	400g
B20028	**John Clare, the Northamptonshire Poet** ed. JL Carr (p/b pocket size poetry book)	£1	20g
B20030	**John Clare: The Living Year** (Prose & Poems of 1841) ed T Chilcott. **1 copy only, going o/p? email me!**	£7.99	350g
B20033	**The Wood is Sweet** poems selected by David Powell illustrated by Carry Akroyd. (rrp £7.99)	£6	200g
B20112	**By Ourselves** following Clare from Epping to Helpston..... **Highly illustrated,** hardback ed. Andrew Kotting	£17	650g
B20113	**John Clare, the Trespasser** by John Goodridge & RKR Thornton	£6.99	75g
B20114	**John Clare, A Poet for all Seasons** Peter Moyse hdbk, many colour photographs	£4.50	500g
B20115	**This Happy Spirit** Clare poems selected by RKR Thornton & Carry Akroyd, illustrated by Carry Akroyd. (rrp £8.99)	£7	200g
B20116	**John Clare: A Collection of Songs, Airs and Dances for Violin (1818)** ed. Tony Urbainczyk , **vols 1 & 2:**	**Vol 1**: £9 **Vol 2**: £14 Incl. Post	
B20117	**John Clare Poems Descriptive** As 1st ed, 4th reprint (hdbk, no jacket) Lark Publishing	£6.50 Incl.post	
B20118	**Hidden Treasures** (of John Clare) ed. R. Rowe(Arbour Edition) few copies only, going o/p	£6	125g
B20119	**A John Clare Flora** Molly Mahoud paper, colour photographs (£14.99)	£17.99 Incl. post	
B20121	**John Clare: The Shepherd's Calender** Tim Chilcott, Carcanet ed. Going o/p?	£18.95	350g
B20122	**Torpel Manor: The Biography of a Landscape** by F Gosling, SP Ashby & A McClain.	£12 Incl.post	

JOHN CLARE SOCIETY JOURNALS

1982- 2019 As available **Please enquire for years wanted**	£3 for each year post free
Journal Index (1982-2011)	£1 post free

MISCELLANEOUS

M20071	***In Clare's Footsteps***. Coloured map of Helpston with notes Unlaminated folded to A5 as above: laminated flat A4	 £0.30 £1	 5g 25g
M20092	John Clare leather bookmark, gold on dark green.	£2	10g
M20031	JCS gummed labels 100 labels in pack.	75p	150g
M20028	Scenes from Helpston: High Quality Cotton Tea-Towel	£4	Post free
M20028	Clare & the Helpston Festival, poems by RKR Thornton ppr	£4	50g
M20001	John Clare Perpetual Calendar.	£2	150g

DVDs and CDs

M20060	**CD 8 Clare songs** set by Terence Deadman with Clare poems read by Peter Moyse, Rodney Lines & Norma Weller.	£7	200g
M20061	**DVD** John Clare, A 65min photographic journey with poetry readings by Peter Moyse.	£5 post free	
M20062	**CD Clare's Journey**. A musical journey through his life, sung by Maida Vale Singers. Composer: Terence Deadman. Lyrics: Trevor Harvey.	£5	200g
Joint special offer : M20060 and M20062 £10 plus £3.00 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 any six flower cards (please state) post free:	£1.80
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

SALES ORDER FORM

POSTAGE & PACKING (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. **(note: some items listed as Incl.post)**

CODE	ITEM	PRICE	WEIGHT
Total purchase price and total weight			
Add p & p from table for the total weight			
TOTAL PAYMENT			
I enclose a cheque (sterling)payable to The John Clare Society for £			
NAME: **Dated**			
ADDRESS: **POST CODE**			
In case of problem or query, please supply your mobile/ phone number and/or e-mail address:			

Return to: Sales Officer, John Clare Society, 3 Astwick Road, Stotfold, Hitchin, SG5 4AP Tel: 01462 631285 e: djsapt@gmail.com