



The John Clare & Society

Newsletter no.143

October 2021



THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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Professor Kelsey Thornton

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Professor James McKusick

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

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

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Chairman's Report

Once again I must say how sorry I am that we were unable to hold our July Festival in Helpston. But at least this year the poetry competition for the children at the John Clare Primary School was held, the children put their Midsummer cushions round Clare's grave, and we had an AGM – even if it was via Zoom rather than actually face-to-face. The formal business of the meeting was followed by Carry Akroyd's Presidential address. This, and the reports given by officers of the Society follow in this newsletter.

The anniversary of the publication of *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* was marked in various ways that I mentioned in last year's report. But, in addition, a new volume of essays edited by Simon Kövesi and Erin Lafford was published: *Palgrave Advances in John Clare Studies* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2020). The committee's plan of sponsoring a workshop to accompany publication was necessarily abandoned, but Simon and Erin organised a very successful online symposium, in which contributors gave brief introductions to their essays, followed by questions and general discussion.

Unfortunately, government restrictions meant that a theatrical performance, planned as the second stage of Simon's anniversary project based on Clare's poem 'The Meeting', had to be abandoned. However, a video has been made of a panel discussion including musical performances and poetry readings. It includes the earliest musical settings of Clare's poetry, from 1820 onwards, plus a contemporary composition by Julian Philips. Kate Romano chairs the panel of Simon, Julian Philips and Toby Jones, while Julian on piano performs songs with tenor William Searle, and Toby reads Clare's verse. Here is the address: https://youtu.be/N_JMae81jYU

Throughout the year the committee has met regularly via Zoom, but, now that restrictions are lifted, we plan to hold a face-to-face meeting in October. My thanks to committee members for their work in the face of all the difficulties of the year.

Valerie Pedlar

Note from Journal editor Simon Kövesi:

I have been very proud to edit our society's *Journal* since 2008. I worked with John Goodridge on reviews and then as his assistant editor for a few years before that, too – so my work on the *Journal* has been a long, pleasurable and intellectually enriching experience. It is therefore with a heavy heart that I want to tell society members that it is time for me to move on. The society needs new blood, and new leadership of its precious and well-regarded *Journal*. The ideal editor is someone who knows the world of John Clare well, and who has considerable experience of editing academic text, who has some standing as an academic, and who has the energy to push and promote Clare into corners and new avenues we have not yet explored. I am happy to talk to anyone interested in this role – and am happy, too, to stay on in any capacity for a transitional period. I want this to be a safe and steady handover, and am in no particular rush. We are lucky that Dr Erin Lafford is keen to stay on as Reviews Editor, a job she does brilliantly (along with the annual 'index of publications' in cahoots with Dr Andrew Hodgson). But it is high time, as I say, for new blood, and there are many talented and experienced people in Clare world, we can all be sure of that. I would like to thank the society's committee and membership for continued support and countless kindnesses over many years. It continues to be an honour to edit this publication for you all. Please get in touch via my email, skovesi@brookes.ac.uk

JOHN CLARE SOCIETY TREASURER

ACCOUNTS EXPLANATORY NOTES, AGM, 2021

In the set of accounts presented, the left hand columns refer to the 2020/21 accounting year and the right hand ones are from 2019/20 as a comparison and also to give a fuller picture of income and expenditure as they straggle the accounting year.

INCOME

- **Membership** fluctuates from year – dependent on when the subs come in. US affiliates remain roughly the same.
- **Donations** consist of £25 (single donation), and the remainder is Gift Aid (£765.13). The gift aid amount fluctuates according to when the claim is put in.
- **Sales** income is higher, mainly on our two poetry books.
- **Journal** income this year is higher at £120.66. This agency payment covered more than one year as it has to reach a certain level before they will transfer the funds from the US.
- **Festival 2019** income (£1109) consists of:
 - Programme/concert ticket sales (£640.30) – which came in after the closure of the 2018/19 accounts
 - Friends of Festival income after 30 June 2019 (£250) – with another £451 received before that date
 - Donations of £89 (Helcats £64; misc £25) after 30 June 2019 – with another £140 (from the Peterborough Writers' Group) received before 30 June 2019.
 - Adverts in the programme, payment was received before 30 June 2019
- **Festivals 2020 and 2021.** Both of these were cancelled and so, although we have no income you will see in expenditure that we do have some costs.
- **Bank interest.** Considering that we had a little more money in the base rate a/c this year, the interest is way down on the previous year.

EXPENDITURE

- Admin costs were lower this year – due to Covid and less going on. Also, there was no website hosting fee as we paid for two years in the previous year.
- Committee meetings took place on zoom so, apart from a late claim which shows in this year's account, we had no expenditure on that item this year.
- Sales expenditure consists of: general purchases (£59.90), The Wood is Sweet/This Happy Spirit books (£574.26), royalties (£254.25) and postage/stationery float (£50).
- Festivals 2020 and 2021. As we start having planning meetings for the next year's festival shortly after the current Festival, we had some planning meeting travel costs before the decision was made to cancel them.
- Newsletter is for three editions (printing and postage): £1649.10.
- Journal production consists of typesetting, sometimes image royalties, printing and postage. Good value for such a high quality product.

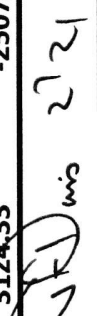
The 'Other Items 2019/2020' on the statement are items which went through the previous year's accounts but need to be recognised in order to balance the 2019/20 income/ expenditure on this statement, for comparison purposes.

IN SUM

Income this year is greater than expenditure by £3124.33 – largely due to Covid and the fact that we have two years with no Festival as a result. We currently have £32597.17 at bank.

Linda J Curry, Treasurer

JOHN CLARE SOCIETY ACCOUNTS 2020/21
STATEMENT OF ASSETS AND LIABILITIES AS AT 30/6/21

INCOME	compare		EXPENDITURE	compare	
	2020/21	2019/20			2020/21
Membership	5062.10	4709.64	Admin	291.21	680.62
US Affiliates	769.95	740.40	Print/post/stationery	232.21	403.67
Donations	790.13	276.81	Publicity/gen travel	56.00	144.95
General	25.00	50.00	Website hosting	0.00	132.00
Gift Aid	765.13	226.81	Committee meetings	24.25	792.20
Sales	2643.22	1835.13	Travel	24.25	672.20
General	707.32	700.13	Room hire	0.00	120.00
WiS/THS books	1935.90	1135.00	Sales	945.41	1030.40
Journal Licences/Royalties	120.66	18.57	General purchases	59.90	192.20
Festival 2020 cancelled	0.00	0.00	WiS/THS books	574.26	602.70
Festival 2021 cancelled	0		Royalties	254.25	205.50
Bank Interest on base rate a/c	13.44	81.30	Post/stationery	50.00	30.00
Other items 2019/20		1188.80	Festival 2020 cancelled	84.00	117.25
			Festival 2021 cancelled	111.87	
			Newsletter print/post	1649.10	1541.74
			Journal production/post	2970.15	2566.35
			Affiliation fees (ALS)	15.00	15.00
			Insurance (BHIB)	184.18	189.37
			Other items 2019/20		4425.48
TOTAL INCOME	9399.50	8850.65	TOTAL EXPENDITURE	6275.17	11358.41
Cash at bank		2019/20	Income over expenditure	3124.33	-2507.76
Community a/c	5338.93	4228.04	Independently examined by:	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; display: inline-block;">  </div>	
Base rate a/c	27258.24	29472.84	J F Davis, FCMA		

Festival Report 2021

Our plans had been well developed for the 2020 John Clare Society Festival, when we would have celebrated the 200th anniversary of John Clare's wedding, the birth of his first child and the publication of his first book. Cancellation was a terrible blow to everyone. We were certain that restrictions would be over by July 2021 and that the events which we had organised could still be held: like the Olympic Games, Festival 2020 would be celebrated a year late. However, as we all now know, normal life still hasn't been resumed, and that beacon of light which was to have been the 2021 Festival was extinguished with a very heavy heart. Having to cancel a second successive Festival seemed almost harder to bear than the first. We needed to have our annual celebration to look forward to, and initially all seemed lost, but as the weeks rolled by a few of us decided to proceed cautiously with some ideas for a more muted gathering. This would hopefully involve some fortunate souls being able to attend, depending on restrictions in place at the time, but it would also provide a focus for individuals to celebrate in their own way, and to give some continuity and something to report on. We felt that we owed it to ourselves, our members and particularly to John Clare.

Our first and most essential plans were to arrange for the annual Midsummer Cushions Ceremony and Poetry Competition to go ahead. The Poetry Competition had been cancelled in 2020, although we did receive some entries, as previously reported. This time, however, we wanted to get back to the entire school being involved. Special thanks must go to the Head Teacher at John Clare Primary School who was particularly keen to participate. The 'Family and Friends' theme was duly given to the school and passed on to the class teachers. Only a month later, over the weekend of 3rd/4th July, three of us (Anna Kinnaird, Sue Young and I) pored over entries from every child in the school and gradually whittled it down to three winners in each class. It was a very difficult task as every poem had special, personal thoughts from each child. Some were cheeky, others funny, many particularly moving. All the winners are reproduced in this newsletter, but I would have loved to have published them all.

After lunch on Friday July 9th, the pupils and their teachers all arrived with their Midsummer Cushions, as fresh and colourful as always, and then gathered by John Clare's grave, attending in individual classes. The vicar and I both spoke at each presentation of the prizes. There were many proud faces and a few shy ones as the winners read out their poems. A few local people and Society members were there to enjoy these special moments. And the weather stayed fine. In the afternoon I went to check on our oak trees at Swaddywell Pit nature reserve, and am pleased to say that they're all not only alive but thriving. That evening, Peterborough Folk came to The Bluebell in Helpston and sang and played their instruments in celebration of John Clare. Very special thanks to them for coming to maintain their long-standing involvement in the Festival.

On Saturday 10th, members gathered at the Buttercross around 10am, and while some went to Glinton and other local Clare landmarks, a number of others went to the church for a Clare-themed service; thank you to the new vicar, Rev. Gary Alderson, for arranging this lovely celebration. For the rest of the day members were free to do as they pleased, and were seen buying books from

our sales officer's mobile shop (his car), visiting the Cottage, having lunch at The Bluebell and generally enjoying John Clare's peaceful and pretty village and its surroundings. Final thanks go to Peterborough Morris who gathered outside The Bluebell to dance the afternoon away, and who attended just because they, like us, felt it was important to maintain our traditions. And thank you to everyone else who came, and others who were and are able to enjoy it vicariously. We'll be back for 2022. Fingers crossed!

**Ann Marshall
Publicity Officer**

A Note from the Membership Secretary

There was a time when all our members routinely received a membership card. This was in the days when the envelopes containing our newsletters and journals were addressed by hand, so it was easy to slip a membership card in the envelope. Now, our printers address the envelopes for us, so this is no longer possible. I do print a few membership cards each year; this is mainly for the benefit of those who have been members of the Society since its foundation forty years ago, and wish to maintain their complete run of membership cards. However, any member can have a card if they send me a stamped addressed envelope.

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

Jonathan Wonham, Hitchin
Sue and Barry Newland, Conover, Shrewsbury
Alan and Thelma Holland, Saxmundham
Nigel Chilton, Lydbrook
Mervyn A. Walker, Oakham
Lilah and Benedict Ramsden, Totnes
Suzanne Bridgewater, Morston, Oxford
I. Wyn Jones, Nantwich
Tim Walton, Box, Corsham
Mike Hopkins and partner, Frieth, Henley-on-Thames
Clare Abbatt, Easton Maudit, Wellingborough
Antony Melville, Oxford
Michael Harrison and partner, Laxton
Roger Shaw, Wainfleet St. Mary
John Noakes, Dorridge, Solihull
Dave Seter, Petaluma, California
Renichi Suzuki, Japan

Robert Heyes, October 2021

Presidential Address 2021

John Clare was 'woke'.

'Woke' is one of those new words that rapidly take hold and become currency, and a shorthand for a bagful of ideas. Just as rapidly, being 'woke' becomes 'wokery', a word pronounced with a scoff and a sneer of derision, with a slap-on-the-back reassurance that these new-fangled notions rising up from the powerless are no threat to the status quo. They can be scorned away.

'Woke' is an African-American expression deriving from 'to be awake' – meaning politically awake and alert to racial or social injustice and discrimination.

Some decades ago 'political correctness' was the new phrase. The 'handicapped' became 'differently-abled'. Oddnesses arose, like replacing 'chairman' with 'chair', because a female chairman (becoming more numerous) may not wish to be seen as standing-in for a man. Be a bit of furniture instead. Indeed, mankind itself had to become humankind, to recall that half the population is female. The red Indians of childhood cowboy films had become American First Nation, to be politically correct – and to help recognition of who they were really, not just called Indians because of an early continental mis-identification due to inadequate navigation.

A lot of fun was to be had, describing short people as vertically-challenged, etc. But for a long time there was the persistent sneer: 'Oh, of course we're not allowed to say *that* any more!' As if it was being forced on us by law to change our speech, rather than an attempt by examining language to expose prejudices in ways of thinking, to suggest other possibilities that would encourage good manners and consideration. Gradually, words can change thought processes; however, changing language doesn't always mean you have changed attitudes. Using 'Special-needs' to replace the word 'retard', simply made 'special-needs' the new jeering insult.

There's a danger in the opposite direction as well; what starts out as being an original thought can become an superficial exercise or obligation, a bit of virtue-signalling. Social peer-pressure can be rather like the manic applause at a dictator's rally, when no-one dares be the first to stop clapping, – after all, they might then 'go missing'.

Poets seek truth in language, and that helps us steer somewhere between the derision dealt out by the powerful, and the fashionable slogan. For Clare, it was about being aware, and not being a 'clown'.

John Clare was woke. He was woke to the social discrimination and injustice that came about through the exploitation of nature. He witnessed the ending of what today is called 'Right to Roam', as all around him became private land, leaving a few prescribed paths to enable the workers to reach their place of employment. He knew the way natural habitats were being changed by the new farming. He saw how the village changed socially as some benefitted financially and others completely lost out and had to go to the new workhouses.

Clare was well aware that there is a superficial 'wokeness', where people say the words but haven't understood the thinking. Currently, the public know that they are supposed to love nature and find solace in it, but this is of little consequence if it is only a sentimental knowledge with no understanding of the bigger picture. It hasn't stopped inappropriate developments or fly tipping or littering. I saw a poster about 'greenwashing' in Oxford recently, comparing how the council had made a 'wildflower meadow' in a central municipal garden, while deciding to build over a small meadow in another part of the city. Greenwashing is everywhere these days. Imagine Clare's response!

John Clare was woke about the state of nature because he had his eyes wide open, trying to understand everything around him and how it all linked together.

Come, poor birds, from foes severe
Fearless come, you're welcome here;
My heart yearns at fate like yours,
A sparrow's life's as sweet as ours.
Hardy clowns! grudge not the wheat
Which hunger forces birds to eat:
Your blinded eyes, worst foes to you,
Can't see the good which sparrows do.
Did not poor birds with watching rounds
Pick up the insects from your grounds,
Did they not tend your rising grain,
You then might sow to reap in vain.
Thus Providence, right understood,
Whose end and aim is doing good,
Sends nothing here without its use;
Though ignorance loads it with abuse,
And fools despise the blessing sent,
And mock the Giver's good intent.

From 'Summer Evening'

With the encouragement of his publishers and for the fascination of his London readership, Clare was encouraged to explain the rural way of life. In many of his poems he is explaining that rural social world and the natural world to an audience that was completely unfamiliar with it. The myriad differences between 200 years ago and now mean he is explaining that rural life to us too. Village life is much changed. Farming is much changed.

But nature is the constant. When Clare speaks of 'insects of mysterious birth' in 'Recollections after a Ramble', he describes something we can still see today. A caterpillar that turns into a particular kind of butterfly is always going to be the same.

Clare is describing his world, well aware that his 'clown' neighbours did not appreciate beauty and miraculousness when it was right under their noses. In our time, that world with of diversity and abundance surrounding Clare is much reduced or disappearing. Instead of on the doorstep, it is a drive away to a special reserve somewhere. And those who go to look for natural joys get called 'nerds' by the clowns who don't even see the little that is left around them.

I've been looking at *The Village Minstrel* because that is his volume of poems that was published 200 years ago this year. A key phrase for Clare comes in the song that begins with:

Swamps of wild Rush beds and Sloughs squashy traces
– the one that says Helpston has no mountains or waterfalls but just thistles, mud and gloom. Nevertheless he says:

My wild Eye in rapture adores every feature.
We need his wild eye, greedy to see all, and to appreciate its significance.

'The Village Minstrel' is the long main introductory poem about Lubin, who is really Clare himself. He explains how much he owes to his rural muse:

And here the rural muse might aptly say,
As sober evening sweetly siles along,
How she has chased black ignorance away,
And warmed his heartless soul with feelings strong

We need the rural muse to chase our black ignorance away. Later he says (of Lubin):

while other louts roam'd heedless by...
no insect 'scaped him, from the gaudy plume
Of dazzling butterflies so fine to view,
To the small midges

Clare was thirsty for knowledge and enquired about everything. He wasn't the kind of person who wanted to be the cleverest in the room, and he didn't like the company of bores; he always wanted to be amongst people who knew more than him, from whom he could learn more about the world. It was wonderful when, with literary fame, a social world opened up for him to meet new people and go to London, make friends, and get to know estate managers and gardeners, anyone who had learning and knowledge that they would extend to him, – theirs was the company he valued.

Another longish significant poem from that year is 'Cowper Green', full of his wild eyes noticing everything. At the beginning of the poem he is trying to shake off tedious company and would rather be exploring the natural world, away from the clown who the

...cut-hedge and lawn adore,
Which his shears have smoothen'd o'er:
But give me to ponder still
Nature, when she blooms at will

Away from a clown 'so low, so vain' he would rather go to botanise. This is another poem with a wonderful botanical check list:

Furze Hawthorne oak brambles thistle nettle hemlock henbane
cowslips Primrose violets wood-anemone dandelion harebell Bugle
cuckoo-flowers Woad betony Mullain horehound ploughman's spikenard
thyme marjoram penny-Royal...

It's never too late to learn your trees or learn about plants. Each year I have to relearn the insects that come in summer. I never remember them from the year before, but it just needs a little refresher, which comes from observation.

Nature is on the front line of a war with destructive capitalism. Be woke. Remember, as Pope said, 'a *little* knowledge is a dangerous thing'. Wake up your Wild Eye, don't mouth greenwashy platitudes, but get to grips with the ecological. But like Clare, be deep woke.

Carry Akroyd

Centre for John Clare Studies

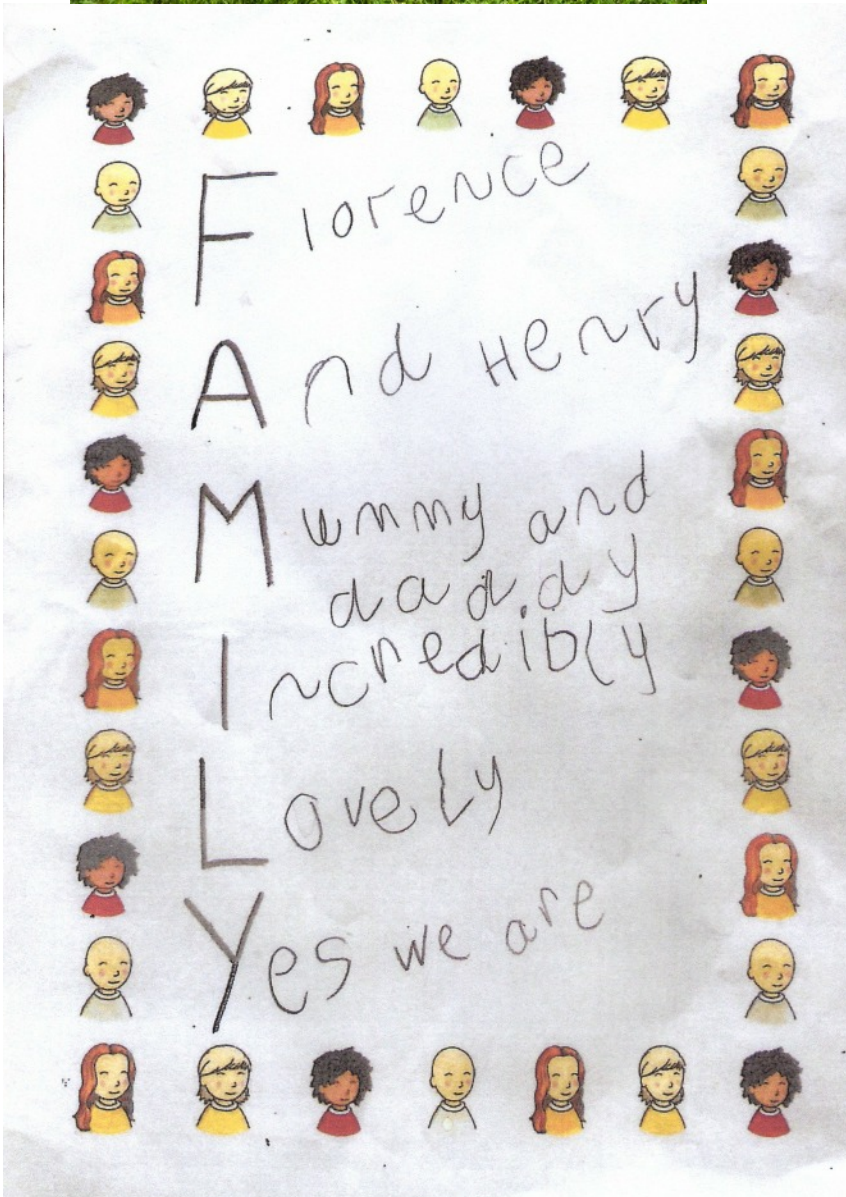
The Centre for John Clare Studies is planning two events for the coming term, both of which will be held via Zoom. More details will be circulated nearer the time (including information about how to sign up to receive the Zoom link),

On Tuesday 2nd November, from 1-2pm, the Centre for John Clare Studies Discussion Group will welcome David Higgins (University of Leeds) as visiting speaker.

On Monday 29th November, we will be hosting a study day convened in collaboration with Erin Lafford (University of Oxford), focused on Clare's *The Village Minstrel*. The event will mark 200 years since the publication of Clare's second volume. Whilst places will be limited, the study day will be open to all on a first-come, first-served basis, once booking opens.



David Smith's photograph shows the colourful display of Midsummer Cushions around Clare's grave on Festival day, 2021.



We often comment about how the entries for the School Poetry Competition are colourful and well-decorated, although generally we can only print the words. Here is the winning entry from Buttercross Class (Reception and Year 1), by Florence Hurford.

Readers who choose to receive the e-mail version of the Newsletter will be able to see these photographs in colour.

JOHN CLARE SCHOOL

Poetry Competition 2021

Buttercross and Woodgate Classes

My family is kind and caring
My family is good at sharing.
My family loves each other
Mummy and daddy, and my brother.
My family loves me.

Olivia Treliving
Buttercross Class (2)

Fun
Amazing
Mummy
I love you
Lovely
You are mine.

Daisy Day
Buttercross Class
(3)

My family is good.
My family is loving.
My family is helpful.
My family is funny.
My family is caring.
My family is full of boys.
My family is football mad.
My family is crazy.

Charlie Venters
Woodgate Class (3)

Funny, forever, fantastic
Awesome, amazing
Marvellous mummy
Incredible, inspiring
Laugh, love:
You are mine.

William Frisby
Woodgate Class (2)

My family is fun and funny,
Daisy is my lovely bunny.
We play lots of games and go to nice places
We laugh all the time and pull funny faces.

I love my family: They are the best
I'd never swap them for any of the rest.

Milo Harding
Woodgate Class
(First Prize)

Broadwheel Class

My Grandad

Great farmer
Ready to work every day
Animals are fed and fresh bedding is laid
Nature and wildlife is everywhere
Dairy herd, black, white and brown
Always busy: but when he's resting in his chair
 He reads his newspaper with care.
Driving his Land Rover over bumpy land checking the animals is my
favourite.
 This is my special grandad.

Freddie Plant
Broadwheel Class (3)

My Naughty Granny

My granny likes to play make-believe with me
She lets me eat sweets and reads stories until it's late

My granny is always pleased to see me
She takes me on holiday in her caravan and lets me have all the attention

My mum says granny is sometimes naughty, but I think my naughty granny
is the best.

Hugo Stephens-Dunn
Broadwheel Class (2)

Connections

Like the good friends we are
The connections we have
When we're not close to each other.
It's like we can talk to each other in our brains
In the dark. When one of us is gloomy or sad, the other
Will light up a notch. If one is hurt, we will always
Be there for each other.
Nothing's going to stop us when we are together.

Henry Mason
Broadwheel Class
(First Prize)

Swaddywell Class

Only Child

I am an only child
But I'm as happy as can be.
I have a cat called Daisy
And she keeps me company.

I have a mum called Tina.
She is very funny.
She goes to work
To earn our money.

My dad is Jamie:
He got my hamster, Gus.
He looks big and strong,
But when it comes to frogs, he's a wuss!

My best friend is Poppy:
She is a bit odd.
She says weird things,
So I just nod.

Lacey Carter
Swaddywell Class (3)

My Sister

When I was three, my sister went away,
The 'plane took off and she flew away, high up for a day.
I was wishing that she would stay;
I was left in England, where I felt quite grey.

For two years I waited to go and see my sister:
The day finally came when we got to go and see her.
My insides were more tangled up than when I play twister,
I was itching more than when I play a prank for having a blister.

When we saw her, I ran up to her and gave her a hug:
She swung me round and gave my arm a tug.
We got into her house: I saw she had a strange rug,
And then we got outside, and I saw a weird bug.

After two weeks we had to go back,
I said goodbye, but I thought we'd always stick like Blu-tak.
I waved goodbye: I felt like an empty sack,
We flew away and I could only hear a whack.

We got back in England: I realised how much she means to me.
I went and sat under my favourite tree
And I looked out to the big blue sea,
But I called in for my tea.

My sister has gone to a different place,
But it's her choice where she puts her space.
She's one lace, I'm the other lace –
But if we were two shoes, I'd definitely win the race.

Georgina Kirk
Swaddywell Class (2)

Our Family Tree

Me and my family have a family tree:
It's very special to my family and me.
It's been here for over a generation,
When I look at it, I think, 'What a sensation!'

A small glimpse and you'll never want to go away,
Not even for a month neither a day.
People from all different countries
All eat different kinds of munchies.

Our tree goes back years and years.
Whenever I look at my Grandma, I get tears.
Some people in the family I haven't even met,
I see some pictures of them I'd like to get.

Our family tree includes many animals,
Like our fish and other mammals.
I would like to have a tall giraffe.
If he liked you, I guarantee you'd laugh.

My family is the key to my success.
I can't deny they're the best.
They've been with me ever since I was born.
I love it when we watch movies whilst eating popcorn.

Estella Ray
Swaddywell Class
(First Prize)

Torpel Class

A Box for My Family and Friends

In the box for my Dad, I would put
A rowing lake, completely free of swans,
A four-stroke Harley motorbike,
A cartoon comedy which makes us giggle,
A house with no more mice.

In the box for my Mum, I will put
A bottle of the world's finest wine,
A nice and long dog walk,
Some money to spend on house renovation,
A calm and relaxing summer.

In the box for my sister, I would put
Some fancy new clothes just for her,
An Apple-branded 'phone,
An unlimited supply of books for her enjoyment
And a comfortable corner to read them all.

In the box for Ben, I would put
Three funny jokes that made him laugh,
An island just for him,
A completely infinite supply of biscuits –
All that are his favourite kind.

The boxes are fashioned from whatever they like
As their box is always theirs.
Whether ice, gold or brick,
It will give happiness to them.

George Dennis
Torpel Class (3)

A Box for My Family and Friends

In the box for my mum, I will put
A tight, loving, hug,
Thanks for all she does for me,
Praise for how hard she works and never gives up,
A bar of chocolate out of the fridge – just how she likes it.

In the box for my dad, I will put
A tight, loving, hug,
Thanks for always being there for me,
Praise for working so hard,
A kind, caring, listening ear for his very long stories and jokes.

In the box for my big sister Lotte, I will put
A tight, loving, hug,
Thanks for doing things with me,
Praise for doing so well in college,
A jar bigger than the Pacific Ocean of Nutella.

In the box for my big sister Issy, I will put
A tight, loving, hug,
Thanks for making baby-sitting so fun,
Praise for working so hard at work,
A bowl of fresh mango fresher than ever.

In the box for my dog, I will put
A tight, loving, hug,
Long enjoyable walks,
Lots of toys and yummy treats,
Playtime in the garden, throwing toys and playing chase.

In the box for my grandad, I will put
A tight, loving, hug,
Thanks for making me laugh. Laughing like the rumble of thunder,
Praise for always being brave,
A handmade bowl with smooth edges that you made yourself.

In the box for my Nanny, I will put
A tight, loving, hug,
Thanks for helping me with my crafts,
Praise for being so clever,
A needle and thread for your creative sewing.

Emily Lawson
Torpel Class (2)

A Box for my Family and Friends

In a box for my mum, I will put
All the love she ever gave me,
Every time she ever made me smile,
The warmest hugs and the tightest squeeze
When she was proud of me.

In a box for my dad, I will put
All the times he laughed at his jokes,
Every time he fidgeted during a movie,
The laughs we've had together,
The reassuring hugs he gave me.

In a box for Lucy, I will put
All the times we laughed together,
Every time we bumped heads,
All the silly things that we can't help laughing at,
All the memories we own.

In a box for Bella, I will put
Her unique personality,
All the questions that made us laugh,
A netball she scored her first goal with,
Her first dance move.

In a box for Macie, I will put
Her kindness that she gives people,
Her smile that shines,
The first time I met her,
Her warm heart that glows.

My box is fashioned with silver and
gold: the outside is new, but the inside
is old. Its joints are butterflies and its
lid is bold. Its colours are bright but
its lock is white. Confetti surrounds it
and it glows in the night.

Phoebe Walker
Torpel Class
(First Prize)

JOHN CLARE: THE APIARIST?

And I will put my books away
And wander in the fields
Just risen is the red round sun
Cocks from the roost doth loudly bawl
And house bee busily begun
Hums round the mortered wall....
The stinking finweeds blushing bloom
Their pea like flowers appear so fair
That bees will to their bosoms come
& hope for honey there
For bumble bees ere flowers are dry
Will wake & brush the trembling dew
& drone as mellancholy bye
When dreams are proved untrue [1]

The 'apiarist' in the title to this article is used deliberately to draw attention to Clare as a poet of the bee. Two groups are referenced in the poem: the bumble bee [*Bombus*] – also for Clare the humble bee – and the 'morter bee' [*Osmia*] – for Clare, the 'solitary bee'. The honey bee [*Apis*] features in other poems.

As well as general mentions, specific bees are described:

The red bagged bee on never weary wing
Pipes his small trumpet round the early flowers
And the white nettles by the hedge in spring
Hears his low music all the sunny hours
Till clouds come on and leaves the falling showers
Herald of spring and music of wild blooms
It seems the minstrel of springs early flowers
On banks where the red nettle flowers it comes
And there all the long sunny morning hums [2]

Bees had long been a subject for poets. By Clare's day, though, a number of learned books on bees were also available, one being published as recently as 1815. He may have read about bee-keeping in his copy of Thomas Tusser's *Five Hundred Pointes of Good Husbandrie*, with advice about hives, and 'burn-up' [the use of smoke to calm bees]. Certainly, hives are described, similarly to Tusser: 'Set hive on a plank (not too low by the ground) / Where herbe with the flowers may compas it round'. Compare Clare's Village Doctress, who, with her 'knowledge of the honey bee', understood the importance of preparation:

When round the hives in May they thickening flye
She seeks her new made hives to dress them well
With balm & hairy fennel scented high [3]

Two poems refer to an old tradition at swarming time; once in the above poem, and also in 'May' (*The Shepherd's Calendar*):

[a] spell that superstition plans
To coax them in the garden bounds
As if they lovd the tinkling sounds
And oft one hears the dinning noise

Which dames believe each swarm decoys
Around each village day by day
Mingling in the warmth of may
Sweet scented herbs her skill contrives
To rub the bramble platted hives
Fennels thread leaves and crimp'd balm
To scent the new house of the swarm [4]

The Village Doctress too;

[a] warming pan half loud as village bell
She rings their roving ears to entertain
As though they loved the sound
nor rings she oft in vain

[A tradition known beyond rural villages: In an article in *The Liberal* in 1823, writing of a walk he had taken with Coleridge and a young man of Nether Stowey, the metropolitan writer William Hazlitt wrote gently and humorously about the young walking companion, who was attracted to the great poet's words as 'bees in swarming time to the sound of a brass pan'.]

There are many generalised references to bees, but they were not mere objects for Clare. Although not so extensive, his writing about them compares favourably with his writing on birds. He brings the two together in 'May'. To suggest the size of a bumblebee – the long-tailed tit – Clare wrote: 'Bum barrels twit on bush and tree / Scarce bigger than a bumble bee'. He is attracted to them because of their variety and their sheer vitality once spring and summer have arrived. Clare writes from experience, out of his gift for 'getting close'.

In 'Wild Bees' Clare reveals the sharp focus of his observations, describing five different species; detailed enough for them to be identified. The poem concludes:

And russet commoner who knows the face
Of every blossom that the meadow brings
Starting the traveller to a quicker pace
By threatening round his head in many rings
These sweeten summer in their happy glee
By giving for her honey melodie [5]

The bee, unquestionably, stands out, interesting Clare on many levels. Bees are mysterious; he notes their ceaseless industry, colours, movement, sounds, what endangers them, their reaction to the seasons. With recourse to the pathetic fallacy, he notes their varied states of mind and behaviour. They can be vagrant, pensive, merry, most careful, angry, even 'threaten war'. And amorous.

Hives fascinate him, holding 'moss-wrapp'd treasures', but he is also aware that some bees live solitary lives in 'time-crevised walls', in holes underground, or one 'half sables and half red / Who laps a moss ball in the meadow grass'. In 'July' we read of the Mower who

...oft as chances bring to pass
Stoops o'er his scythe stuck in the grass
To seek the brimming honey comb
Which bees so long were toiling home
And rif'd from so many flowers
And carried thro so many hours

He tears their small hives mossy ball
Where the brown labourers hurded all
Who gather homeward one by one
And see their nest and honey gone
Humming around his rushing toil
Their melancholy wrong awhile
Then oer the sweltering swaths they stray
And hum disconsolate away [6]

That section, for me, speaks 'Clare' so movingly. He understands the mower's action and is not judgemental. It is the poet's feeling for the bees – 'the brown labourers' – and the loss of what they had spent hours 'toiling home' that is so affecting. It is not sentimentalised. Clare feels to a depth that very few then (or even now?) could comprehend.

Clare's wonder came early. In his Natural History Letter of March 25, 1825, he writes of taking a walk:

'to botanize.... the shallows are cloathed in their golden palms were the bees are singing a busy welcome to spring.... I have often wondered how these little travellers found their way home agen from the woods & solitudes were they journey for wax & honey I have seen them to-day at least 3 miles from any village in Langley wood working at the palms & some of them with their little thighs so loaded with the yellow dust as to seem almost unable to flye it is curious to see how they collect their load they keep wiping their legs over their faces to gather the dust that settles there after creeping into the flowers till they have got a sufficient load & then they flye homewards to their hives.'

He goes on to tell of a bee-keeper, 'curious to know how far his bees travell'd', dusting his bees with fine flour as they left the hive, later noticing some at 'the extremity of the Lordship' and, on his way to market, others in 'a turnip field in full flower about 5 miles from home'. [7]

Through observation of bees' behaviours, Clare understands that theirs is a sensory world of sight, smell, taste and touch as much as it is for him. For example, they anticipate weather changes:

Black grows the southern clouds, betokening rain
And humming hive bees homeward hurry bye
They feel the change [8]

They can be chancers – venturing out too early in a year:

The insect world now sunbeams higher climb
Oft dream of spring and wake before their time
And bees peep out on slabs before the hive
Stroking their little legs across their wings
And venturing short flights where the snow drop hings....
They sip and find their honey dreams are vain
And feebly hasten to their hives again [9]

After the long winter hibernation, that 'feebly' is so telling.

Clare knows the threats to their environment, with the spread of new agricultural practices and enclosures; Swordy Well laments the 'Grubbed up trees banks and bushes' where

The bees flye round in feeble rings
And find no blossom bye

Then thrum their almost weary wings
 Upon the moss and die [10]
 Haymaking has an impact. Clare loves
 to muse oer meadows newly mown
 Where withering grass perfumes the sultry air
 Where bees search round with sad and weary drone
 In vain for flowers that bloomed but newly there [11]

The countryside is a soundscape. Bees 'sing' and, unsurprisingly, buzz and hum. [Ploughmen and boys, too. Even the poet hums.] Bees – sometimes 'merrily', or sometimes 'a mournful hum bewails declining day'. It 'booms faint with weary chime' and, most movingly in 'July' – 'disconsolate'. The 'minstrel of spring' also 'pipes his small trumpet'. As we read earlier, they make 'melodie'. They 'caroll', 'murmur', 'drone' - 'sad and weary' and 'mellancholy'; and make 'busy noise' Evidence that he had 'an ear' runs through Clare's poetry. There is much repetition, but, with such a variety of words for bees' sounds, we are reminded that Clare was also a musician. Even 'drone' has a musical instrument connotation.

The Letter also references the bees' working day. It is often depicted as pleasurable and joyous. But Clare also understood it as toil, ceaseless labour. 'Busy as a bee' was a familiar phrase of industry in the 19th century. Clare goes beyond the cliché, suggesting a parallel with personal experiences of labour:

And from the knotted flowers of thyme
 Where the woodland banks are deckt
 See the bee his load collect
 Mark him turn the petals by
 Gold dust gathering on his thigh
 As full many a hum he heaves
 While he pats th' intruding leaves
 Lost in many a heedless spring
 Then wearing home on heavy wing [12]

Just four simple words : load, heaves, wearing, heavy. Redolent of the hedger's, thresher's, woodman's days, perhaps?

In conclusion, a brief look at another group of words: amorous, courting, teasing, rifling. Words with obvious connotations, the latter two perhaps more erotically suggestive than the first. This intimacy is suggested, as we see in the opening quotation: the bees to flowers' 'bosoms come'. Clare observed: 'new opened flowers untouched & free / From the bold rifling of the amorous bee' [13]

And swathy bees about the grass
 That stops wi every bloom they pass
 And every minute every hour
 Keep teasing weeds that wear a flower [14]

In the ballad, 'I love thee, sweet Mary', the speaker is rather more explicit:

I would steal a kiss, but I dare not presume
 were thou but a rose
 And I a bold bee for to rifle its bloom [15]

The flower's scent and its nectar draw in the bees. It is a bee's essential food, as is the pollen it collects, passing from flower to flower. Bees feeding and

collecting are constant images. But did Clare have an understanding of the inter-dependence? The flower needing the attention of the bee – both transferring and collecting pollen – as much as the bee needs sustenance and material? Did Clare know about pollination, a subject well documented by his day? Through his friend Joseph Henderson, Head Gardener, he knew the Library at Milton Hall and many of its books, including those on Nature. Knowing, as we do, the depth of his learning especially related to the natural world, it would be foolish to say that John Clare wouldn't have been aware of the importance to plant and to bee of all that ceaseless activity.

Citations:

The Midsummer Cushion [ed. Anne Tibble & RKR Thornton. MidNag/Carcenet, 1979] 1,3,11.

John Clare Oxford Authors [ed. Robinson & Powell, OUP, 1984] 2,5,8,10.

The Shepherd's Calendar [ed. Robinson, Powell & Summerfield OUP 1973] 4,6,9,14.

The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare [ed. Grainger OUP 1983] 7.

From 'Solitude' 12; from 'I love thee sweet Mary' 15 [accessed via internet].

Norman Goodman

Renichi Suzuki selects and translates, *John Clare Meishisen (The Selected Excellent Poems of John Clare)* (Tokyo: Eihosha Co., Ltd, March, 2021. ISBN 978-4-269-82054-8)

In 2004 I published my translation of the Everyman's Poetry *John Clare*, ed. by R. K. R. Thornton. After that, in the process of my Clare study, I became obsessed by the idea that many important poems were not included in that edition. Reading them carefully confirmed my belief that they should be translated and their translation would make his importance more widely known in Japan. For example, we were missing 'Helpstone', 'Helpston Green', 'The Fate of Genius', 'The Lamentations of Round-Oak Waters', 'To the Rural Muse' (Muse of the fields . . .), 'The Moorehens Nest', 'Autumn' (Syren of sullen moods...), 'Childhood', 'Summer Images', 'The Progress of Ryhme', 'To the Snipe', 'Child Harold', 'Don Juan a Poem', 'Graves of Infants', 'Mary' (It is the evening hour...) and numerous other poems.

I used the Oxford English Texts edition. I started translating these poems in 2006. There were a lot of difficult words and phrases in them, which, of course, made it very hard for me to understand and translate them. Whenever I found a difficulty, I asked Professor R. K. R. Thornton about them. His paraphrase and explanation were a great help to me. I really enjoyed the communication with him by email. In almost every poem, I sent him my paraphrase of the lines I was not sure of and then he sent me his paraphrase and explanation about them, and it made me see if my reading was correct or not. Without his help, my translation could not have worked well. I would like to take this opportunity to express my appreciation for his help.

In spite of all his help, there still remained the serious problem to solve: to find a perfect Japanese translation for Clare's words. Concerning word meaning, English and Japanese are quite different because they have their own ethnic, cultural, religious, and historical backgrounds quite different from each other. Therefore, in some cases, it took a few hours to decide the fittest Japanese corresponding to Clare's text. Moreover, it required me to rightly grasp Clare's thoughts and feelings in his poems to translate them properly.

My choice of 45 fine pieces rests on three reasons. First: they could be regarded as 'environmental poems' which describe the destruction of an ecosystem caused by the enclosures which the Agricultural Revolution encouraged, and underlie contemporary ecological thought, and they could be political poems which are based on Clare's sympathy for the common people. Second: they could be regarded as the poems which deal with (a) the relation between eternity of poetry and that of the imagination, (b) the gap between of imaginative world and the real world, (c) the relation between loss of joy and Nature's healing power, (d) a criticism of class society, (e) the relation between Time and loss of Eden, (f) the love of Mary and his children. Third: they were taken up and considered for study by Clare researchers.

The arrangement of the poems in my book is chronological. I used this method because I thought it might clearly display both Clare's consciousness of themes and the changes of his poetics in each period, and that it might also present an overall picture of Clare, as a 'versatile' and 'prolific' poet. His imagination remarkably sees ahead of his age the crisis of the environment, even when writing about his past life, politics, and religion.

Lastly, I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Professor James McKusick for his cooperation of reading with me 'Child Harold' and 'Don Juan a Poem' and other poems while I stayed studying at the University of Montana in 2007, and to Carry Akroyd for her kindness of showing us around Peterborough Fen when my wife and I visited in 2009.

Renichi Suzuki

A copy of the book has been offered to the John Clare Cottage.

'The Meeting' 1820 Anniversary Project

The final element of the project is now freely available online, here:

<https://www.brookes.ac.uk/the-meeting/2020-anniversary/>

Towards the bottom of that web page you will find a series of audio recordings entitled 'melodys of earth & sky': musical compositions by Julian Philips, in dialogue with new readings of Clare by Toby Jones.

Julian's 'creative transcriptions' are rewritings of tunes from Clare's own folksongs. The reimaginings of these tunes put the violin of Ionel Manciu in playful, sportive dialogue with the clarinets of Kate Romano (also producer of the whole Clare project). In further thematic, tonal conversation with these new instrumental songs, are a selection of poems, performed by Toby Jones, and chosen by Julian and Simon Kövesi.

An album (CD and other formats) will be released by the NMC record label in the autumn. This project was made possible by funding from Arts Council England, the John Clare Society and Oxford Brookes University.

Simon Kövesi

Professor of English Literature
School of English and Modern Languages
Oxford Brookes University

THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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October 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.

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David

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