



# The John Clare & Society

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## **THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY**

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## THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY FESTIVAL 2021

We are hoping to hold the Festival this year with the Midsummer Cushion Ceremony on Friday 9 July and the main Festival and AGM on Saturday 10 July. Obviously we don't know at this stage what restrictions the government may impose on group meetings, but it is likely that, if it does take place, the Festival this year will be a bit pared down. The main problem is going to be whether we can meet in the church as usual, and whether the ladies from the village can provide catering in the Village Hall. Once we know what we are allowed to do we can make firmer plans. We will let you know in the June newsletter and by email what we have been able to arrange.

For the moment, may I just ask you to 'pencil in' the dates of 9 and 10 July and hopefully we will be able to go ahead!

**Sue Holgate, Festival co-ordinator**

## SOCIETY SALES, Autumn 2020

The highlight of this quarter has been frequent visits to the post-office and dispatching copies of *The Meeting* in single or multiple-copy packets. I gamble by saying there are some copies left as this is written mid-November, (33 copies sold). I understand it will not be reprinted.

Of course, there have been an additional small number of sales of various Clare items, books and *Journals*; but 'nothing to write home about.' Once again I can blame Covid-19 for lack of face-to-face opportunity to speed things along, but I have taken that as good reason to put some 'adverts' – I prefer to call them reminders – of Society books and gifts that are available, onto the John Clare Society Facebook page. Feel free to share these 'ads' or even make a purchase by contacting me. They are, I hasten to say, all listed in this Newsletter.

As well as cheques and bank-transfer I can accept PayPal and credit/debit cards – PayPal being very useful for overseas orders!

We do have a fair number of the 2020 special edition *Journal* available. It is chunkier than usual but has ten of Clare's poems from his first book, *Poems Descriptive*, included, with short critical essays attached. Those, with the normal accompanying articles, make ideal gifts for any poetry enthusiast to dip into.

As a final reminder, for these dark winter days, why not order a copy of Peter Moyse's DVD, *John Clare: A Photographic Journey with poetry readings?* £4, post free. 65 minutes of 'sunshine'. (see order form)

Here's to a healthier, fruitful year for 2021.

**David Smith, Sales Officer**

## MEMBERSHIP

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

F. J. and David Spires, North Shields  
Sister Julian Falkus, Wass, North Yorkshire  
Francesca Gardner, Bourne, Lincs  
Leanne Gorman, Haslingden, Rossendale  
Lauren Cooper, Syracuse NY  
Christopher Edmonds, Brighton

**Robert Heyes, Membership Secretary**

## A PATHWAY TO JOHN CLARE

We crossed the deserted road bordering the housing estates of Killingworth, North Tyneside, and passed through the rustic gateway leading to the dry mud pathway which was edged on one side with blooming hawthorn interspersed by the occasional ash and oak tree. Non-intensely-farmed fields lay to both sides of us with the occasional hedge leading off into the distance at right angles to the pathway we were following. It was a mild evening in mid-May 2020 and the Covid-19 lockdown was still in force. There were no aircraft above us in the pellucid blue sky, little to no traffic on the nearby roads, no Metro service along the rail lines to the south of us, and hardly a breath of wind. We were walking on our 'patch' in almost complete silence apart from our own occasional chatter and the calls and songs of birds. Thankfully, the rules of lockdown had been eased a little; hence we were out here in the open, fellow naturalists attempting to keep our social distance.

In recent years I had been introduced to poetry of John Clare by friends Kelsey and Hilary Thornton and I in turn had ensured that my friend with me this evening was made aware of just how rewarding a reading of this poetry and prose can be. In my opinion there is no other poet who through his works speaks so well to the naturalists of today. I had found his works inspiring, whilst also offering much comfort during the restrictive days of lockdown. The atmosphere of this evening ensured that Clare was a topic of conversation as we walked and shared our growing knowledge of the great man's work.



*Long-eared owl*

Our priority this evening was to find a suitable position from where we could watch from a safe distance for the long-eared owl recently found hunting in the area. Being patch birders, it was a must that we had good sightings of this bird, the first time we were to record it in the area. We were soon safely tucked away by the hedge, listening to, and watching such species as common whitethroat as they lifted in display flight, and the now vulnerable species lapwing, grey partridge and yellowhammer. We could not help but feel that John Clare, who once described lapwings as 'common as crows', would have enjoyed this evening. However, he would surely be shocked to find these birds on a list of vulnerable species.

As I backed stealthily further into the hedge to gain cover, Clare's 'The Nightingale's Nest' came to mind. It's among my favourite poems, and I imagined Clare on hands and knees examining the hedges, observing every detail, and inviting us to join his careful watch just as his lines do in the poem. We admire Clare's abilities as a naturalist just as much as we do a poet.

The sun still shone as we were rewarded with sightings of not just one, but a pair of long-eared owls as they quartered the fields in search of voles, before dropping to the ground within a few yards of where we stood. We wondered if Clare had ever watched long-eared owls in the field, as whilst his bird list includes the horned owl (long-eared owl), it simply goes on to say that they are said to build in the old hollow thorn trees in Milton Park. A great brown horned owl is mentioned in Clare's double sonnet on the marten written at Northborough:

The great brown horned owl looks down below  
And sees the shaggy martten come and go.

I do not know if Clare has used poetical license here, or if even the owl he refers to is what we would recognise now as a long-eared owl. In later lines of the sonnet Clare refers to the 'grey owl' which, from the description of its behaviour, would seem to have been the tawny owl.

What is most improbable is that Clare would have watched little owl during his nature walks. This is a species we recorded later in the evening, in trees south of our position in the hedge from where we watched the long-eared owls. During Clare's lifetime only rare records of little owls, thought to be escapes from private collections, were recorded. In 1842, five little owls were released in West Yorkshire by Charles Waterton in an unsuccessful attempt to introduce a population to England. One of the first successful introductions of little owl was in fact made near Oundle, Northamptonshire, in the 1880s by Lord Lilford. Had Clare still been living, I feel sure he would have been interested in such a release in his home county.

We walked further south along the mud path and reached the stables and farmyard and here it was we initially heard the mellow and quiet hoot of a little owl. We could not help feeling that Clare would have felt at home in this cluster of old buildings and fields which held numbers of horses of various breeds. It seemed to us that, take away the modern machinery, this area would not have looked out of place in the nineteenth century.

Less than two hundred yards across from us and running parallel to the path we are on, runs an old wagon-way, used historically to take coal from the local mines down to the River Tyne. This wagon-way and the surrounding area would have been well known to George Stephenson. He was born in 1781, only twelve years before Clare, and in his early years worked in the local mines and lived in a cottage, still extant and less than two miles from where we stood. Stephenson's early years have much in common with Clare's, since he was born to illiterate



*Grasshopper Warbler*

parents who were unable to afford an education for their son. Stephenson was illiterate until the age of eighteen, until he thought to improve himself through evening classes. Like Clare, his first strong romantic feelings were directed towards the daughter of a local farming family who thought him unworthy of their daughter, and so a blooming of the relationship was prevented. The two men did of course take vastly different pathways, Stephenson becoming part of the bedrock of the

industrial revolution, whilst Clare maintained a rustic existence. Both men did have other similarities in that both were keen gardeners and both had some difficulty in relationships with the higher echelons of society, in Stephenson's case because of his early lack of education and his continuing broad Northumbrian accent. It seems probable that Clare would have greatly disliked the changes that the railways brought to the countryside and it is only after his death when his body was brought back to Helpston for burial that he boarded a train.

We retraced our steps along the pathway as the sun dipped below the horizon and the sky appeared as if aflame. As darkness set in we listened to the drawn-out mechanical reeling song of the grasshopper warbler, Clare's 'Cricket Bird'. We stopped at the foot of an ash tree to listen to the clear, loud, and melodic sound of the song thrush, more musical than ever in the stillness and silence of the evening. We eventually left the pathway and moor behind us, but the song of the thrush seemed to follow us home.

The moor we had left behind, we later found, had been enclosed in 1793, the year of John Clare's birth. This fact would have surely made the man unhappy. We share empathy with that unhappiness knowing that the moor which has such a long history is soon to be covered in brick and concrete, as plans to build thousands of houses materialise. A wonderful habitat for birds and other wildlife is to be destroyed. We shall continue to walk the path and enjoy the natural world that surrounds it until it becomes but a memory. We shall also continue along the pathway that led us to the poetry and prose of John Clare, in the hope of gaining yet more understanding. We hope to visit Helpston in 2021.

Although we are in a different era, our feelings about the use of the land and loss of vital wildlife habitat are perhaps summed up well in the last lines of John Clare's Poem 'The Mores':

Thus with the poor scared freedom bade good-bye  
And much they feel it in the smothered sigh  
And birds and trees and flowers without a name  
All sighed when lawless law's enclosure came  
And dreams of plunder in such rebel schemes  
Have found too truly that they were but dreams.

**Text: Brian Moorhead**  
**Photos: Samuel Hood**

## Humility 3:

This is the most common of trees – along our roadsides  
Yet – rarely allowed to grow – rarely allowed to become  
A full grown tree – reaching for the sky  
Kept as a humble hedge – along with others  
Enclosing us all – in a countrywide maze  
It can grow to forty feet  
According to Arthur Mee's Children's Encyclopaedia  
But is usually kept – as a narrow bush  
Yet it can still cover itself with blossom – when the time comes  
Becoming a barrier – a living wall  
Between public highway – and private land  
Keeping the living – in and out – and in order  
A guardsman – in his duty – rooted to the spot  
Running parallel – with thorny companion – barbed wire fence  
Perennial shepherd – you guide us all – along the way  
Humble army – lowly hedge – guarding us all  
With sheep, cow and horse – protector also  
Of the national wealth – of golden wheat – of grain  
Native soldier – marching in retreat now – across our hills  
Forming a lowly bush – home for the dunnock  
Guest of your hospitality – the hedge sparrow  
With its sky blue egg – likes to nestle there  
Host – though less often now – to the close-winged black thrush  
Neat feather – neat wing – and nest together  
Your thorniness – providing some protection  
Some people – used to – or still do  
Break off your tender shoots – to chew  
While stood waiting for a bus – perhaps  
And calling it 'cheese and bread' – it is the hawthorn  
A corridor of life – for jenny wren – tireless, vital as she is  
Corridors of life for us too – of mine, hospital and school  
People standing in the aisles of church or cinema  
And crowded bus – gone – past  
Is simplicity then – to be found among the humble?  
The livewire hedgehog – its hedge bottom home  
Set alight one day – by the sun's fire  
Magnified – through a thrown away bottle  
The fire brigade coming to their aid – the history of the hawthorn  
Reflects the human condition – given the choice  
We would like to be a tall tree – standing clear  
With plenty of sunlight and air – around us  
But so many have to accept the workaday life  
Like that of a common hedge  
Indistinguishable from the rest – invisibly linked.

**Bob Kelly**

## CONSIDERING 'PLEASANT SOUNDS' - An Asylum Poem

Nature now spreads around in dreary hue  
A pall to cover all that summer knew  
Yet in the poets solitary way  
Some pleasing objects for his praise delay  
Something that makes him pause and turn again  
As every trifle will his eye detain  
The free horse rustling through the stubble land....

'October', *The Shepherd's Calendar* [ed. Robinson and Summerfield, O.U.P. 1973]

*The Shepherd's Calendar* poems were written between 1823 and 1827. At times, John Clare had been very ill, with periods of serious depression and disillusionment. Over twenty years or so later, he wrote these lines:

The rustling of leaves under the feet in woods and under hedges  
The crumping of cat-ice and snow down wood rides, narrow lanes  
and every street causeways. Rustling through a wood, or rather  
rushing while the wind halloos in the oak tops like thunder. The  
rustles of birds' wings startled from their nests, or flying unseen into  
the bushes.

The whizzing of larger birds overhead in a wood, such as crows, puddocks,  
buzzards etc.

The trample of robust wood larks in the brown leaves, and the  
patter of squirrels on the green moss. The fall of an acorn on the  
ground, the pattering of nuts on the hazel branches ere they fall  
from ripeness. The flirt of the ground-lark's wing from the stubbles,  
how sweet such pictures on dewy mornings when the dew flashes  
from its brown feathers.

'Pleasant Sounds', *John Clare: Selected Poems* [ed. Jonathan Bate, Faber 2003], p.291.

The poem has appeared only rarely in selections. Perhaps we should not be surprised by that. All very familiar, offering nothing new? It would, however, be a loss not to know the poem. It was written in Northampton Asylum, where Clare had been taken in December 1841 and where he would stay until his death in May 1864.

The date of composition is not known. Many hundreds of poems had been written in the asylum even by the time the House Steward and Clare's transcriber, William Knight, had left in 1850, and many more poems came after. The poem may not be considered as fine as other 'Asylum' poems, such as 'A Vision', 'Autumn' [I love the fitful gust that shakes / The casement all the day....] 'Wood Anemone' [The wood anemone through dead oak leaves / And in the thickest woods now blooms anew....], 'The Crow' [How peaceable it seems for lonely men / To see a crow fly in the thin blue sky....], 'To John Clare' and, one of the great poems, 'I Am'.

Recollection, nostalgia, loss are themes, as so often with Clare. There is anguish, despair and pain – sometimes not easy to read about. The tone, though, is not all sadness or regret. Some memories appear welcome and satisfying. Words from Clare Holtham (died 2010) seem, for me, appropriate: 'So fragile a thing is memory - Sunlit flashes on the dark hill'. [Clare Holtham, *The Road from Herat*, Newnham College 2011]

I think we see 'sunlit flashes' in Clare's poem. For some readers it may be another 'list' poem. There is undeniably much repetition. Not just within the poem – *rustling* and *rustles*, *dew* and *dewy*, *patter* and *pattering*. There are also words and

images familiar from other poems. It is interesting to look at some of the 'cross-overs'. We notice them from 'October', cited above. *Rustle* and its various usages was certainly a favourite word for Clare. Even a scythe *rustles*. In 'The Fens', the poet *love[s] to rustle through the sedge*. [Other than *The Shepherd's Calendar* and 'Pleasant Sounds', all quotations are from the *Oxford Authors* edition ed. Robinson & Powell, O.U.P 1984]. *Patter/pattering* sounds are familiar, too; 'February' gives us another neat link. The thaw brings 'icles...// Pit patting wi a pleasant noise'.

Sounds and noises pervade Clare's poems. As well as being an observer, he definitely had an 'ear'; responsive and acute. It is well-known how brilliantly he turned birds' calls and song into sound-words. It is not a surprise to learn that he was a musician, too, and one able to 'prick down' notation as he listened to fiddlers and singers.

There is much to enjoy in 'Pleasant Sounds'. We realise again just how important it was for Clare to write! He still had a passion to do so. Words mattered; they are still potent. He had to get them down. He's in touch. Familiar material, yet not stale. There is a quiet exuberance about the poem. And he can surprise us.

*The crumping of cat-ice and snow*. 'Crumping' has been commented upon many times. A delicious onomatopoeic dialect word. I have not, though, come across 'cat-ice' elsewhere. Robert Macfarlane tweeted it as his 'word of the day' a couple of years ago and it elicited some fascinating feedback – including a reference to Clare's poem – and some superb photographs. [Robert Macfarlane; Tweet 2018/19] Cat-ice : that very thin layer of ice that can form over shallow water in pathway ruts, holes and probably *causeways never drye* ['November']. Stepping on cat-ice – 'crumping' – so right!

*Rustling through a wood, or rather rushing while the wind halloos....*

*The rustles of birds' wings startled from their nests....*

Alliteration and assonance. Sibilance. Then, *The whizzing of larger birds overhead in a wood, such as crows, puddocks, buzzards etc.*

*Whizzing*. another familiar Clare word. In 'The Fern Owl's Nest' the bird *wizzes as quick as thought*. In 'Pleasant Sounds' the word is suggestive of both the quick movement and the sound that that speed creates. It is an old word, too. *Puddocks* is familiar; Clare keeping to the Northamptonshire usage for a kite. Then there is that 'etc'. Tongue-in-cheek? Or has Clare consciously stopped himself continuing a 'list'?

*The trample of robust wood larks on the brown leaves....*

*Trample?* An exaggeration? I think not; the wood larks are *robust!* A delightful choice. Very different from the aggressive, destructive 'Inclosure' which *came and trampled on the grave // Of labours rights* ['The Mores'].

*The flirt of the ground lark's wing from the stubbles.*

Lovely to be reminded of Clare, the close observer, and his genius for the 'right' word. *Flirt* – that rapid wing flick, opening and closing, as the lark lifts off.

*how sweet such pictures on dewy mornings when the dew flashes from its brown feathers.*

The wing *flirts*; the dew *flashes*. A poem with the title 'Pleasant Sounds', yet visual imagery, too. Even sunshine is clued!

*Sweet pictures* were important to him; the words again appearing numerous times. There is a version of them in 'October' – *Yet in the poets solitary way // Some pleasing objects for his praise delay*. Some lines further on we see *Such are the pictures that October yields // To please the poet as he walks the fields*, and

almost at the end: *These pictures linger thro the shortening day // And cheer the lone bards melancholly way.* It is so understandable that *sweet pictures* brought solace at some of the 'bad' times. Sounds, too.

'Pleasant Sounds' could be dismissed as an inconsequential poem if compared to some of the wonders of John Clare's output, yet it is not a poem to be flicked over or given a cursory glance, in my view.

**Norman Goodman**

## **AN EARLY ADMIRER OF JOHN CLARE**

One of the first authors to write about John Clare at length and with much critical insight was Edwin Paxton Hood, a non-conformist minister who in 1851 published a book entitled *The Literature of Labour: Illustrious Instances of the Education of Poetry in Poverty*. In this work he devoted thirty-six pages to a biographical and critical sketch of Clare and also printed six of his poems. While showing some naivety regarding the poet's actual behaviour – even to stating at one point, 'He, however, never went to the Public House' – some of Paxton Hood's critical comments have a surprisingly modern feel to them, as in the following:

Clare writes as Gilbert White would have written, had he been a poet. He threads his way through all Nature's scenery with a quiet meditation and reflection, and frequently those reflections, if not the result of profound thought, yet bear the stamp of profound beauty.

and also:

Fancy, Feeling, Philosophy or Reflection, these are the characteristics of the verses before us. Most rural poets have indulged merely in the Feeling, but the Feeling has not been sufficiently sensitive or profound for Reflection, and the mind has not been active enough for Fancy – that is the rich and ariel humour of our poet in which he enters into the life of an insect.

Also of interest is the brief account of a visit to Helpston that Paxton Hood made, probably in 1850:

The memory of the poet has not during his long estrangement passed away from his native village. From its excellent rector, the Rev. Mr. Mossop, we derived much of the information we have detailed above. In a recent pilgrimage to the Poet's birthplace, he most courteously received and furnished to the writer the mournful details of the swan of Helpstone. And from thence we passed to the cottage of Northborough and spent a few moments with Mrs. Clare – 'Patty' – and we thought the tears with which she told us some of the incidents of the old time, so long ago, the best testimony to the soundness and healthiness of Clare's home affections. The old violin hung on the wall, with which the cottage used to echo to the song in the old days; when the verses were read by the fireside as soon as made. 'We were all so happy in those days' said the poor woman, in a tone that sounded like the wail of a heart sadly learned in the lesson of endurance and suffering.

Paxton Hood expanded his account of Clare in a later book entitled *The Peerage of Poverty*. In the fifth, enlarged edition of this work, published in 1870, he devoted a chapter of fifty-four pages to the poet and included several more of his poems. This account, written after Clare's death, differs somewhat from the previous one, draws a good deal from Frederick Martin's *Life of John Clare* (1865) and gives a much more detailed picture of the poet's life. The author was quite

critical of the fact that Martin had not included more of Clare's poetry in his volume in the following (somewhat mistaken) extract:

The extracts we have made will be at once an appendix to Mr. Martin's Biography, while they will justify our own wish, expressed above, that he had somewhat enlarged his book, and increased its value, by comprehending within it a general selection from the now-forgotten, unnoticed, and we suppose never-to-be-reprinted, writings of the poor peasant.

Paxton Hood goes on to show just how much of an independent thinker he was and able to speak his mind, by attacking Earl Fitzwilliam. Apparently Fitzwilliam had declined to provide Clare with more than a pauper's grave, and in the following extract the author is surprisingly critical of the Earl:

As to Earl Fitzwilliam, we are quite aware that from his ancestors Clare had received much of that order of kindness which, while it confers, never forgets to glove the hand in conferring. We are aware, too, that Clare, when he died, was a pensioner on Earl Fitzwilliam's estate, by arrangements of the preceding Earl. Doubtless the noble peer was very glad to find a pensioner struck from his roll. Should this poor notice meet his eye, we will respectfully commend to him certain lines written by the poor lunatic himself, in one of those lucid intervals of sublimity and beauty – lines suggested, we suppose, by some such ruggedness of behaviour as that with which he treated the venerable corpse of the Northamptonshire peasant.

Paxton Hood goes on to print Clare's poem, 'The Modesty of Great Men'. I would suggest that this unveiled condemnation of a member of the nobility gives us a strong indication of Paxton Hood's very high regard for John Clare and his poetry.

**Noel Crack**

## **HONESTY: Lunaria Annua**

We used to call them pennies,  
round seeds of Honesty that turned to silver  
if we kept them long enough,  
as though their value had increased  
by hoarding them.

In Spring, we'd sink our little hoard in earth  
and watch rich blossoms reach the sky  
to make more pennies,  
just as though we'd minted them.

This mornning, I've collected more of them,  
a bag of silver discs to scatter in the lane-side scrub  
and feel that old enrichment once again.

**Mike Sharpe**

## 'CARELESS JOHN CLARE': Erin Lafford, 3 Dec. 20

Here is my overblown analogy: take a far-reaching subject, such as 'plant diversity in the time of global climate change' and a small doorway to understanding the whole shebang might be to study just the complexity of a single tree. This is how I feel when an academic picks on a small familiar word and shows how it can throw light across a larger expanse. This is what Erin Lafford did in her presentation 'Careless John Clare'. John Clare is a wide subject both in his work and in himself as an individual, and Erin showed how the notion of 'care' permeates aspects of his life and poetry in many varied ways.

First of all we had homework: to listen to Erin giving her paper on 'YouTube', before 'zooming' to a later synopsis and wide-ranging discussion. At the time of writing, the YouTube paper is still accessible at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=P0qoJ0xo3jg>. Presented by Edge Hill University, the subsequent online seminar belonged to a series on The Romantics. It is a minor consolation in these pandemic times that such a 'virtual' meeting can engage with an extended audience, from different educational backgrounds and regions, not to mention revealing an assortment of background bookshelves, workrooms and sofas.

Erin set us to examine how the word *careless*, which we frequently encounter in Clare's writings, can mean so many different things. He pretended that his poems were just careless scribbles, in letters to his publisher, in order to protect himself from the pain of rejection by a pre-emptive pose of carelessness. In his poems, *careless* can also mean different things simultaneously, always intentional, because although Clare was sometimes careless with his handwriting and spelling, he was not careless in his thoughts. Freedom from care does not necessarily mean careless negligence, but in some circumstances such as for a natural habitat and wildlife, a bit of careless negligence can be a good thing.

When Clare visited London and mixed in literary society, he was impressed by the careless and witty conversation and manners amongst the London intellectuals. Clare had an anguish of care in relation to his social superiors. There were few people with whom he himself could enjoy that careless unselfconsciousness he admired.

In poems Clare crams in quantities of details, all his observations and sensations; Erin discussed this attentiveness to everything as an indication of how much he cares, for nature and his familiar neighbourhood. This is in contrast to how he sees the 'clowns', the other people who seem entirely careless and heedless of their surroundings.

Questions and contributions expanded into other considerations: his careless rambles are snatched moments from his labours. He knows about being *careworn* from caring for his extended family, and eventually he ends up being cared for by others, later perceiving that 'none cares or knows'. Then carelessness becomes associated with childhood.

There was some discussion around the notion of carelessness as a pose of indifferent sensibility as opposed to scientific thought. iPad in hand, I listened with care, as I was sprawled carelessly on my sofa.

**Carry Akroyd**

## HOW READING THE FIELDS AND JOHN CLARE GAVE ME AN ADVANTAGE IN NEUROLOGY

I still remember dreams where I could fly, and how as a child I loved the sound of a tawny owl hoot. Recognising a robin, a duck, a swan and a house sparrow was part of growing up, but I also picked up the names of other birds I didn't know from the chatter of my mother and father, as they looked over our little lawn at teatime. Every Thursday when the box of groceries was delivered from the Thrift Stores, I pulled out the packet of PG Tips and rummaged its foil wrapper and cardboard carton, hoping the gannet would fall out rather than yet another duplicate. These Brooke Bond Tea collectable picture cards provided the platform for me to leave stamp collecting and train spotting behind and start to create an inventory of garden birds.

For my twelfth birthday I asked for a compendium that would allow me to put a name to the birds I was seeing in my garden and the old pasture that sloped down from the bottom of the road. Every bird that had been sighted more than fifty times in the last hundred years was included in the *Collins Pocket Guide to British Birds*. Richard Fitter, its author, had discarded the standard Linnaean classification and devised a new approach that would assist bird watchers out in the field to identify species they had only glimpsed. The descriptive section was divided into the three broad habitats of land, waterside and water, and within each of these groupings, the species were laid out in ascending order based on their length. The 64 pages of illustrations arranged the individual types by their colour and likeness. A further 48 monochromatic images depicted raptors, gulls and waders in flight. At the bottom of each plate there was a silhouette of a house sparrow which served as a size comparator. In the key at the back, birds were categorised according to the colour of their feathers, anatomical features such as their feet, head, wing and tail, their haunts, and particular behavioural characteristics. The guide made the point that female, male and immature birds of the same variety could look quite different and that their feathers often changed markedly with the season. It also reassured me that even expert bird watchers made diagnostic errors often in their mania for rarities.

One day, about a year after I had started to keep field records, I looked out from my bedroom window on to the rugby pitch and saw a group of dark birds huddled close to the 25-yard line. In a moment of drama, they rocketed into the air, skimming the tops of the goal posts, and whirred away over the chimney tops. The pack of eight were back the following morning, crouched low on the grass pecking the pitch like wood pigeons with their small black beaks. My mother and father could not tell me their name nor where they had come from.

There were too many medium-sized land birds in my guide to be of much help and none of the illustrations seemed a close match for what I was seeing. So, I turned to the key. The list of brown birds included partridge, woodcock, corncrake, red grouse, snipe, ruff and bittern, but only two of them, the golden plover and the red grouse, had a black bill. I flipped back through the illustrations and immediately discounted the plover, so I homed in on the red grouse. The text informed me that *Lagopus lagopus scotica* was endemic to the upland moors of the British Isles where it fed on ling, bilberries and small insects. Field identifiers that I had been unable to discern included a crimson band above the eye, a hook-tipped bill and light grey feathered feet. Sensing my uncertainty, my father reminded me that birds could fly anywhere they wanted to and that very few remained in one place for long. He went on to say with a smile on his face, 'Birds also do not read bird books'.

That evening I wrote in my diary:

The red grouse were on the rugby pitch. I think they may have come here to escape the burning heather on Blubberhouses moor.

The identification of the red grouse sparked my interest and I started to spend my Saturdays travelling to bird haunts like Spurn Head and Swillington Ings in the company of adult naturalists. These experienced and learned people emphasised the importance of writing down what I saw and showed me where and how to look.

My mother, who sometimes used birds to tell fortunes, conserved my bird journals for many years. After I had qualified as a doctor she handed them back to me, reminding me how as a 12-year-old I had needed to be able to name every little brown bird that came into view. She then said, 'Do you remember when you found that dead blue tit unharmed in the garden and how you buried it under the laburnum, marking the spot with an ice lolly stick?' At the time she had told me that when sailors were lost at sea blue tits carried their souls to heaven.

I have one of my maroon hardback journals open in front of me now, its lined pages filled with an italic script that I scarcely recognise as my own. Each entry is meagre and ordinary. The mechanical accounting with daily averages and graphs that followed the descriptions were remnants of my need for system, formality and rules. Even so, watching birds taught me the virtue of patience and composure and how to focus on a single living thing at the expense of everything around it:

Sunday April 24th

'The weather was cold with a strong wind blowing.... A blue tit was feeding on the nuts when a greenfinch wanted to. A fight broke out but not for long for the tit attacked the finch with such ferocity that the greenfinch was forced to withdraw'.

Saturday June 11th

'The weather was mild but there were a few rain showers. A song thrush began to build a nest in the flowering currant bush, but it was only seen once. It probably still had some young to feed and was building the new nest in its spare time'.

Daltonism, caused by a mutation in the green pigment in the cones of my retina, was an inconvenience that forced me to rely more heavily on the size, shape and behaviour of a bird than the colour of its plumage. My parents had told me that the grouse were chestnut brown rather than dark, giving me the missing marker that had allowed me to identify the bird in my *vade mecum*. Flashes of buffs and greens, that were so important in distinguishing brown female dabbling ducks like mallards, gadwalls, pintails and teals, were out of my visual range. I was forced to focus on movement and learn to spot an immature blackbird just by the way she cocked her head. When a dark shape dropped like a stone from the garden fence, I did not need to see a red breast to know it had to be a robin. I became an expert in the *gestalt* of birds and was soon able to put a name to many types just from their flight or the way they walked or hopped. I also discovered through my interactions with other bird watchers that I was better than everyone else at picking up birds hidden in long grass. When out of the corner of my eye I spotted a mouse-rustle in the fallen leaves I knew that if it was tiny, chunky and brown with a cocked tail it was a wren, while if it was the size of a house sparrow with a streaked back and moved with a nervy shuffle flicking its wings, it just had to be a dunnock. One of the naturalists who had taught me how to tell a willow warbler from a chiffchaff and was aware of my deficit told me that in World War II colour-deficient observers could penetrate the khaki camouflage of the enemy when it had deceived normal people.

At fifteen my father introduced me to the *Selected Poems of John Clare*. In the introduction, Geoffrey Grigson had written that as a young man Clare scraped a living as a farm labourer in the fields, a potboy at the Blue Bell public house and as a gardener on the Burghley estate. He learned to play the fiddle with gypsies near his home in the village of Helpston and later enrolled in the militia, but by the age of fourteen he had fallen in love with the written word. When he could not afford writing material he used birch bark as papyrus and a mix of bruised nut galls, green copper, and stone blue soaked in a pint and a half of rainwater for ink.

As he wandered in the flatlands between limestone outcrop and fen, the remedial currents of Nature helped to calm his ever present dread of enclosure and confirmed his identity. He wrote to feel happier and to calm a growing sense of loss through losing himself. To get closer to birds and go deeper into their lives he would hide in the long wet grass, scramble on all fours under bushes, wade through swamps and scale ancient oaks. There he would watch wisps of snipe standing in clumps of yellow flags, nightjars whirling over the furze, yellowhammers with heads of solid gold perched on hedgerows, and a pair of ravens nesting in a giant oak. His poetry was a form of departure. He wrote that the world's end was at the edge of the horizon and that a day's journey would be enough to carry him to its brink from where he could look down and see heaven in the sea. He stalked the circle in the blue mist but always returned home.

His verse gave intimate details about the locations of nests and the grasses, moss, twigs, hairs and mud used to construct them. The fragility and decorativeness of birds' eggs fascinated him, the yellowhammer's 'scribbled as with ink and pen' and the 'deadened green' of the nightingale's clutch that he had located concealed in a bush of thorns. As he idled on the common ground, melodious lyrics continuously entered his head:

The crowds of starnels whizz and hurry by,  
And darken like a clod the evening sky:  
The larks like thunder rise and suther round  
Then drop and nestle in the stubble ground....

His deep knowledge of bird call meant that he was able to appreciate the drama going on among the trees and his sensitive ear allowed him to transcribe rather than translate the nightingale's song:

'Chew-chew, chew-chew' & higher still  
'Cheer-cheer, cheer-cheer' more loud and shrill...  
Wew-wew wew-wew chur-chur chur-chur  
Woo-it woo-it'—could this be her  
Tee-rew Tee-rew tee-rew tee-rew  
Chew-rit chew-rit'—and ever new  
'Will-will will-will grig-grig grig-grig'

Clare knew Nature by heart. The birds recognised him, and he belonged with them. He used graphic local names – like 'butter bump' for bittern, 'fire tail' for redstart, 'fern owl' for nightjar and 'bumbarrel' for the long-tailed tit – to celebrate the local birds, and rejected the 'dark system' of Latinate names that stripped birds from their culture:

I love to see the nightingale in its hazel retreat and the Cuckoo hiding in its solitudes of oaken foliage and not to examine their carcasses in glass cases, yet naturalists & botanists seem to have no taste for this poetical feeling they merely make collection of dried specimens classing them after Linnaeus into tribes and families.

The informality of his verse made it seem as if he was sharing his deepest secrets with me; his eye for detail drew my attention to things I had never noticed.

He likened the cuckoo to a hawk in flight, commented on its red mouth and sharp eye and how in June it forgets its song. His pureness of vision seemed to make the birds I had watched even more alive. Each one he encountered had become part of his very being.

After the rains of May and the sunshine of June I turned my attention to the life that depended for its survival on the desolate local meadow. As I lay in the long grass listening to the rasp and scrape of grasshoppers, a skylark would dart out of the sward and climb into the air. Each ascent was like a firework display engineered to stunning effect, but one which varied in its calculated spontaneity depending on the weather. Nature's stability was providing me with a refuge; the more I observed birds, the more I became aware of their allure and the beauty contained within their ordinariness. Bird watching had become a vigil comparable to prayer.

What surprises me most as I read on in my childhood records is that they are devoid of not just colour but also song. It was as if I had been deaf to the calls of birds and that I had needed to see their fluttering shapes to be sure they existed. Yet as I cast my mind back to those halcyon days, it is the harmonious discord of birds that evokes my sweetest memories of the garden and the dark wood, the four-note lullaby of the wood pigeon, the death rattle of magpies and the cuckoo I never saw.

Not long after I had found Clare, the diggers and steam rollers came over the tops and a gleaming new housing estate with high rise blocks and semi-detached palaces stood where the sky larks had once plummeted to earth. The pasture was now a transformed landscape of lost freedom.

My field journals had got me started with cataloguing and organising knowledge, and through mixing with learned men at a young age I began to realise that a familiarity of observation was at the essence of all natural history. My colour blindness had taught me that perceived deficits could sometimes be associated with compensatory biological advantage, including a greater appreciation of texture and contrast. John Clare introduced me to the power of passive attentiveness and showed me a new way to make birds visible on the written page.

During my clinical apprenticeship I was interested first and foremost in the accurate diagnosis of each medical species, the habitats and behaviour of patients and the study of remedies derived from plants. I enjoyed reading the nineteenth century romantic descriptions of illness by novelists such as Zola and Flaubert as well as the seminal accounts of disease by physicians like William Heberden, James Paget and Richard Bright. My study was the natural history of medicine rather than a desire to save lives or even search for disease causation.

The intellectual challenge of neurological diagnosis and the inherent rationality of its anatomo-clinical method appealed to me most. I liked the idea that by listening attentively to the distress calls of my patients I could determine the cause of their complaint, and that the systematic examination allowed me to more precisely localise the site of their lesion. Through a combination of sensitivity, intuition, versatility and patience I was able to create a short list of diagnostic possibilities. As more data filtered in from the examination and tests, I was then able to infer the likely cause by a step-wise process of elimination. Instead of looking at size and shape, colour and distinctive field marks I inspected each patient for stiffness and weakness, visible signs that suggested impaired proprioception and the presence of any adventitious involuntary movements. I kept an eye out for pathognomonic signs like the pill rolling rest tremor that was akin to the distinctive kestrel's hover. After listening to my teachers at medical college I became convinced it would only be a matter of time before the cause of every nervous disorder would be categorised in terms of its anatomical, electrical and chemical connections.

Once I had become competent and knowledgeable enough to educate students I tried to involve them rather than force them to listen. When we were short of instructive cases on the ward I took them round the Circle Line. Before leaving the cruciform building on Gower Street, I asked them to observe the Underground passengers surreptitiously, paying particular attention to facial expression and hands and feet, observing how they rose on leaving the carriage and how they walked down the platform. I stressed to them that they needed to melt into the background and attempt to become invisible. After I had bought the tickets at the Euston Square ticket office we went downstairs to the westbound platform. When the next train pulled in we split up and entered four different compartments. It took us just over an hour to go full circle. On our return to the day room, I expected each student to give me a descriptive account of what they had seen much as they might do to the London Transport police after witnessing a crime. I expected them to comment on the subject's likely ethnic origin and, if they had heard any speech, the likely place of upbringing. If the person they had focused on had bright or beady eyes I asked if they had noticed the size of the pupil. If the commuter had looked anxious or angry I asked them to try to put into words what had made them think that. If they had noticed a limp I pushed them for more detail. I was pleased when they embellished their description with observations relating to the individual's clothes and accoutrements or when they speculated about the likely occupation. The intention was to try to encourage them to become doctors on whom nothing was lost. Although I never discussed possible medical diagnoses I wanted them also to be aware that a clinical picture was far more than just a sick person in a night dress lying in a hospital bed.

My clinical gaze allowed me to suspect what was wrong at a glance. With increasing experience and self-awareness, I was able to take short cuts because I knew which signs to look for in a specific setting. The red grouse had taught me that when common things have been eliminated I should never be afraid to diagnose the exotic or unexpected. Binoculars had taught me the power of instrumentation and I was never without my ophthalmoscope in clinic. Retracting an incorrect diagnosis had far more serious repercussions than a bird spotting error and despite the appeal of pattern recognition I refrained from instant diagnosis and always became my own devil's advocate. Bird watching had also alerted me to the challenging problem posed by mimics and by phenotypic variation.

At medical school my nature walks became *dérives*. Even now as I walk I am always trying to better understand the habitats and lives of the people I encounter in the sanctuary of the hospital. If I meet my patients in the street I want to be able to not just recognise them but be able to have a chat about things other than their health. It took a long time for me to understand that giving a name to a disease was in fact the easiest part of good neurological practice. In order to make people better, neurologists need to bring themselves as well as their doctor's bag to the consultation. I still keep my eyes open for a black redstart on the Soho rooftops and for patients with chronic and debilitating neurological illnesses I occasionally recommend 'bird therapy.'

**A.J. Lees**  
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## MY INTRODUCTION TO JOHN CLARE

I knew the name from poetry anthologies at the grammar school, but nothing of the man, his situation or history. The poem 'Little Trotty Wagtail' was the one that resonated with me, since I had been interested in birds from a very young age. It was the accuracy of the description of the bird as it

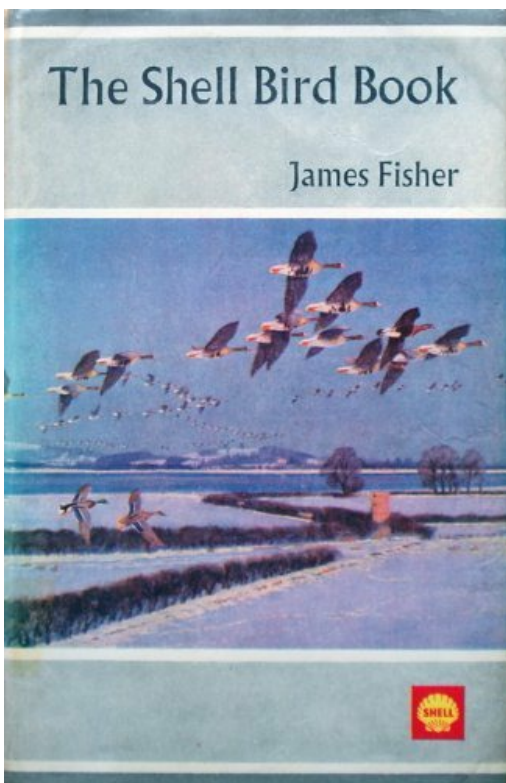
stooped to get a worm and looked up to get a fly....

And chirruped up his wings to dry upon the garden rail that grabbed me. I had observed all this on the upland farm in the Yorkshire Dales, where I spent much of my childhood. I had seen how wagtails would 'nimble all about', picking up tit-bits from the ground and then suddenly leap up to catch a passing insect, as well as how they 'chirruped up' their wings with a loud double note when they flew up onto a stone wall, the garden rail or any other solid object. These they much preferred to swaying branches or telephone lines. This was Nature as it really was. However, it was many years later that I discovered the reality of the man who had written these truths.

In 1966 an ornithologist that I had come to respect called James Fisher wrote *The Shell Bird Book* and I bought a copy. Now Fisher was undoubtedly one of the top bird men of the time; his fine monograph *The Fulmar* published in the 'New Naturalist Series' in 1952 is a classic. He did much to inspire the great modern interest in birds and in bird-watching and it was a profound loss when he was killed in a car accident in the 1970s. Being a Northamptonshire man himself, James Fisher was also much interested in John Clare and had already published a detailed paper with the title 'The Birds of John Clare'. This was included in a book which celebrated the first fifty years of the Kettering and District Natural History Society and which came out in 1955. This scarce item is the first detailed study of Clare's writing on birds. The paper was also reprinted separately later the same year in paperback form, but this is also very difficult to find.

*The Shell Bird Book* is a small but very detailed work, covering all aspects of the history and distribution of birds in Britain as well as their effects upon our culture. Beautifully-illustrated with colour plates, photographs and sketches, the book includes a long chapter on birds in our literature, music and art. It was here that the author devoted two pages to John Clare (pp.192-3).

These were a revelation to me and sent me off on a lifetime's journey of discovery and enjoyment. The book was a great commercial success and it was reprinted several times. As a result, copies can now be picked up for just a very few pounds in second-hand bookshops, and even less sometimes in charity shops. To me these prices bear no relationship to the true value of the book for someone with a true appreciation of nature. As a detailed account of birds in these islands and of our relationship with them, it has been surpassed by no other compact book aimed at the common reader. I am just so thankful that it crossed my path over fifty years ago.



**Noel Crack**

## CLARE'S MENTAL ILLNESS: EARLY SIGNS

In a career as a practising psychologist specialising in children and young people I have been increasingly struck by the *antecedents* (terms used in applied psychology in italics) of Clare's later mental illness that lay in his childhood, his teenage years and his early adulthood. The circumstances and events of his early life contained *risk factors* that set Clare on a course for what happened to him later. We know that Clare is the surviving baby of *dizygotic twins* (non-identical). When a twin dies at birth, or soon after, the feelings of loss, longing, survivor guilt and sometimes low mood (or even depression) that accompany bereavement can last on and off for a lifetime, as they did for Clare. One theory is that twins form a kind of *attachment*, or bond, in the womb. Another baby sister dies when John is about three years old.

Clare looks back at his childhood as a joyful time. The problem is that we only have Clare's version of his childhood in Eden, remembered later. By the time he records it he has been beset by much adverse experience. The subjective bias in our memories of childhood can be helpful to a psychologist in developing a *formulation* (working theory) about later problems. Because such memories are 'constructed' from points in a future life, they are prone to error, distortion, and confabulation.

I am struck by how seldom Clare mentions his parents. They seem marginal figures in the narrative. Clare admits that he encountered danger on his childhood wanderings and the fears and anxieties he developed stayed with him throughout his life. He is an insecure child who seeks out the hidden, quiet places of shelter in the landscape. Today, John and his family would be the subject of a multi-agency *Child in Need Meeting* to ensure his safety.

John hides his early efforts at writing from his parents. Perhaps this is another sign that their *attachment* isn't strong enough to support such a sensitive child. Later, Clare seems at liberty to pass over two opportunities to take up apprenticeships, either of which could have given his life some much-needed stability.

As a teenager Clare drifts from one casual job to another. Some of this work was to put into effect the Enclosure Act for Helpston, 1809. These were *dissonant*, not to say humiliating occupations for Clare. He was actively helping to despoil the Eden that was also his muse. His poem 'Helpstone' was conceived in his later teenage years that followed enclosure. The final lines are full of sadness. He hopes he dies in Helpston and can be buried there. But at less than twenty years of age he senses the troubles ahead:

When all the hopes...  
By disappointments prov'd a foolish cheat  
Each ending bitter and beginning sweet.

As a child and teenager Clare tells us he feels physically sick when he cannot readily understand something. A further, ominous sign of approaching ill-health occurs when he is about 18 years old. A man falls from a cart and breaks his neck. Henceforth Clare has fainting episodes when he thinks about death. By then Clare already lacks the necessary *resilience* to move on: the personal resources to assimilate setbacks or shocks and recover from them.

By his early twenties Clare is suffering from spells of exhaustion and 'a sinking, sickening, pain in my head'. He refers to some episodes as a 'numbness', sometimes with very low mood. What Clare is describing is *dissociation*. This is a

descriptor for a sense of detachment from immediate surroundings that can be mild or severe. In mild form, dissociation is thought to be a coping mechanism in which the brain 'zones out' from overwhelmingly stressful sensations. Clare's later episodes of dissociation involve a detachment from reality; he becomes manic and loses his sense of self, his own identity.

In 1820 Clare writes the profoundly sad poem 'To an Infant Daughter' for his first child, Anna. Jonathan Bate tells us that references to the 'mad father's ... feeling fears' and 'gingling starts' fell victim to editing. Clare knows by this time that his 'itch at rhymes', its attendant problems and the many other setbacks in his life have destabilised him mentally. There follows a poem to his dead twin sister Bessy who left him 'growing up to sin and shame'. There is confirmation of Clare's growing *alienation* in the form of the long, little-read, but biting satire of his neighbours called 'The Parish' (1823).

Guilt, loss, rejection by Mary, dissonance and finally a sense of utter alienation. No wonder a childhood in the fields and commons seemed so joyous.

**Nigel Rathmell**  
**Chartered Psychologist**  
**Associate Fellow, British Psychological Society**

## **BUYING A PALGRAVE BOOK ON JOHN CLARE (or any other!)**

There have been several new books on Clare in 2020. I have bought some. The most recent is *Palgrave Advances in John Clare Studies*, essays edited by Simon Kövesi and Erin Langford. The various authors live in England, Scotland, Wales, USA and Canada.

This is not about the contents, but a journey of the modern publishing industry! I ordered and paid for the book online from the Palgrave website whilst at home. Eventually, it was easy, once the page I wanted settled on £ rather than €. I had 'order confirmed' then had to wait for delivery. No problem. In the next few days I received two emails, each of which included an invoice. From previous experience I knew I could ignore them in the full knowledge I had paid!

Approximately a week after the emails I received the paperback copy in pristine condition in German-made cardboard packaging. The delivery note was interesting: Happily it stated nothing to pay but it appeared to come from Springer Nature – no mention of Palgrave except in the book title listed.

The book title page said Palgrave Macmillan with its registered head office in Cham, Switzerland.

Delivery note added lots: customer services based in Heidelberg and that Online payments go to a bank in München. If you send a cheque it goes to Frankfurt. But, If you need to return the book, send it to Dollyman's Farm, Wickford, Essex, UK.

Incidentally, the UK office of Palgrave Macmillan is in Camden, London, sadly not mentioned in book or paperwork. Lastly: This book was print-to-order and sent to me, from the printer, in Biggleswade.

Oh, by the way, I live in Stotfold, some 4.9 miles from the printer in Biggleswade.

It's a small world!

**Alfred Nellsohn**

## **'Calling John Clare's Bluff - Pursuing his Psyche on the Road'**

**Bridget Somekh and Ellis Hall : Tuesday 20 October,  
Centre for John Clare Studies Discussion Group, Cambridge.**

Usually it is a trip to the campus for a lunchtime paper on an aspect of Clare, but we have moved into the realm of technology. Thanks to Covid-19 and restrictions on people and places, we had invitations to a 'Zoom Discussion'. The beauty of Zoom is that more people are able to connect virtually than travel (technical difficulties discounted). For this event we numbered some thirty-four 'visitors' plus Sarah Houghton-Walker doing the introductions and the authors and presenters. They, Bridget Somekh and Ellis Hall, briefly explained their plans to thoroughly investigate the details of Clare's journey out of Epping, by following his 'memoir' text.

The discussion was highlighting one particular section of his route and to consider Clare's writing of the memoir. Finally to talk about his poem sent to Eliza Emerson in 1820 and her response. Plus a relevant poem to Eliza Phillips in his long poem 'Don Juan'.

They described the challenge of the book's construction, the research required and the discussions they had on how to cover the groundwork of the 85 miles Clare covered in 4 days.

We heard first of the notebook Clare probably carried with him, in which he wrote the memoir 'immediately' on his arrival home. There was a second, 'new, clean' notebook where a 'decent copy' had been written, with some additions. The assumption being that the 'fair' copy was in preparation for publication. They discussed other authors' writings about Clare's 'Journey out of Essex' but none had tried to define the specific route, or the accuracy of the memoir itself. Ellis and Bridget's decision was to discover and walk the entire journey; an expectation of an 18 month project which eventually took 5 years.

Bridget on Clare's text: Throughout he writes about himself, creating a sense of the state of his mind and health as well as actual place description through his walking.

Day 1: The memoir's opening 'is beautifully constructed'. There is humour and irony in the text. Day 2 continues in similar vein. By day 3, he appears to deliberately write that he is losing his mind through hunger and fatigue. However, on Day 4 he returns to coherent story-telling with his meeting Patty and eventually arriving home (in Northborough). Maybe he was exaggerating to create the storyline. Bridget considered the whole 'fair copy memoir' to be an 'artfully constructed piece' for publication.

Ellis: One case to illustrating the difficulties and surprises in tracing and walking Clare's exact route:

On Clare's second day and into night, he had looped off the current route of the Great North Road at Biggleswade and walked to Potton, Gamlingay Heath and then followed a road back to the old Northern Road. En-route he missed 'The Ram' on the heath. Eventually finding a milestone, he seems to have guessed the direction to take back to the Tempsford toll bar on the Great North Road.

This was a difficult area for Ellis and Bridget for they found 'The Ram' in the wrong place and not old enough. However, it could originally have been on the opposite side of the road, part of other buildings, and Clare missed it. Clare's description of finding somewhere to sleep is quite particular. It was thought to be

in Wyboston, Forty Farm, opposite the Nag's Head. On investigation of the overgrown, dilapidated and long abandoned building there was no obvious porch 'just big enough' for him to lie down and sleep. However, walking a little further north, on the left, they spotted a pebble-dash house with a porch, 'South Corner'. The porch seemed to match exactly, on a house much too young! We were shown another picture which included an upper window that was old enough! The house, it turns out, was a 17th Century cottage and almost certainly where Clare slept that night.

This was just one example where diligent work on the ground, using the memoir, historical maps and local historians has given a new and likely definitive understanding of Clare's journey.

Bridget then showed us the previously unknown 'The Vow', written before 9 May 1820. We next saw copies of his 'Invitation to Emma'; sent in July 1820, to Eliza Emerson, a keen supporter and patron he met in London. Followed by the poem she wrote in 'reply.' His was an invitation for her to join him, just for a day, to enjoy the quiet and beauty of his countryside. Her reply, echoing much of his verse, concluded that as much as she would enjoy it, she was not able to 'fly the noisy city'.

Last was the sample: 'Canto of 'Don Juan' for Eliza Phillips'. Here we can see he is writing to/about Eliza Emerson, this time including his wife Patty.

Near the beginning he says 'I love a modest wife & a trusty friend'.

The first line of the last verse switches to tongue in cheek but the next mentions 'wedding gowns or money from the mint' (an allusion to the wedding dress and gifts to Patty and Clare). He then continues in his Don Juan vein for the final few lines.

Bridget read her poem; 'Emma and Johnny'. This related the contact and connections between Clare, the poor poet and Eliza, a sympathetic and wealthy married woman of London, who was also a poet.

All in all, this 'Discussion' was full of fascinating detail and investigative discovery, fitting the events and geography of Clare's journey into the modern world. A glimpse at a small part of an important book: *Love's Cold Returning* by Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh.

**David Smith**



## THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

SALES ORDER FORM

February 2021



*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.*

*If you wish you can email an order or question to me. It is now be possible to accept PayPal and debit/credit cards for mobile payment. Orders by post and cheque still welcome.*

*Full address and ordering information below.*

*David*

## BOOKS

CODE	ITEM	PRICE	WEIGHT
<b>B19971</b>	<i>a JCS book:</i> <b>For John Clare</b> rrp £6.95 ed. John Lucas. An Anthology of poems about John Clare	£3.95	180g
<b>B20023</b>	<i>a JCS book:</i> <b>John Clare: New Approaches</b> rrp £7.95 ed. J Goodridge & S Kövesi ppr (essays on Clare)	£2.50	400g
<b>B20028</b>	<b>John Clare, the Northamptonshire Poet</b> ed. JL Carr (p/b pocket size poetry book)	£1	20g
<b>B20030</b>	<b>The Ballad of John Clare</b> Hugh Lupton. ppr	£9.99	312g
<b>B20033</b>	<i>a JCS book:</i> <b>The Wood is Sweet</b> poems selected by David Powell, illustrated by Carry Akroyd rrp £7.99 ppr	£6.25	200g
<b>B20112</b>	<b>By Ourselves</b> following Clare from Epping to Helpston.... <b>Highly illustrated</b> , hardback ed. Andrew Kotting	£16	650g
<b>B20113</b>	<b>John Clare, the Trespasser</b> by John Goodridge & RKR Thornton ppr	£6.99	75g
<b>B20114</b>	<b>John Clare, A Poet for all Seasons</b> rrp £15.99 By <b>Peter Moyse</b> hdbk, many colour photographs	£4.75	500g
<b>B20115</b>	<i>a JCS book:</i> <b>This Happy Spirit</b> Clare poems selected by RKR Thornton & Carry Akroyd, illustrated by Carry Akroyd. (rrp £8.99) ppr	£7.25	200g
<b>B20116</b>	<b>John Clare: A Collection of Songs, Airs and Dances for Violin (1818)</b> ed. Tony Urbainczyk, <b>vols 1 &amp; 2:</b>	<b>Vol 1:</b> £9 <b>Vol 2:</b> £14 Incl. Post	
<b>B20125</b>	<b>John Clare Society Journal, 2020</b> 200 <sup>th</sup> year anniversary of 'Poems Descriptive' publication	£3.75 post free	
<b>B20118</b>	<b>Hidden Treasures (of John Clare)</b> ppr Both edited by. R. Rowe (Arbour Editions)	£5	125g
<b>B20127</b>	<b>Drinking With John Clare</b> ppr	£3.50	65g
<b>B20119</b>	<b>A John Clare Flora</b> Molly Mahoud ppr, colour photographs (rrp £14.99)	£17.99 Incl. post	
<b>B20126</b> <b>*NEW*</b>	<b>THE MEETING: Reading and Writing Through John Clare</b> <i>a JCS book</i> ed. Simon Kövesi. ppr rrp. £4.	£4	160g
<b>B20122</b>	<b>Torpel Manor: The Biography of a Landscape</b> by F Gosling, SP Ashby & A McClain. ppr	£12 Incl. postage	
<b>B20123</b>	<b>Selected Poems of Robert Bloomfield</b> Trent Edition paperback (rrp£7.99) Edited by John Goodridge and John Lucas	£7.99 Inc. postage	

## JOHN CLARE SOCIETY JOURNALS

<b>1982- 2019</b> <b>Please enquire for years wanted (see B20125, above for 2020)</b>	<b>As available (some no-stock years)</b>	£3.00 for each year post free
<b>Journal Index (1982-2011)</b>		£1 post free

## MISCELLANEOUS/BOOKS

<b>M20071</b>	<b><i>In Clare's Footsteps.</i></b> Coloured map of Helpston with notes Unlaminated folded to A5 as above: laminated flat A4	£0.30 £1	5g 25g
<b>M20092</b>	John Clare leather bookmark, gold on dark green.	£2	10g
<b>M20031</b>	JCS gummed labels 100 labels in pack.	75p	150g
<b>M20028</b>	<b>Scenes from Helpston:</b> High Quality Cotton Tea-Towel	£4.50	Post free
<b>B20025</b>	<b>Clare &amp; the Helpston Festival,</b> poems by RKR Thornton ppr	£3	50g
<b>B20124</b>	<b>OUP : John Clare Selected Poems,</b> Oxf. Stdt Txts	£12.99	300g

## DVDs and CDs

<b>M20060</b>	<b>CD 8 Clare songs</b> set by Terence Deadman with Clare poems read by Peter Moyse, Rodney Lines & Norma Weller.	£6	Post free
<b>M20061</b>	<b>DVD</b> John Clare, A 65min photographic journey with poetry readings by Peter Moyse.	£4 post free	
<b>M20062</b>	<b>CD Clare's Journey.</b> A musical journey through his life. Sung by Maida Vale Singers. Composer: Terence Deadman. Lyrics by Trevor Harvey.	£3.00	Post free
<b>Joint special offer:CDs: M20060 and M20062 £8.50 Post free</b>			

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<b>P20023</b>	John Clare (Behnes bust)	£0.30
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February 2021

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