# The John Clare Society

Newsletter no. 139 June 2020

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## FROM THE CHAIRMAN

As those of you who received my email of 18 March will already know, and others will no doubt have guessed, there will be no Festival this year – for the first time since the Society was founded. It is particularly disappointing since we had intended to take the opportunity to celebrate the bicentenary of Clare's first publication, and to remember the other significant happenings of 1820. But the way that the coronavirus has spread through society and the actions that the government has taken to try and control it show that our decision was a sensible one.

We are very pleased that our President, Carry Akroyd, has nevertheless written a 'Presidential Address' that captures the spirit of that heady and challenging year in Clare's life; you will find it in this Newsletter.

We shall have to arrange an AGM, but there is still so much uncertainty that it is not sensible to plan anything at this stage. We shall of course contact you once we are in a position to make arrangements. In the meantime you will receive your Newsletter as usual and the Journal will be sent out in July.

Simon Kövesi's project 'The Meeting' was due to end with a musical stage show on 26 April at Bush Hall in London. This part of the anniversary project – co-sponsored by the Society along with Arts Council England and Oxford Brookes University – has also been postponed. As soon as a new date for the show is secured, and tickets are available, the Society will alert members by email.

With best wishes,
**Valerie Pedlar**

## THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY FESTIVAL

We shall certainly be having our usual celebrations and Festival next year, all being well – **Friday 9 to Sunday 11 July 2021** in Helpston. Please put the dates in your diaries – we look forward to seeing you all then!

**Sue Holgate – Festival Coordinator**

## MEMBERSHIP

If you do not pay by standing order, you will receive a form inviting you to renew your membership with this Newsletter. It would be appreciated if this could be returned with your cheque; for individual members the annual subscription is £15, and for joint members £20.

You are welcome to pay by internet banking, or by bank transfer. Please complete and return the renewal form, or tell me by email that you have paid. If you wish to pay by standing order, which simplifies matters for everybody, then let me know and I will send you the appropriate form.

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

Liz Evans, Burton Latimer
Robert Beckinsale, Taunton
Graham Prosser, Barnstaple
Joanna Dobson, Sheffield
John Laycock, Cowlersley, Huddersfield

**Robert Heyes, Membership Secretary**

## JOHN CLARE SALES

Last year seems a long time ago! The high point of the successful Edward Thomas/Clare event continued into an unexpected order from the USA for a selection of books and cards and my successfully using PayPal to receive payment! February was making sure we had stock of *The Wood is Sweet* and *This Happy Spirit* before the planned theatrical event celebrating the publication of *Poems Descriptive*. To be followed by the big Clare Festival at Helpston in July on the to-do list. Additionally I ordered a couple of copies of *Cottage Tales*, *The Shepherds Calendar* and *The Ballad of John Clare* to add to the displays for July and the Bird Fair I hoped to attend with Noel Crack.

Oh dear! March and April threw those plans out of the window, or rather, shut the window and locked the doors! At this time of writing all events have been cancelled and are only due to return next year. However, I do look forward to the better times, as I am sure we all do, and meeting at some future event. Hopefully the theatre event with Toby Jones may be this autumn.

In the meantime please take a look at the order-form and see if there is something for yourself or that you could give as a gift. I can accept PayPal, credit/debit cards via mobile payment or online transfers to a bank. Cheques are also acceptable, of course, but slow the process a little. I can post to you or a send-to address. Email enquiries etc. welcome, also by mail. All this in aid of The John Clare Society. Here's looking forward to the next few months….

**David Smith**

# A PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

Poor health, requiring the postponement of plans and the cancelling of arrangements, was a regular occurrence in Clare's life. We now can appreciate what it means to scrub our diaries. In all our various isolations and lockdowns, we can still contemplate together on that significant year in Clare's life, 200 years ago, when he had the thrill of seeing his first book of poems published.

The title of the collection, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, often gets shortened in conversation and lectures to just being 'Poems Descriptive' which I always think is a great shame. The emphasis, like the greater size of the typeface on the frontispiece of the book, should be on the 'Rural Life and Scenery' which is exactly the contents. Clare delivers slices of village life narrated by local voices, and an appraisal of scenery with the eye and vocabulary of a naturalist.

The poems were gathered from all of his previous writings, including some of his teenage output; they vary a good deal in both quality and style, but already show how Clare can write in many different registers. His editors were quite bold in their selection, but fairly timid in their print run: published in January by the end of February they had almost run out of copies and were planning a second printing for twice as many.

Clare was suddenly famous; spun by his editors as 'the Northamptonshire Peasant Poet', he was taken up as a novelty. His friends made plans: he must visit London. I often think about this first trip of Clare's to the capital, what it was like for a clever but very rural young man.

I was about nine years old when I first was taken to London. I was tagging along while my older brother was taken to the Science Museum, of which I remember seeing the pendulum and being told that it proved something or other. I don't think I understood what that really was until I was 30. But I do remember the impression on me of the size of the buildings, both from outside and inside, and the breadth of the streets, the noise and the traffic. Obviously the most important part of the excursion was going up and down escalators for the first time, and travelling on the tube. It was all the peripheral things that were the most exciting, and not just the structures and technology but the novelty of seeing the huge variety of other people, how they dressed and behaved, taking everything as normal. How much more exotic for Clare was his first trip to London – the architecture, the carriages, the fashions, the people.

His excitement must have been sustained at a high pitch because everything was happening so quickly since meeting his publisher only a few months earlier. It was his first long coach journey, at great speed through new landscapes and distant towns, to reach the bustle of London. Clare was in the capital for

less than 10 days, and the rate of new events and experiences had no let up.


Constantly guided and escorted, Clare was taken to meet so many new people, all of whom not only looked upon him with great interest but took him seriously and saw his quality. He was taken to the theatre and to Westminster Abbey to be shown Poets' Corner, and if the notion occurred to him that one day his own name would be there, he would never have guessed how interminably long it would take to make that happen. His new song, printed at the beginning of the volume, was being sung on a London stage. He was meeting people of education and influence; the future was looking bright.

Clare was taken to have his portrait drawn by William Hilton. This drawing is the basis of the Hilton portrait that now hangs in the National Gallery. It captures that optimistic excitement and rural freshness young John carried to town. At the studio he also met Hilton's sister who was married to the artist Peter De Wint. Clare must also have seen some of De Wint's work; he admired him as an artist of truth, meaning someone who actually went out into the fields and painted the landscape and the agricultural population as they really were, not as something romanticised. Also, De Wint's landscapes were flat and familiar, not vistas of sublime mountainous drama.

Clare was visiting people who lived in a much more comfortable style than his crowded cottage. It must have all seemed overwhelmingly glamorous and confusing, and the potential future. But back to earth. Just as the possibility that fame and fortune might be his, and place him in a more positive light with Mary Joyce, the die is cast. It was during this trip that he resolved that when he returned home he would be getting married to Patty. After all, she was six months pregnant.

Almost immediately on returning home Clare went to a nearby village to marry Patty She didn't come to live with him straight away, but quite understandably stayed with her mother until after the birth; then in June she arrived complete with baby girl at the Helpston household and Clare became both a husband and father. In July Clare thinks his wife 'is a better bargain than I expected', but by August he says she will turn out a termagant and one of the most ignorant and obstinate women in creation. Patty was illiterate, so there would be little empathy in that part of their relationship. Not happy ever after.

By the end of May the book has gone into its third printing, but the support of some influential figures has been conditional on some cuts to the content, made without consulting Clare. He began to see that creating the work is one thing, controlling what happens to it afterwards is quite another.

There's always a flipside to everything in Clare's life. The fame brings the possibility of prosperity but also celebrity stalking. He is given invitations he cannot refuse and letters to be paid for and responded to, from a stream of tedious people. The anticipated fortune has not materialised yet, and while he

must work in the harvest fields he nevertheless must be called back to the house to see visitors curious to witness him as a puppet show, and causing him to lose money. When all he really wants to do is be on his own to write because the poems are pouring out of him.

How did he do this? Creativity requires a certain amount of mooching-around time, gazing into space, being distracted by a bird nesting, walking the rhythm of a line, wandering the fields to absorb ideas and observations. Creativity needs a bit of solitude and uninterrupted time, of which he had so little. Landwork, correspondence, fiddle playing, baby, family, walking to Stamford for books and news and the literary conversation lacking in the village – so much going on in his head.

Yet Clare estimated he had written 70 songs in the year, which he sends to Stamford for sheet music, even though he anticipates that probably he won't make a farthing from them, and he regularly sends new poems to London for the next volume in preparation, which will be *The Village Minstrel.* He even stressed to his publisher that there was no need to hold anything back from publication because he felt so much in the flow of inspiration that he knew there would soon after be enough work for a further third volume.

He started planning to go to London in September; he desperately needed more contact with his new literary acquaintances. A creative person can only value praise and opinions from someone they respect and perceive to have the right understanding. He needed approbation from a quarter unknown in Helpston, little known in Stamford, but he could be sure of receiving in London. However, the journey was put off and put off again, and then later the weather became cold drizzling and half-wintry, which made him feel too low to make the journey. As the year drew to a close he was still working very hard, even though often in poor health and feeling melancholy.

How could he not be exhausted after a year like that? All the excitement of a wider social circle, the new experiences, the delight in recognition at last for the work he had been doing. How encouraging, at last, to feel the joyful justification of his belief in himself. What new confidence, what a buzz. The anticipation that his fortune was made, and money problems would be no more.

1820 was the big year for Clare. Disappointment and dismay were not yet on the horizon, it was the high point of his life, the peak of his optimism. His best work was yet to come. He was 26.

**Carry Akroyd**

*Photographs of Helpston by Valerie Pedlar and Stephen Sullivan*

John Clare

We offer this selection from our stock to the John Clare Society members. All books are octavo in good or very good condition. We have listed scarcer John Clare titles but have many more in stock (price ranges from £5 to £50). We also stock poetry, fiction and an extensive rural and natural history stock, ranging from scholarly to serendipitous.

**John Clare**

*Poems* – ed. Tibble, 2 volumes, dust wrapper (1935) £120.00
*A Life* – Tibble (1932) £45.00
*Sketches in the Life* – ed. Blunden (1931) £60.00
*Folk Tradition* – Deacon (1983) £15.00
*Letters* – ed. Tibble, dust wrapper (1951) £35.00
*Life and Remains* – Chevvy (1873) £75.00
*John Clare* – Martin (1865) £65.00

**A Taster of Other Stock:**

*The Country Scene* – Masefield and Seago (1937) £150.00
*The Complete Herbal* – Culpepper – crown octavo – modern quarter calf (1814) £120.00
*Collected Poems* – W.H.Davies, quarter blue calf (1943, 2nd impression) £40.00
*The Minstrel* – Beattie, full green leather (1823) £20.00
*Legends of Ireland the Land* – Lady Wilde, 2 volume (1887) £50.00
*The White Road Westwards* – B.B. (1972) £60.00
*A Trilogy* – A. Bell (1948) £45.00
*Bobby Bocker* – A.G.Street – mint condition, dust wrapper (1957) £45.00
*A Clear Water Stream* – H.Williamson, dust wrapper (1958) £15.00
*Archie and the Street Baptists* – J. Betjeman, dust wrapper (1977) £35.00

Enquiries welcome; other authors in stock include R. Blythe, Bensusan, Moore, Niall, Storey, W.H. Hudson


Contact: Edward Baines: 01572 722154; Lucy Baines: therutlandbookshop@gmail.com; 07860657911
Website: www.therutlandbookshop.com

# THE POET AND THE PAINTER

*A close friend recently sent me this dialogue-poem. It very much reminded me of a poem, written in August 1941 by Sidney Keyes, who died in action less than two years later in Tunisia, age 20. That poem also seems Clare-related; it is called 'Death and the Plowman' and is a conversation between Death and (I think from the content) John Clare. I have no idea if folk might know it, or Sidney Keyes's Clare-related work, but the comparison seems clear to me, particularly the biblical references.*

***Roger Rowe***

*The Plowman:*
It's only the wind holds my poor bones together,
So take me with you to that famous land.
There I might wither, as I'm told some do,
Out of my rags and boast at last
The integrated skeleton of truth.

*Both:*
We're driving to the famous land some call
Posterity, some famine, some the valley
Of bones, valley of bones, valley of dry
Bones where there is no heat nor hope not dwelling:
But cold security, the one and only
Right of a workless man without a home.
*August 1941.*

(Two sections from 'Four Postures of Death: IV. Death and the Plowman' by Sidney Keyes, written, perhaps coincidentally, 100 years after Clare's tramp from Epping to Northborough)

## THE POET AND THE PAINTER
## A meeting between John Clare and Vincent van Gogh on the 20th May, 1864

*John:*
I am, John Clare, The Poet
Born not made
Nor a peasant, as I have been called
But a Poet, published and read and famous in my day.
Now an old man, gnarled and rotting
Barnacled on my arse
Overly ripe in parts
Birds nesting in my whiskers
Fungi growing and twisting around my roots
As if I lie too soon in my grave
Smelling the damp clods of dirt under Helpston
'Tis a smell I love. 'Tis home.

*Vincent:*
Is it here, sir, your home?  In this madhouse?

*John:*
Who speaks?  Who are you, boy?
Lean in... my ears are up the spout.

*Vincent:*
I am Vincent, Sir.  From Holland.  Aged eleven and a bit.

*John:*
Eleven and a bit, eh?  I think that the bit is paramount.
Ah! I see you now.  Vincent van Gogh the Painter!
You look bemused and so you should.
But no, this madhouse is not my home
Though I have been here many years.
This bed you see me on is my deathbed
You will paint one like it one day, Vincent,
You, but a schoolboy now
Innocent of what a pretty maid hides under those petticoats
(but you will learn).

*Vincent:*
I have just arrived at boarding school
And sad to leave my brother Theo.
But you were a great man, John Clare!
You were Lord Byron, you were a Champ in the ring
A King wearing a crown, of thorns
Your words shook the leaves off the trees
And feathered quills fluttered in your fingers.

*John:*
Ay, slow down, it all ended soon enough.  Nothing lasts, nothing.
But I once dreamt of a time when they will go grubbing and dig me up
My poems printed again in books
I saw a plaque on a wall
But you were there too?
Not in the great Abbey, no
But your paintings boy, worshipped
In great grand rooms full of 'em, too many to count
(I whisper as I am frit to say the word aloud, lean in –
Genius, they will call us both.  Yes, genius!)

Flat country, Fens, Netherlands
We both sprung up from flat wet land
('Twas you Dutchmen who showed us how to drain 'em)
And you will travel more than me, Paris, Brussels
London (I did go there, and so shall you)
Arles in the south of France.  Imagine that!
I walked from Epping to my home

My feet blistered black 'n' blue, eating bread
No – not bread, grass
I grazed on grass, like The Lamb.

And you, Vincent, will take a long walk too.
You will be among coal miners, my boy,
Poor men, poor souls
As their pastor
And give up your lodgings to a tramp
While you live in a hut.  Well, maybe stable is a better word
After all, the one we love was born amongst beasts.
Laid on straw.
But the bosses will not be keen on it
Scribes and Pharisees the lot o' em
They'll sack you
And you, Vincent, will walk forty-seven miles back to Brussels
Forty-seven miles! That's impressive.

*Vincent:*
But Sir, I see my life, my whole purpose, is to spread the word of God
Do you see that?  When I grow up?  When I am a man?
I see God all around me.  In the light.  He lives in the light
And it is His light that crashes around my head – Oh
Hold onto me, John Clare, Sir, or I might crash right through that wall
Tie me down or I might blow away
I might be lost forever to never put a brush to board
John Clare – Help me!

*John:*
Be calm, boy.  Settle yourself.  Don't go so tepid on me.
I can see far beyond that old wall there –
Such sunflowers I see, yellow burning gold
Suns and swirling starry skies
Big skies like only you (and me) know how
And Jesus walking on the water, or is it a farmer sowing his seed?
I see a lark, a lark ascending, O I see such beauty!
Open my crusty old lips will you, boy,
And hear it?  The lark's cry?

*Vincent:*
I hear many birds singing out of your mouth
And, well, a little bit smelly in truth, but tell me
Is it a magic trick, Sir?
The dawn chorus comes up from your guts
Words are scratched into your wrinkles
Your eyes are filled to overflowing with flowers
Buds, blossom
And green twigs up your nostrils –
Crawling creatures inhabit your hairy earholes:
O! Earwigs are burrowing into your brains!
You are a midsummer meadow, John Clare!

*John:*
Not a meadow, Vincent.  Not big enough.
'Cushion' is the better word –
A Midsummer cushion.

*Vincent:*
A cushion, then, that is blowing a storm under your blanket!

*John:*
No, no, boy.  I farted.  Begging your pardon.
*(Vincent blushes).*

*Vincent:*
And what of love, sir?  You, the poet?
My tutor says it is all love and death.

*John:*
Ah! love.
You will cut off your ear for love, Vincent
(John chuckles) Ay and I did worse
I loved Mary Joyce (who was burnt up in a fire)
Believing her to be my second wife.
Poor Patty.  Poor Patty, only true wife of mine
Who never hurt a midgeon. Buried two babies, we did
Our young hearts cracked like that old milk jug.
Wipe away my tears, there's a good boy.

*Vincent:*
There, there.

*John:*
Death?  Well yes, as I said, this is my deathbed
And a steam engine will carry me home
My first time on such a contraption – I'd have to be dead!
But I am not keen on 'em.
The land, you see. The land. I love the land and I see what they do
They muck it about for profit.  They enclose the fields, you see,
They criss-cross the pastures with iron tracks
It'll all come to ruin, it'll rain down on their heads
The birds will fall out of the sky, the tracks will rust
The rivers will dry up – or flood like Noah and his great Ark
And they will be lost.  All will be lost with no one left to find 'em.

Where was I…. where was I...?
Yes, as you see, I'm breathing my last in an asylum
they call me mad.
And you, Vincent, I hardly know how to tell you
Be brave, my boy,
For you too will be called mad, and will be sent to the madhouse.
My poor boy.

Keep close to your brother Theo, and his wife –
Thanks to her your paintings will be saved.

*Vincent:*
Will I be an old man like you?

*John:*
No, my dear boy.  You will go younger than me
By a bullet.  Self inflicted, they say
But who knows?
The thing to remember is this – We, you and me, will leave behind us such stuff!
Such Poems!
Such Paintings!
The likes of you and me are rarities!  Like Roman gold
Dug up in a field.
I said before that nothing lasts, but I should have added –
Listen carefully boy, I should have added –
Except what we produce.  Poems.  Paintings.  They live on.
We leave a legacy, you see, Vincent,
for the world to come.
We live on in the stuff we made.

And now I have to say goodbye and breathe my last.
Are you still frit, Vincent?
Vincent?  Vincent van Gogh?

He's gone. Of course. He has a life to live
School and games and suchlike
Girls to love
Tears to shed, too many –
And laugh, he will laugh a bit.
And paintings, oh yes, such paintings to paint.

They shall come and cart me off soon
Turn down my bed
Make ready for the next one.
I wish him luck, poor soul, whoever he is.

Sweet maid,
take my hand and lead me on.
All is quiet.
My time is finally up.
I am… gone.
I am.

**Pat Blalock**

# JOHN CLARE'S BIRDS – Signs of Spring

The sunshine of April has been in strong contrast to the sadness that has beset our world during that time. Often it has felt rather unreal sitting in the garden, basking in the sun while outside the country struggles to contain this deadly virus.

Clare knew much trauma in his life and it shaped both his poetry and, I think, his attitude to nature, from which he not only took great joy but also solace in times of difficulty. Nature cure is something we all appreciate, I am sure.

And nature has been doing its best at this time to keep reminding us of the wonders of our world. With the weather so settled many of the summer migrants have been reaching our countryside several days earlier than usual and so far in good numbers too – perhaps the weather means that more are surviving the rigours of migration, and fewer are being shot from the skies in the southern Mediterranean. Perhaps the hunters too are in lockdown?

One bird that Clare wrote so beautifully about is the common whitethroat – one of our commonest summer songsters which proclaims its presence in our hedgerows with its scratchy song and bursts of vertical song-flight. Here he goes:

The happy white throat on the sweeing bough
Swayed by the impulse of the gadding wind
That ushers in the showers of april – now
Singeth right joyously and now reclined
Croucheth and clingeth to her moving seat
To keep her hold – and till the wind for rest
Pauses – she mutters inward melody
That seems her hearts rich thinkings to repeat
And when the branch is still – her little breast
Swells out in raptures gushing symphonies
And then against her brown wing softly prest
The wind comes playing an enraptured guest
This way and that she swees – till gusts arise
More boisterous in their play – when off she flies.

As ever, Clare captures the essence of the bird perfectly – it is a jaunty bird, constantly on the move and often retreating into the hedgerow as you approach, churring away in annoyance and peeping out as you pass! Clare also remarked that the bird often imitates the nightingale in variety and loudness of song – it is certainly very vocal, although its song is much less rich than the nightingale's and overall rather scratchy in tone. If I were to describe the difference in human terms, I would say that the whitethroat is the cheeky chap of the local bird world, full of fun, restless and not too serious! And if the nightingale listens to Radio Three, then the whitethroat is more of a Radio Six Music listener, loving the indie sound!

Whitethroats remain common today and can be found singing and nesting in scraps of hedgerow across John Clare Countryside. Good places to see and hear them are around the heaths at Castor Hanglands or in the hedgerows around Woodcroft Castle.

**Richard Astle**
**Chairman, The Langdyke Countrysifde Trust**

# THE REAL JOHN CLARE (Part 1)

I enjoyed the recent (18 January 2020) programme on Radio 4 entitled *John Clare's Scrapings*, which concentrated on the poet's interest in and collecting of folk songs and music from his part of the world. Many Clare enthusiasts probably do not realise just how much of a pioneer he was in this field, or the extent of the 263 songs and tunes that he recorded in manuscript. However, I was not happy with the programme's reference to Clare as the 'poverty-stricken poet'. The use of that phrase tends to perpetuate the myth that John Clare lived in a far more perilous situation than was the case. After the success of his first book, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*, Clare received much financial aid in the form of a trust fund and annuities that were established by his patrons and supporters. In order to give a truer picture of the poet's situation I feel that this should have been mentioned.

The income from these sources at first amounted to about £45 as year, although this was decreased to about £39 as interest rates reduced over the years. To put this figure into perspective, one needs to realise that at the time a small cottage could be bought in Helpston for less than this, as Frieda Gosling shows in *Exploring the Heritage of Helpston* (2018). Also relevant is the fact that most of Clare's neighbours would be working a full week and earning somewhere between eight and twelve shillings (twenty shillings to the pound), although probably not so low as the five shillings mentioned in the programme. This was often the rate paid by the parish to unemployed people for doing useful work, as in Clare's father's case. For the ordinary labourer, the only occasion when wages were higher (twelve shillings a week is about £32 per year, but this assumes that such a highly-paid rate would be available throughout the year) was at harvest time, when all able-bodied individuals were expected to take part. Shirley Wittering in *Ecology and Enclosure* (2013) gives some details of this as regards South Cambridgeshire.

I feel that we have to be honest and admit that some of John Clare's financial problems were self-inflicted. If at times things were tight, it was not helped by the poet's unnecessary spending. One senses in his own account of events an indication of the guilt that he feels for this. Throughout Clare's life we know of many examples of gifts of money being given to him – some of these quite considerable – as well as much practical help. Overall, it seems to me that a combination of factors resulted in John Clare's struggles. His increasing mental and physical problems, together with a certain lack of discipline, led to him being unable to make the most of his situation.

Also related to the poet's finances is the question of how well he was treated by his publishers. There have been suggestions that he was defrauded by them out of his share of the profits from his books but, in spite of Clare's own assertions, this does not seem to be the case. Jonathan Bate, in his biography (2003) does a good job of showing the reality of events. John Taylor took a risk in publishing Clare; his normal practice was to purchase an author's copyright before publication, but with Clare he agreed to the poet having a share of any profits. From the evidence available it seems that, after all payments to and for Clare had been deducted, this is what happened. Even when purchasers had generously overpaid for books, the extra amount seems to have been forwarded to Clare. There are on record a good number of payments that Taylor and Hessey made to the poet, above and beyond the trust fund interest, which was regularly sent on.

These include the £40 that was paid to Edward Drury which he said was still owed to him by Clare as well as £20 for his shared of the copyright. Many other payments were also made for transport, medical costs and other practical purchases.

One example of Clare's relationship with his publishers occurred in 1825. On Thursday July 7th he writes in his Journal:

> Wrote an answer to Hessey's letter of the 30th of June which contained a draft for my dividend and salary also was forced to solicit them anew to send me £10 which I want to pay off my half yearly accounts.

Just three days later, the Sunday entry reads:

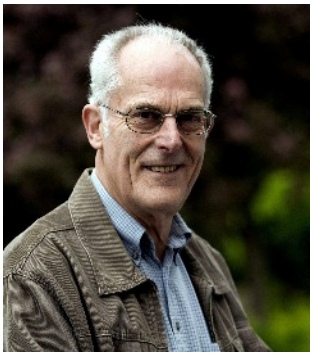
> received letter from Hessey with the £10 which I wanted more then my salary came to....

On the other hand, in the final settlement of accounts between Clare and his publishers in 1829 there are some items which throw a different light on things. Various errors and omissions in the accounts, while occurring on both the credit and the debit sides, did leave the poet worse off. There was no mention of payments due to Clare for contributions that he made to the *London Magazine* whilst Taylor was its editor, although his connection with the journal had ended four years previously. The £100 contribution that Taylor and Hessey had paid into the trust fund for Clare at its inception, had been repaid to the firm. This had been listed as a gift in the original subscription list. There would undoubtedly be a good business motive in insuring a stable income for their new protégé, but whether it had been intended as a gift and changed because of events, we will never know. Because of this, it looks as if any profits that John Clare made from his first book probably ended up in his trust fund, and it could be argued that this was the best place for them. In the general chaos during the winding-up of the publishing firm, I find it difficult to see any real intention to defraud the poet; rather, this is what might have been expected at a difficult time. At the end of the day, when one considers the amount of effort that Taylor put into editing and presenting Clare and the fact that even after 1829 he did help to edit *The Rural Muse*, and also contributed to Clare's upkeep at High Beech, I for one would not charge him with any major deception.

My purposed in writing this piece has been to try to demonstrate that the struggles which John Clare faced were, like his poetry, a result of the man that he was.

**Noel Crack**

**Ow bist yer 'Asum grammar', then?**

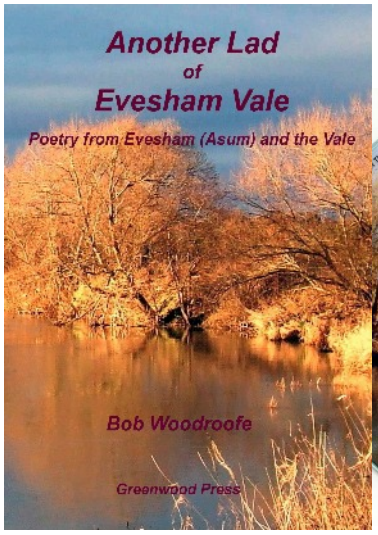


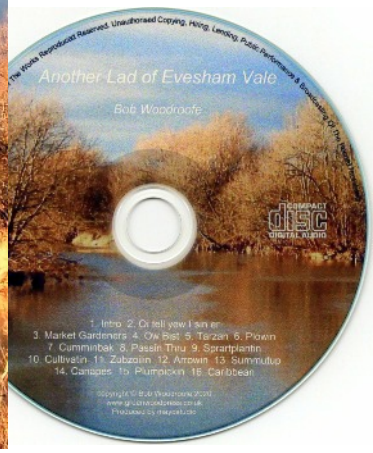
# ANOTHER LAD OF EVESHAM VALE

A generation or more after local author Fred Archer's *A lad of Evesham Vale* was published in 1972, *Another Lad of Evesham Vale* has appeared on the scene. Here is an update on life from the Market Gardens of the Vale of Evesham. Fred's words were written in prose, Bob Woodroofe's are written in poetry:

Extract from 'Passin thru':

> Asum's allus a bit congested yew,
> like whenever yew wantz tu drive straight through,
> It doan matter iffun yew gus fast or slow,
> yew'll nevur get seven green lights in a row.




Born and brought up in Evesham, Bob still lives in the town. When he was young he earned his money picking fruit and vegetables grown by the local Market Gardeners. One of his claims to fame was picking a ton of plums in one day!

It was out in the Vale's fields and orchards that he first heard and picked up the local dialect, 'Asum Grammar', which is very rarely heard these days. An audio CD of the 'Asum grammar' poems is included with the book in order to appreciate and preserve this disappearing dialect.

There are poems about Evesham and growing up, working on the land and others reaching out around the Vale up to more recent times.

This is Bob's second hardback collection following on from his ***Pick of the Crop*** published in 2017 by Greenwood Press, which included poems on the Countryside, Nature, Evesham, Worcester, Croome Park and others.

***Another lad of Evesham Vale – Poetry from Evesham (Asum) and the Vale.***
**by local poet Bob Woodroofe. 64 pages plus CD. £12 (£1.50 p&p)**

**Publication date 1st May 2020**

**For further information please contact**
**Bob Woodroofe** **by email** **bob.woodroofe@outlook.com**
**or phone** **01386 446477**

**website** **www.greenwoodpress.co.uk**

# A Workshop: WHAT IS LOVE?

The following poem, dated as 1841, was written just after Clare returned home. He could not find Mary Joyce, the woman he believed to be his wife. His body was weak and mind even more confused after walking 80 miles from Epping to Helpston, having eaten only a piece of bread, a pint of beer and grass over three days. It was unsurprising that he couldn't find her as she had been dead for three years and he had been married to Patty for some twenty.

**Say, what is love?** John Clare

Say, what is love? To live in vain,
To live, and die, and live again?
Say, what is love? Is it to be
In prison still and still be free—
Or seem as free? Alone, and prove
The hopeless hopes of real love?
Does real love on earth exist?
'Tis like a sunbeam in the mist,
That fades and nowhere will remain,
And nowhere is o'ertook again.
Say, what is love? A blooming name,
A rose-leaf on the page of fame,
That blooms, then fades, to cheat no more,
And is what nothing was before?
Say, what is love? Whate'er it be,
It centres, Mary, still with thee.

**The following two poems were written in a workshop at Poetry ID, in response to Clare's poem: Say, What is love?**

**Say I'll be Free**

Here is a little gift of love
tattered as a peasant's glove.
Here is an empty-bellied hope
That never loudly spoke.
Tell me I will never see
her face again and I'll be free.
Tell me I will never find
her face inside my mind
and I'll be free.

*by Jonathan Wonham*

**To John Clare**

Three days from Epping to Helpston
on foot, and Mary Joyce nowhere.
The dead are not always elusive.

What keeps you going? Wayside grass,
three half-pints, cheese and a crust,
the hope you might find her again.

Wisdom too is elusive. The hedges
are silent, lacking his songs.
Alone, you ask *What is love?*

It's a question Wisdom himself
might pester the weshes to answer
and still be left wanting.

You know Mary's its centre
and you're the man walking, walking
the North Road towards her.

***John Gohorry***

# CLARE'S FINANCES

## TRICKS OF A CONJUROR

There is one thing which I do not like in these matters & that is the trumpeting my difficulties in the papers & the fact is they are made much worse then they are – I have had small sums of money at different times from Taylor which may imperceptibly amount to a larger sum then one is aware of but there is no settling in the matter & no disposition to settling & as I wish not to leave my family in any shadow where the world can have any apology by way of kindness to make any mist instalments of money charges on their little property I am anxious it should be settled

the worst is the first bookseller to whom my trifles were intrusted turned round upon me with a meaness that I never dreamed of & cheated me out of all profit connected with the first Vol – he said I sold it for 26 pound & then made a charge on Taylor & Hessey on my account for £20 as copyright – I should have been glad then to have sold it for £10 but the fact is I never recieved a farthing in that shape For of all the little sums I recieved from him every farthing was placed against my account with Taylor & to mend the matter as I objected to the account as being a great deal too much his conscience took off a portion

yet avarice is never conquored & in a byeway after the offer was paid without acquainting me with the matter he presented a bill of £20 a fiction to the fraction of a farthing & Taylor without acquainting me untill it was paid paid it this compleatly upset my faith in the honesty of professions & when my bother was over for this Drury threatened me with law in the first instance & I in too much haste to escape an idle threat which he dare not have put into force Wrote to T & H to get them to settle it & secure my property as a turn over but nothing of that kind was done & I was never settled in my mind but always wishing for a settling

I wrote to Taylor to correct the errors in the accounts & he said they should be looked into but as yet I have heard nothing I wrote to Drury asking him how he could make such mistakes to my injury & also for the trifles in MS he possessed of mine – of the copyright fiction he was silent & made no reply – of the invented bill for £20 he 'wrote' I had it in 'money & goods' & of the MSS he said I had given them to him – perhaps I might – but I thought not but as to the other lies I was sure of it which was the only part of the loss that injured me – I could hardly bear patience enough to contradict such a barefaced lie – & when I did It was to no purpose so I was done out of £40 which from the difference of {money} had it been mine to receive makes £80 loss – here is the fact of the matter – & tho I know I am cheated such is the cunning of avarice [that] like the tricks of a conjuror it defies detection

**Pet MS A57 p67-69**

**FROM AN OLD BOOK OF FABLES**

'Gold is a general purchaser – buys all
'From the high alter pallace bench & Hall
'Down to the humble cottage hut or stall
'Buys smiles or tears melts eyes or drys em – gold
'Like Esops satire buys[1] breath hot and cold
'Makes out all wants & all defects supplies
'Een the old wrinkled hag young courtier buys
'Can buy an ass a penegaric – build
'A dog a monument[2] – vice with virtue gild
'Nay buys a coward laurels -- & what not
'Thus the proud Gaul[3] the stile of a great has got
'That neer faced foe in reach of cannon shot
'Buys knaves an office traitors power & trust
'High & low fliers bought with shining dust
'Buys villany a mask hypocrisy paint
'Buys inside devil the out side face o' saint
'Buys tyrants champions – cut throats caps & knees
'Buys lies & oaths buys souls & consiences
'Buys prayers & curses buys both earth & hell
'Nay buys heaven too at least if Rome can sell
'What is it which that tempting ore cant buy
'Buys everything but truth & honesty

---

[1] Aesop has 'blows'

[2] 'Epitaph to a Dog' is a poem by Lord Byron. It was written in 1808 in honour of his Newfoundland dog, Boatswain, who had just died of rabies. .

[3] Napoleon Bonaparte

**Both published in *Accursed Wealth* (The Arbour Chapbook Series No. 5)**
**Arbour Editions (2017)**

# THE DESCENDING SPIRAL

What was the catalyst during the autumn and early winter of 1841 that made Patty Clare realise that she could not cope with her returned husband living, as they were, in Northborough?

I have always been intrigued with this year of two asylums. The year when Clare quit High Beech and walked the 90 miles to Werrington, where Patty picked him up off the road. Then after a few months at home found himself being forcibly taken to Northampton General Asylum.

By Christmas his position in Northborough was impossible to maintain, 'a stranger to his own family', and he was removed to Northampton General Lunatic Asylum on 29 December 1841.

& what is joy or bliss or happiness
Mere trifling parents of a laugh or smile
That are but cares decked in a different dress
To cheat our hearts & sooth our hopes awhile

Mere sabbaths in lifes agonizing toil
To catch our breath while in its strife we dwell
Prolonging life by shadows that beguile
For joys beginnings have one tale to tell
& bring their end a heart ache & farewell

Poetically, the year was a very productive period with a vast output of all sorts, from Biblical paraphrases to the devastating denunciation of women, marriage and sexual excesses of Don Juan.

Sandwiched between these polar opposites we encounter some of Clare's most beautiful and haunting work, the beauty and longing of a confused mind. But I see something else too. I see a descending spiral. A descent from mental confusion and day-dreaming, through depression into despair, which continued throughout much of his Northampton incarceration.

In this, the sixteenth volume of my Chapbook series, I seek to show Clare's spiral into despair, and the possible causes.

Published in April 2020, 'The Descending Spiral' is priced at £3.50 + £1 P&P. To order by email drop me a message on arborfield@pm.me OR send me a message via The John Clare Society facebook page.

**Roger Rowe**

# THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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*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 via this catalogue which also includes a small selection of other books on Clare.*

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*Full address information below.*

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| **M20092** | John Clare leather bookmark, gold on dark green. | £2 | 10g |
| **M20031** | JCS gummed labels 100 labels in pack. | 65p | 150g |
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