



The John Clare & Society

Newsletter no.142

June 2021



THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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The John Clare Society maintains a Facebook page, open to all.

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ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

Notice is hereby given that the Annual General Meeting of the John Clare Society will take place on Sunday 11 July 2021 at 2.30 p.m. The meeting will take place by Zoom. All members of the Society are cordially invited to attend. The necessary documents and Zoom link will be sent in good time to those who have given us an email address.

From the Chairman

Although we had hoped to organise a pared-down Festival this year, the situation is still too uncertain for us to make plans at this stage. Accordingly, the committee has decided to hold our AGM via Zoom, and gives formal notice of this, above. Carry Akroyd will give her Presidential Address after the formal business is concluded.

We are having the AGM on the Sunday (11 July), so that the Saturday (10 July) is free, should it be possible to organise some activities in Helpston at short notice. Members who have given us their email address will be notified if anything is taking place, and the Society Facebook page will have up-to-date information. I know some members have not given us an email address, but if they would like further information about the AGM they should send one to our Secretary Sue Holgate: smholgate@outlook.com.

Finally, I should say that although we are not able to meet face-to-face at present, we are still interested in recruiting new members to the committee. If anyone thinks they would like to join us please do contact me to find out what is involved: vpedlar@yahoo.co.com.

**Valerie Pedlar
Chairman**

A

From the Membership Secretary

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 form 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; if so, 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:

Andrew Lees, London N6
Robert and Debra Cossey-Mowle,
Huntingdon
Eric Angus, Bushey
Barry O'Doherty, Meols, Wirral
Stuart Barlow, Macclesfield
J H Wood, Sinfin, Derby

Ann Arran, Buckden, St Neots
Joanna Bray, Chatham
Peter and Mrs S M Allen, Cawton, York
David J Frost, Gatley, Stockport
Robert Wynne-Simmons, Oppenheim,
Germany

Robert Heyes
Membership Secretary

Sales Report

The regular Newsletter-sales were spread across most of the range. The emphasis this quarter was on Journals, followed by *Poet for all Seasons*, *This Happy Spirit*, *The Wood is Sweet* and tea-towels, with small additional sales of cds, DVDs and sets of postcards; also odd copies of other books, including the two volumes of Clare's collected music – for which I wish to thank those that contacted me.

The Newsletter encouraged a regular number of enquiries but I am also pleased that my Facebook 'blatant sales adverts' have produced several sales which seem to warrant the occasional reminders I have put up. I hope to continue these now and again, especially if anything new appears.

The income on my area of sales, after postage, is approx. £200 from January 1 to mid-April. This is not huge but it is satisfying to aid the interest of John Clare Society members, old and new.

Stock of *This Happy Spirit* and *The Wood is Sweet* is now replenished and available. We also have some copies of *The Meeting* available.

I really look forward to having some form of 'stall' at a physical event when everything opens. It would be good to meet people again!

David Smith
Sales Officer

On the nature of Nature: A Spider's Apologia

Ever since the time of Aesop, poets and storytellers from different cultures have employed anthropomorphic allegory, voicing cautionary tales and moral messaging to children and grownups alike. European folklore, for example, customarily portrays the fox as a sly rascal or the owl as a counsellor of great wisdom. Featured amongst this menagerie of creature protagonists, spiders emerge with a more complex, dual personality, having been typecast in the guise of both Jekyll and Hyde, as characterised by W S Bristowe in his classic monograph *The World of Spiders*. Thus, our wonder and admiration for what are of course instinctive survival strategies, become, by way of metaphor, human, self-conscious attributes: forethought, such as cunning and deceit or patience and prudence, or even the *compassion* of parental care.

Inspired by the apparent perseverance and stoicism of a spider, legend has it that Robert the Bruce was stirred to rally his courage and his men in a final, successful attempt to defeat the English at Bannockburn in 1314; perhaps a significant lesson of relevance today. Conversely, the supposed cunning and deceit of a spider is exemplified in Mary Howitt's famous poem, which became a familiar aphorism to illustrate how flattery and charm may disguise true intentions: 'Will you walk into my parlour?' said the spider to the fly; 'Tis the prettiest little parlour that you ever did espy....' By charm, flattery and manipulation the credulous fly is enticed to its ultimate fate:

He dragged her up his winding stair, into his dismal den,
Within his little parlour – but she ne'er came out again!
And now, dear little children, who may this story read,
To idle, silly flattering words, I pray you ne'er give heed:
Unto an evil counsellor, close heart, and ear, and eye,
And take a lesson from this tale, of the spider and the fly.

Howitt's poem was first published in 1829 in *The New Year's Gift and Juvenile Souvenir*; coincidentally, in the same year, in a different children's literary annual, *The Juvenile Forget-Me-Not*, another cunning spider enacted the same 'murdering' scenario, this time with a different victim. John Clare's long narrative poem 'Adventures of a Grasshopper' was written for his infant daughter, his first-born, Anna Maria; in a letter to his publisher in 1823 he wrote: 'I have put the fable of the grasshopper into verse to please my little girl'. Clare's intention of including the poem in a volume of children's verses was never realised; it finally appeared in his *Rural Muse* in 1835.

In his *Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People*, Spencer Hall – poet, practitioner of mesmerism and homeopathy and a close friend of the Howitts – described Clare's poem as 'one of the richest and shrewdest allegories ever written for the young'. Hall had visited Clare in 1844 during his protracted stay in the asylum at Northampton, presenting him with a copy of his own poems, *The Upland Hamlet*. Mary Howitt, along with her poet husband William, also visited Clare in the same year; sharing Clare's love for natural history, William gave Clare a copy of his poetry anthology, *Book of the Seasons*, which commended and quoted Clare's own work. Clare in turn is said to have written them a poem in gratitude.

When Anna was born in the summer of 1820, Clare wrote a poem, 'To an Infant Daughter', in which he expressed his fear of what life might bring to the child:

Sweet gem of infant fairy flowers
Thy smiles on lifes unclosing hours
Like sunbeams lost in summer showers
They wake my fears
When reason knows its sweets and sour
Theyll change to tears.

From an early age Anna would accompany her father on nature rambles, Clare no doubt delighting himself in his daughter's innocent play with the birds, flowers and insects:

My Anna summer laughs in mirth
& we will of the party be
& leave the crickets in the hearth
For green fields merry minstrelsy....
As bird or bee or butter fly
Bounds thro the crowd of merry leaves
& starts the rapture of thine eyes
To run for what it neer achieves.

In Aesop's fable 'The Ant and the Grasshopper', a hungry grasshopper, at the onset of winter, begs food from the ants, who rebuke him for his summer idleness, singing and dancing while they worked hard to store up food for winter, thus illustrating the virtue of hard work and future planning. Likewise, Clare's protracted version of the fable concludes by conveying a similar message to his young daughter, particularly with regard to her commitment to education:

Now Anna my child to this story of truth...
To value that sweetest of seasons thy youth...
Shun the idle that spend all their childhood in play
& pass them to school without care or regret
Where thy books they will show thee that this is the way
To shun the sad fate which the grasshopper met.

Clare's account of the fable begins:

A grasshopper idle the whole summer long
Played about the tall grass with unthinking delight
& spent the whole day with his hopping & song
& sipped of the dew for his supper at night....
The ant had forewarned him of what he would be
When he laughed at his toil on the parched summer plain
He now saw the folly he then could not see
But advice ta'en too late is but labour in vain

Having ignored the ant's earlier advice, with the arrival of winter, the grasshopper seeks food and shelter from the cold, knocking on the doors of a variety of characters, including that of the ant colony, a mouse, a beetle, an earwig, a bee and even a chrysalis:

A chrysalis dwelt on the back of dead leaves
In a palace of silk and it gladdened his heart

But wealth rarely sleeps without dreaming of thieves
So she kept her door bolted & bade him depart
His efforts were all to no avail, with no good Samaritans or benevolent
innkeepers coming to the aid of an unworthy grasshopper, excepting the fateful
hospitality of the spider:

In passing a barn he a dwelling espied
Where silk hangings hung round the room like a hall
In a crack of the wall – once again he applied
& who but a spider should come at the call
The grasshopper said he was weary and lost
& the spider gave welcome with cunning disguise
Although a hugh jiant in size to his host
Our beggars heart trembled in terrors supprise
When he set down before him dried wings of a flye
& bade him with shy sort of welcome to eat
For hunger found nothing its wants to supply
& fear made him ready to sink through his seat
Then to bed he went quaking & feth well he might
Where murdered things lay round the room in a heap
Too true did he dream of his dangers that night
For the spider watched chances & killed him asleep
In the morning a robin hopped down from his perch
& fluttered about by the side of the wall
Where the murdering spider peeped out on the lurch
The robin soon found what the spider was at
& killed him & bore the dead beggar away
But wether to bury or eat him or what
Is a secret he never would tell to this day

Anthropomorphic rhyming aside, John Clare's perceptive observations as a field naturalist and his protean virtuosity in transcribing them into evocative, didactic poems of unrivalled expression, undoubtedly justify the accolade bestowed on him by James Fisher as 'the finest poet of Britain's minor naturalists and the finest naturalist of all Britain's major poets'. Clare's knowledge and admiration for the 'sociobiology' of the insect world in particular is amusingly revealed in two of his sonnets, 'The Ants' and 'Monarchy of Nature', whereby the moral of society's cooperative prudence might be learned through the 'role-model instincts' of social insect species. 'The Ants':

What wonder strikes the curious while he views
The black ants' city by a rotten tree
Or woodland bank – in ignorance we muse
Pausing amazed we know not what we see....
Surely they speak a language whisperingly
Too fine for us to hear, and sure their ways
Prove they have kings and laws, and them to be
Deformed remnants of the fairy days;

'Monarchy of Nature':

I've often thought me that a king should be
The head of every empire when Ive seen
The little toilings of the honey bee

Who forms a colony & owns a queen
 & hurds his stores for winter in his hive
 While wild and stragging tribes in bank and wall
 Bore little holes – nor further store contrive...
 While tempest proof against the rudest blast
 The hive bees monarchy doth live & thrive
 Like popolous citys & when winters bye
 Crowds upon crowds again their busy labours ply.

The mystery of altruism's motive in the natural world, both within and between species, often remains just that. To conclude, I leave you with two personal takes on a spider's credo; one a fanciful allegory on pragmatism, the other a more impartial Darwinian account:

You Scratch My Back, I'll Watch Yours.

'Exist before you exit this ephemera of strife.'
 So said a savvy spider as she spared the cricket's life.
 'It's not that I'm capricious or imbued with empathy,
 Predation has its drawbacks if the prey is you and me.
 There's a chiffchaff round the corner and he's playing hide and seek,
 And I doubt he'll spare our welfare from that prying, pincer beak.
 Be quick and disentangle from my comely silken thread,
 And we'll seek the safe seclusion of my under-leaf bedspread.'
 'I appreciate your candour', said the cricket, unensnared.
 'Allow me to reciprocate, a favour needs be shared.'
 And so it seems we've much to learn of Nature's furtive ways,
 From suchlike altruistic acts to wonder and appraise.

(after Aesop)



Arthur Rackham

A Spider's Apologia

'Evolution lacks a motive'
 Said the spider to the fly,
 'It's simply not for me to say
 If you should live or die.
 Nor is it that I'm selfish
 When my genes dictate to me:
 To spin a web of silken thread
 Designed to entrap thee.
 Creation's just a happenstance,
 An altruistic act,
 We're all in this together,
 Nature's universal pact.'

(after Darwin)

Mick Schrey

The Lark Publications Edition of Clare's *Poems*: A Bibliographical Note

In his piece on 'Helpstone' in the Newsletter for October 2020, David Day asked: 'Why, though, did Lark Publications exclude from their 1986 version of *Poems Descriptive* twelve of the 'Helpstone' lines in which Clare courageously speaks out against the hunger and degradation that he and his peers have suffered because 'Accursed wealth' has bought out the village and laid it waste?'

The Lark edition of Clare's *Poems* is a curious publication. For those unable or unwilling to spend a few hundred pounds on one of the four original editions, this is the only substitute. However, Lark are reticent about which of those editions they used. On the dust wrapper they say that: 'The poems printed here are those that first introduced John Clare, a Northamptonshire farm labourer to the literary circles of the early nineteenth century'. (Clare was not a farm labourer, of course, he was a gardener; still a surprisingly common mistake.) Later we are told: 'This volume reprints the original edition in its entirety'. The reader could be forgiven for thinking, as I did, that he or she is looking at a reprint of the first edition. However, as David Powell pointed out in reviewing the volume for the *John Clare Society Journal* in 1987, it was in fact the fourth, and final, edition which Lark used. This answers David Day's query because, as he pointed out himself, the lines in question do not appear in the fourth edition.

David Powell also noted that there were mistakes in the Lark edition. One of the most important pieces of Clare scholarship of the last twenty years is Maroussia Oakley's Birmingham M.A. thesis entitled "'False Delicacy' & 'Fashion': The pressures of Patronage and Reception on the Publishing of John Clare's *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery*' (2001). In an appendix, Maroussia lists the variations in the four editions of the *Poems*, something never attempted before. In another appendix she lists the errors in the Lark edition. For example, 'spot' in 'Patty of the Vale' becomes 'post'; in 'Summer Evening' 'soodles' is rendered as 'soddles'. As Maroussia pointed out: 'this edition does Clare a disservice because, not only does it reprint the last, and most mutilated version of his first volume of poetry, compositor's errors and all, it actually introduces further errors, rather more than those which David Powell had identified.... This is a volume which claims to be a faithful reproduction and an accessible edition for those who cannot own an original edition, but which is flawed in its presentation and production'. (p. 51)

Bob Heyes

Cambridge Centre for John Clare Studies

Thanks to video-conferencing, the meeting of the Cambridge Centre for John Clare Studies on 23 February 2021 was very well attended, and Chair Sarah Houghton-Walker was delighted to welcome several new visitors. Speakers were Clare studies group member Daphne Astor – American-born artist, writer, poet, farmer, conservationist and now publisher – and two of her authors – Anna Selby and Ella Duffy. All three started their contributions by reading one of Clare's poems, before, in Daphne's case, going on to describe her personal response to John Clare, an affinity forged by a sense of expulsion, disorientation and enclosure on coming to live on her Cambridgeshire farm, and reinforced by the Covid-19 restrictions of 2020. But lockdown also stimulated Daphne Astor's determination to realise a long-held ambition – to launch an independent publishing company, Hazel Press, with a focus on the environment, the arts and feminism.

Daphne described the connection between arable farming, livestock, the countryside, landscape and wildlife conservation – and the benefits and joy of collaboration she has felt working with a range of people. For example, a British Trust for Ornithology study of spotted flycatchers in the neighbourhood revealed that these small migratory birds winter in northern Angola. This almost serves to emphasise the 'act local, think global' philosophy of Hazel Press.

Of the first four books from Hazel Press, published in 2020, *Field Notes* and *Rootstalk* provided readings for their respective authors Anna Selby and Ella Duffy, both of whom find inspiration from the natural world: Anna combined her love of diving and the sea with the ability to write life-studies under the waves on waterproof paper to create poetry; Ella's book is a long poem combining the mythology of Persephone and Demeter with human characters and her own fascination with botany – for she reflected, while 'sipping a G&T', that the gin relies on the juniper. We just cannot get away from plants – everything is linked and relies on the integrity of that network of connectivity. And as Daphne Astor observed, the thought of the amount of work, effort and energy that goes into growing the wheat seeds, making a loaf of bread and delivering it to our breakfast table should be an incentive to eat our crusts!

Field Notes and *Rootstalk* (£10 each) and other titles can be ordered directly from Hazel Press (hazelpress.co.uk) or from the London Review Bookshop (londonreviewbookbox.co.uk).

That more than 90 people logged in to the Cambridge Centre for John Clare Studies' Zoom meeting on 2 March was testament not only to the popularity of the speaker, Stephen Moss, but also to the tremendous amount of interest there is in John Clare's poetry. As several attendees asked for details of the John Clare Society, it is a hopeful sign for membership.

Writer, television and radio presenter Stephen Moss is well known to birders and naturalists and his lecture 'An undiscovered song: John Clare's bird poetry' gave us an entertaining opportunity to have another look at many of our best-loved poems, seen from the perspective of the birdwatcher.

Revisiting such favourites as 'Emmonsales Heath in Winter', 'The Land Rail', and 'The Fern Owl', Stephen drew attention to Clare's acute observation of his subjects and landscape and his use of language. By 'the undiscovered song' of the land rail (corncrake) we were reminded of the difficulty of actually *seeing*

many species, so secretive and skulking are their habits, that we often have to rely on songs and calls as evidence of their presence. We were also aware of the dramatic decline in and almost complete loss of some bird populations – wryneck, corncrake, and turtle dove.

On 13 April the Studies Centre hosted another well-attended Zoom meeting at which 2017 Fenland Poet Laureate, Kate Caoimhe Arthur and artist and printmaker Iona Howard described their collaborative response not only to Clare's poetry and but also to landscape – a landscape that Clare knew from a different, suspicious perspective – the fenland to the north of Cambridge – on Fen Edge. Kate shared some of her poems inspired by her explorations near her home in Cottenham and resulting friendship with Iona. Iona's prints capture the unique atmosphere of this rich agricultural land constantly changing through the seasons in images where dark smudges of carborundum evoked the fertile soil. Walking together and often working together en plain air, proved to be a project that was equally fertile.

Sylvia Sullivan

You can register with the Cambridge Centre for John Clare Studies to receive details of future meetings on Zoom or, if restrictions are lifted, in Cambridge. Email: cjcs@english.cam.ac.uk

Hedge-Urchin

Lice in my spines itch as days grow longer
And bite to draw life from my thinning blood
While weak rays on my leaf nest grow stronger
Summoning back the slugs and worms, my food
These cold months since, my vigour has lain low
My heart pulsing a barely present beat
Through this dreary time of frost, fog and snow
But now the dead season must face defeat –
When the pale sun will be denied no more
When dormant buds must break and leaves unfurl
When my torpid body is an emptied store
As a ball of prickly life I'll now uncurl
Then I shall stir my legs, set forth my snout
As spring's advance storms winter's grim redoubt.

Peter Russell

PETERBOROUGH

Natural History, Scientific, and
Archæological Society.

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The John Clare Centenary Exhibition - 1893

In 1893, to celebrate the centenary of John Clare's birth, the Peterborough Natural History, Scientific and Archaeological Society organised what is still probably the largest exhibition devoted to the poet ever held. The very considerable quantity of material, both donated and lent, does tend to show just how highly Clare was regarded, at least in his own part of the world. A catalogue that was produced for the event is a considerable document of 27 pages, which lists 171 items, including manuscripts, letters, collections of poems, portraits, photographs, personal possessions and a part of the poet's library. Much of this is described in considerable detail along with its source. There is also a seven-page introduction by the Honorary Secretary, Mr C Dack, which is very informative and includes Clare's long poem 'The Mother's Advice', although this poem is described as unpublished, when in fact it had appeared in the Stamford Champion in 1830. However, I do feel that it is worth including here the first two paragraphs of this Introduction for their very interesting content:

A short time since it was suggested that 1893 being the centenary of John Clare's birth, it would assist in making his works more known than they are at present, and it would keep his memory green in the neighbourhood of his birth, if a collection of all his manuscripts, books, relics, portraits, etc., could be made and exhibited. By the kindness of some of John Clare's friends, who are still living, I was put into communication with many people who were interested in him and met such hearty support that ensured a very interesting collection being got together. Amongst other correspondents, Mr Whitaker had formed a most valuable and extensive collection of John Clare's manuscripts which by his liberality and the generous help of many of John Clare's admirers has been secured for the museum of the Peterborough Natural History, Scientific and Archaeological Society, where it will find a permanent resting place. As will be seen in the catalogue there are many unpublished pieces. There are parts of his diary, random notes, extracts from favourite authors, prose jottings, Natural History notes, letters to and from friends and notes for a novel, which he proposed to write but never completed. During his early days it will be seen how hard pressed he was for paper, any scrap being made use of, backs of letters, curculars and bills, a poem is even written on the back of an election address supporting Cecil and Chaplin against Tennyson. The memorandum books have in many cases been used more than once. Notes made in pencil are erased and others written in ink. Some of the books have been written on one side of the page by other people and Clare has no doubt had them given him, or obtained them cheaply, and he has written on the unused side of the paper and in the margins. His random notes are stitched together in a rough and ready manner, as will be seen in the collection.

The Whitaker collection is now the property of the Museum and the manner in which Mr Whitaker became possessed of it is as follows. He bought a set of the *London Magazine* and there saw an account of John Clare, which

greatly interested him and mentioning his name to a friend who said he knew Clare's publisher, Mr Taylor, intimately, and would introduce him. Mr Whitaker went to Northampton, saw Mr Taylor, who was then about 85 years old and very feeble, and made a provisional bargain for all Clare's works in his possession. He also visited Clare, who was at that time in Northampton Asylum. He afterwards saw Mrs Clare at Northboro', and saw what manuscripts she had. He also went to the Asylum just after Clare's death, and visited Helpstone, where he met the Bellars family. Mr Bellars had just purchased Clare's cottage. By accident Mrs Bellars heard of John Clare's death just in time to prevent his being buried as a pauper, and at their expense he was buried in Helpstone Churchyard, and a neat stone erected to his memory. Mr Whitaker agreed to give Clare's widow £10 a month in exchange for the manuscripts and the sole right to publish anything printed or unpublished. This annuity was paid to Mrs Clare as long as she lived, about seven years after.

At the start of a one-page postscript at the end of the catalogue the following correction is made:

Since the opening of the Clare exhibition I have received communications respecting some statements in the introduction. Mrs Sefton (the poet's daughter) writes that the annuity paid to her mother by Mr Whitaker was £10 per annum and not £10 a month.

The catalogue is itself quite rare and I feel unsurpassed as an expression of local feeling for John Clare before a wider recognition began.

Noel Crack

The Lea

The field beyond my hedge you see,
Was once a special place for me,
For many years, on crops that grewed
From seed a local farmer sowed,
Did scores of sparrows much adorn
The golden ears of ripened corn.
'Twas when the farming there did cease
Did Mother Nature take the lease
And in a few short years made she
A very pleasant little lea.

No artist could they paint the scene:
A hundred different shades of green,
Wild flowers with their colours bold

Were sights of beauty to behold.
With fruit upon the hedgerow too,
And habitat for mouse and shrew,
A hundred million insects there,
Some rabbits and the odd brown hare,
Dandelions of yellow bright,
I'd watch them close their heads at night.
Went down the sultry summer sun,
The crickets' chorus then begun.
A kestrel hovered there by day,
And in the corner fox cubs played.
There was a well-worn badger track,
I'd watch them out and watch them back.
The barn owl quartered there by night,
Majestic in its ghostly flight.
Many different types of bird
Could be seen and could be heard,
And through the summer holidays
Local children often played,
Did through the grass and flowers run,
Dancing in the summer sun
And mother nature learned to share
With horses which were stabled there.
But what seemed once was heaven sent
Was sold off for development.

Now near the hedgerow stands forlorn
The muntjac and her tiny fawn.
There in the guise of housing need
Spawned avarice and wanton greed.
The trend for nature's whole demise
Is witnessed there before my eyes.
No more the habitat for voles;
A forest now of scaffold poles,
Soon replaced by bricks and tiles,
A ghastly sight that's seen for miles
I see no more that lovely lea,
Consigned now to my memory.
And so forever it is lost.
Does no-one care about the cost?

Tim Speed
March 2021

The Rise and Fall of the Turtle Dove

The soft purring of the turtle dove (*Streptopelia turtur*) is characteristic of warm summer days – a romantic image for many poets for whom it was symbolic of faithful love, but not it seems for John Clare. It may at first be surprising that it does not appear in his poems, less so when we find out that he did not know the species. In his Bird List (Peterborough MS A46) turtle dove is dismissed with a terse 'none here' and he notes 'Our Lanscape is not poetical enough I suspect for the far famd turtle dove though I hear it breeds in Kent and Essex'.

A summer migrant, this elegant dove, smaller than a stock dove or woodpigeon, has a spangled back and brilliant-white outer tail feathers that show up when it takes off in flight. It was once a common lowland farmland bird, feeding on grain and seeds and nesting in hedgerows, trees and bushes. However, it has suffered a catastrophic decline and is now a Red List species (Vulnerable). In the last four years, to my intense sadness, it has disappeared from the nesting areas I knew in my own village.

The history of the turtle dove in Britain over the last 150 years or so is an interesting one of mixed fortune. Richard Astle, Chair of the Langdyke Trust, kindly informed me: 'It seems as if turtle doves were absent in Clare's time, but then expanded considerably from their strongholds in the SE and started breeding in the area in the mid-late 19th century.... Certainly they are assumed to have been a common bird locally during most of the 20th century and when I moved here in 1997 they could be found around the village – I even had one in my garden once – as well as in key local centres at Bainton Pits, Castor Hanglands and Maxey Pits.

'The Maxey Pits area is now a regionally important place for turtle doves and the Langdyke team... are working with the RSPB to offer supplementary feeding for our birds, particularly on their return from Africa in late April/early May. Last year I was lucky enough to see 10 birds perched on one gate at our Etton Maxey Pits Nature Reserve.'



Carry Akroyd

Near where I live, farmers' conservation efforts to sow cover crops have attracted good numbers of wintering finches: I hope these may have a knock-on effect on other species and that the turtle dove's soporific crooning will again be a familiar accompaniment to my summer strolls. It is certainly good to know that turtle doves have been encouraged to breed again in Clare country – had John Clare himself been familiar with them, I'm sure he would have loved them too.

Sylvia Sullivan

Artis and Clare

The Langdyke February Zoom talk was given by Geoffrey Dannell, the chairman of The Nene Valley Archaeological Trust, whose primary interest in Archaeology brought him to Edmund Artis and John Clare. It was a well-illustrated and informative Power Point presentation, followed by a lively discussion that enhanced our knowledge of the relationship between the two men.

John Clare made his acquaintance with Edmund Artis when Artis was head steward to Lord Fitzwilliam at Milton Hall, which was an easily accessible walk from home for Clare who was a frequent visitor there. Clare shared gardening and botanical interests with the gardener, Henderson, but more particularly with Artis, who shared Clare's keen interest and knowledge of the local wildlife, especially birds. He and Artis also had in common a fascination with the fossils and historic remains that could be found scattered around the area at that time. John Clare says of the servants he met at Milton: 'they were the first rate of the house, well informed men not unacquainted with books and I never met with a party of more happy and heartier fellows in my life....' Their friendship and acceptance of John Clare was so different from the suspicion with which he was viewed by many of his fellow villagers.

As Geoffrey Dannell says, Edmund Artis was an intriguing man. He was born near Leiston in Suffolk in 1787, the son of a carpenter but connected to the wealthy Tyrrell family through his mother. In a time of need he was able to raise funds by auctioning his household effects that included works by Poussin and a Clementi piano that he had inherited. The young Artis was sent to London to learn the wine trade, but instead became a patissier of renown. Artis attracted the attention of Lord Fitzwilliam when the Earl saw a rather splendid cake in the shape of a castle that Artis had made. As a result he was invited to join the staff at the Fitzwilliam London residence in Grosvenor Square and thence to Milton Hall, where he obtained the powerful position of House Steward. He became interested in fossils and archaeology, and this developed to the extent that he was elected as a Fellow of both the Geological Society and The Society of Antiquaries. He left Milton Hall in 1827 after a scandal, whose details are vague, and became the owner of Doncaster Race Club, where the great and the good stayed for the annual September St. Leger race, which was under the patronage of the Fitzwilliam family. Here he enjoyed much success for a few years and was able to buy two houses in Castor; but when Earl Fitzwilliam withdrew his patronage for the racing at Doncaster, Artis saw a sharp decline in his business and left Doncaster.

Little is known of what connection John Clare had with Artis after this time, although Clare's friend Simpson wrote to inform him that Artis was back at Etton in 1827. Then in the 1840s, Artis was back in the area excavating for the Duke of Bedford in Bedford Purlieus, close to Kingscliffe, where he found remains of old iron workings. In 1847 he was working here in appalling weather when he became very ill and died on the 24th December. He was buried in Castor churchyard, where his grave can be found close to the church porch.

Artis dug extensively around the area of the Roman city of Durobrivae that covers a substantial area just south of the River Nene – the Roman road, Ermine Street, dissects the city before crossing the Nene on its way north. He

wrote a well-regarded account, *The Durobrivae of Antoninus*. His prose was not so elegant as John Clare's, but he was a superb draughtsman and it is beautifully illustrated.

Clare is known to have helped Artis on some of his digs, and Geoffrey showed an illustration of the Artis dig on the school field in Castor in 1822. Clare said, 'I have been to Milton and spent 3 days with Mr Artis the antiquary very pleasantly, he has discovered a multitude of fresh things and a fine Roman bath where the painted plaster on the walls was very fresh and fine when I saw it and the flues on the furnace was a proof without the least supposition of its being a bath'.

In 1823 their dig in Normangate field uncovered a well-preserved Roman pottery kiln complete with pots; Geoffrey used an illustration showing three men at work, one of whom could well have been John Clare. Here Clare says of Artis, 'he has also found the Roman road that leads down to the river, the pavement is as fine as when first laid down'.

In February 1825 Clare wrote in his journal, 'found several pieces of Roman pot in Harrisons top close... at the north east corner of Oxey wood one piece was the letter V, Artis says they are Roman and I verily believe some Roman camp or pottery was made there'. Artis did indeed excavate here in 1827, most probably with Clare's help, and found a villa with a beautiful and complete tessellated floor, immaculately noted and illustrated by Artis.

Geoffrey completed his presentation by showing us 'What Artis never saw at Durobrivae' and Clare neither. This was 'The Water Newton Treasure', a complete Church silver service from the Roman Empire of 4th – 5th century, and a later find of a gold hoard that would have filled them both with joy.

His friendship with Artis and the discoveries they made in the area greatly enriched John Clare's life and it was interesting to learn of their friendship from the Edmund Artis angle.

(As members may remember, the John Clare Society *Journal* for 2017 has an account of the work that Artis did in the area complete with illustrations of the digs. The Helpston tessellated floor is on the front cover.)

Mavis Leverington



A Forgotten Acolyte of John Clare

While serving on the Western Front, Edmund Blunden famously found solace in a collection of John Clare's verse edited by the poet Arthur Symons. That collection, published in 1908, has often been cited as the first to acknowledge Clare as more than just a rural rhymester, and to present him as an innovator and experimenter in verse. Because he inspired Blunden to seek out and publish Clare's work in manuscript, Symons is widely credited with kick-starting the twentieth-century reappraisal of the 'Peasant Poet'. Though largely accurate, this assertion is by no means the whole story, because seven years earlier, in 1901, a collection appeared called *Poems by John Clare, Selected and Introduced by Norman Gale*, which anticipated Symons's reassessment in every particular.

Like Symons, Norman Rowland Gale (1862 – 1942) belonged to the *fin de siècle* 'Decadent' school of poetry which flourished during the 1890s. He was a contributor to John Lane's daring avant-garde *Yellow Book* (the quarterly that launched Aubrey Beardsley's career) and by the end of that decade had produced six best-selling collections. Unlike his fellow Decadents, however, Gale looked for inspiration not to the French poetic tradition but to the English, and in particular to John Clare. Everywhere in his first collection, *A Country Muse* (1892) there are echoes of his hero, as in these stanzas from 'A Pastoral':

The last cow's milked and Mary's free
To cool her face so warm;
She pats old Ginger tenderly
And lends her comely arm
To hoist the pail
Across the rail,
And foots it homeward to the farm.
The bodice of her dairy-dress
Is full of milk-white loveliness,
And in her cheek there vies
The wildrose with the snowdrop small
That makes a deeper blue of all
The violets in her eyes!
With fearful hope and happy fear
She listens for Jock's tread,
And when his whistle proves him near
She does not turn her head
Because her face
May show the trace
Of love too great till she is wed!

And Clare even appears in one short poem:

AN OUTLINE

As Mary walked ahead with John
We heard glad voices ringing;
But suddenly there came a pause
Filled up by wood-birds singing,
Filled up by wild birds singing.

As John came back to us alone
His eyes with tears were welling.
'Twas but a simple tale he told
That was not worth the telling,
Ah me! not worth the telling!

But Gale was no mere imitator of Clare. As a poet with his own original voice, he was given a place in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*, and he recognised in *The Rural Muse* and the few poems published while Clare was in Northampton Public Asylum (from which over half his 1901 selection is drawn) the mastery of form and experimentation with subject matter that was the hallmark of his own best work.

Though popular in his day he is now largely forgotten, and the details of his life – beyond his birth at Kew and his Oxford education – appear to have died with him. There is no biography or autobiography. We surmise that at one time he was a Master at Rugby School, but inquiries there have drawn a blank. If anyone has any more information about him we would love to hear it, as we feel that the time is long past due to give him a reassessment of his own.

Ellis Hall

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Bridget Somekh

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Hawthorn *Crataegus monogyna*

You held a tuft of Hawthorn leaf
picked from a garden hedge.
'This has the scent of Spring,' you said.
In a pinch of freshly-opened leaves,
I smell it now, plucked from a thorn-bush
grown as old as me that still displays
green flourishes of youth.

Mike Sharp

Restoring John Clare's Countryside

Imagine a countryside brimming with wildlife, alongside successful, sustainable farming – large flocks of common birds in the woods and fields, hundreds of butterflies fluttering through newly-created wildflower meadows and a landscape dotted with hedges, trees and ponds. That's what the John Clare Countryside is all about, and it's already starting to happen thanks to Langdyke Countryside Trust members, our key partners at Natural England, The Wildlife Trusts, Peterborough Environment City Trust and supportive local landowners!

The Parish Nature Recovery Plans that Langdyke and PECT launched last year continue to evolve and we now have over 40 projects identified, as well as the funding to make them happen! A full list of the projects and an update from each parish can be found at <https://langdyke.org.uk/nature-plans-update-april-2021/>

What's great is that some of these projects are now actually visible – you can see the new hedge planted between the village and the church at Maxey, the nest boxes in Helpston, and the trees planted in Ashton and Bainton.

And there are also some rather nice John Clare Countryside signs now! These will appear beside all the projects (you can see an example by the new Maxey hedge), so if you're visiting, look out for them around the area as to see how our work is progressing.

Another particularly noticeable project is the management of the verge north of the Ginton roundabout, where we hope you will see flowering bee orchids this summer! They are already there; we just need to help them flower through a more sympathetic grass mowing regime. This is something we are working on closely with Peterborough City Council – they are very supportive of our aims and we will be running several pilots this year aiming to get more wild-flowers growing on the verges across the area.

The first John Clare Countryside work party took place on 10 April, with twelve Langdyke members (in Covid-compliant groups of six) working on the new woodland walks along the Welland, in partnership with Burghley Estates, helping to remove tree guards and open up the paths.

We have some very significant projects in preparation for the autumn, including large-scale hedgerow creation at four sites across the area, and we are talking to the Internal Drainage Board and Environment Agency for working partnership to create more wetlands and wildflower meadows. We have created nature recovery plans for two local landowners, covering nearly 100 acres of land, and have started conversations with several others, covering much larger sites.

If you'd like to get involved at all, do contact me:

Richard Astle
Chair, LCT
chair@langdyke.org.uk

The Langdyke Countryside Trust is a Charitable Incorporated Organisation and registered charity in England and Wales no. 1180626

A Lie

if it's artificial
then it's not grass
but a barren waste
& greeny desert
grossly immoral
replacing the living
with the dead
symptom of a sickness
of plastic hearts
to come – heartless
rank weeds better
superior – no doubt
it's a crime

recall John Clare

Before Television

we gazed into the fire
eyes fixed on the coals
and bathing in heat
absorbed in the radiance

later instead
looking past each other
at the television's – lit screen

Bob Kelly

Stop Press: On Common Ground

Carry Akroyd's Clare exhibition, 'Found in the Fields' is to open at Peterborough Museum on July 8. Carry plans to do a couple of short walk-and-readings in the exhibition on Saturday 11 July in the afternoon. And, fixed to coincide with the exhibition, Hugh Lupton will be performing his exploration of the life and times of John Clare, 'On Common Ground' on Friday 10 July at 7.30 in the Studio of the Key Theatre, Peterborough.

This information is correct at the time of going to press (18 May). Please check before travelling for confirmation and booking details (if any) in case of changes in the Coronavirus regulations.

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

SALES ORDER FORM

June 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
B19971	<i>a JCS book:</i> For John Clare rrp £6.95 ed. John Lucas. An Anthology of poems about John Clare	£3.95	180g
B20023	<i>a JCS book:</i> John Clare: New Approaches rrp £7.95 ed. J Goodridge & S Kövesi ppr (essays on Clare)	£2.50	400g
B20028	John Clare, the Northamptonshire Poet ed. JL Carr (p/b pocket size poetry book)	£1	20g
B20030	The Ballad of John Clare Hugh Lupton. ppr	£9.00	312g
B20033	<i>a JCS book:</i> The Wood is Sweet poems selected by David Powell, illustrated by Carry Akroyd rrp £7.99 ppr	£6.25	200g
B20112	By Ourselves following Clare from Epping to Helpston.... Highly illustrated , hardback ed. Andrew Kotting	£16	650g
B20113	John Clare, the Trespasser rp£6.99 by John Goodridge & RKR Thornton ppr	£6.99	75g
B20114	John Clare, A Poet for all Seasons rrp £15.99 By Peter Moyses hdbk, many colour photographs	£4.75	500g
B20115	<i>a JCS book:</i> This Happy Spirit Clare poems selected by RKR Thornton & Carry Akroyd, illustrated by Carry Akroyd. (rrp £8.99) ppr	£7.25	200g
B20116	John Clare: A Collection of Songs, Airs and Dances for Violin (1818) ed. Tony Urbainczyk, vols 1 & 2:	Vol 1: £9 Vol 2: £14 Incl. Post	
B20125	John Clare Society Journal, 2020 200 th year anniversary of 'Poems Descriptive' publication	£3.50 post free	
B20118	Hidden Treasures (of John Clare) ppr Both edited by. R. Rowe (Arbour Editions)	£5	125g
B20127	Drinking With John Clare ppr	£3.50	65g
B20119	A John Clare Flora Molly Mahoud ppr, colour photographs (rrp £14.99)	£17.99 Incl. post	
B20126 *NEW*	THE MEETING: Reading and Writing Through John Clare <i>a JCS book</i> ed. Simon Kövesi. ppr rrp. £4.	£4	160g
B20122	Torpe Manor: The Biography of a Landscape by F Gosling, SP Ashby & A McClain. ppr	£12 Incl. postage	
B20123	Selected Poems of Robert Bloomfield Trent Edition paperback (rrp£7.99) Edited by John Goodridge and John Lucas	£7.99 Inc. postage	

JOHN CLARE SOCIETY JOURNALS

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

MISCELLANEOUS/BOOKS

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

DVDs and CDs

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

June 2021

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