

## THE JOHN CLARE SOCIETY

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*Peter Moyse at the Festival in 2009*

*Photo: Peter Leverington*

I am so saddened by Peter's sudden death. His coming to Helpston made him a host for all of us who arrived there every July to celebrate John Clare. He was in fact the perfect resident for all of us who visited that quiet countryside, and his own interpretation of it both by photography and in that modest voice of his was perfect. It will be strange and a huge loss to be there without him. I treasure those quiet but authoritative books of his. He made us see things which brought us close to Clare and to my mind his reading of the poems was remarkable. Not that he knew it. Myself – all of us – gained something from Peter in our search for Clare which was truly remarkable and I am so sorry that we have lost him – both he and Mary, for she too was such a great friend. What was it that Henry Vaughan said? – 'They have all gone up into the world of light'.

**Ronald Blythe**

## **Peter Moyse: One More Picture for the Album**

Should it be of on my first  
John Clare birthday  
At Helpston when I arrived late  
And he rescued me from confusion  
To get me to the church on time  
For the AGM?

His gift of helping.

Or the newer image early  
This year in John Clare Cottage  
When he signed my copy of his book,  
Talked of photography following  
Our poet and revealed the wellsprings  
Of his vision?

His gift of sharing.

But this sad news has snapped into  
Focus a view touched with the joy  
Of Spring, of a man doing the thing  
He loves, with those he loves: our  
Adventurer setting off, camera  
At the ready.

His gift of being.

**Alan Ross**

My association with Peter goes back to the early 1990s when he came to Daventry to give an illustrated lecture on the life and poetry of John Clare to the Friends of the Museum group.

Such was Peter's enthusiasm for his subject that he then provided me with leaflets, postcards and other information about the Society. I was keen to join the John Clare Society there and then, and I subsequently acquired a considerable library of Clare's work.

When I met Peter that evening, I was the Secretary of Daventry Natural History Society, a post I held for 38 years (who wants to replace a secretary?) until its dissolution in 2005. During that period I organised many field trips and recorded the wildlife of many of the places where (as I realised after joining the John Clare Society) Clare would have sat and observed the butterflies, insects, flowers and birds that we were keen to see. So Castor Hanglands, Barnack Hills and Holes, Swaddywell Pits and other locations became more meaningful to visit.

Through Peter I was introduced to Anna in Annakin's Gallery, who kindly provided me with the opportunity to display some of my illustrated calligraphy of Clare's poems, which were then used in displays at the Festival in 2013. Contact via Peter with the Headteacher at the John Clare School led me to illustrate the individual winning poems composed by the children in 2012; these were sent to be presented to the children.

Like many others who knew Peter, I shall miss his friendship, his kindness, his willingness to help, and his devoted enthusiasm for all things connected to the Clare Society. A huge loss – but how happy to have met him.

**Leslie Tooby**



The dwindling list of people who  
 I send my Christmas greetings to  
 Reminds me that the time is short  
 Before it dwindles down to nought,  
 When lists will be no use at all  
 Except to give some friends a call  
 To invite them to my funeral.  
 The time will come for crossing through  
 Our names, and lastly all lists too.  
 Today, sad news that Peter Moyses  
 Is lost from our short list of joys.  
 Unpretentious, friendly, kind,  
 A man who foreigners would find  
 Who'd visited without a guide  
 A friendly presence by their side  
 To tell them where the cottage was  
 And where Clare walked and drank,  
 because  
 He knew the place and loved to share  
 His knowledge and his love of Clare,  
 And caught the nature of the fens  
 So sharply with his camera's lens.

It's odd that we can find so dear  
 Someone we met just once a year;  
 But all those words that Clare loved best,  
 'I love to', 'life', 'heart', 'nature', 'nest',  
 Were dear to him; especially 'joys',  
 A word that sums up Peter Moyses.  
 His cheerful voice no longer shall  
 Welcome us to the Festival;  
 Who gave to everyone a part  
 Of his enthusiastic heart.  
 He's gone; but seeds that he has sown  
 For love of Clare and life have grown  
 In many hearts and there will last  
 The things he planted in the past.

Of those who made, it seems to me,  
 The world a better place to be,  
 Peter stands high up in the list.  
 He was much loved. He'll be much  
 missed.

**RKR Thornton**

## On being befriended by Peter Moyse

13 July 2002: I was scared, curious, and tentative.

For several years I'd been voice-recording back issues of the John Clare Journal onto audiotape, for a blind nature-and-literature lover, via CAMREAD, then a local charity. She and I had made tape copies available to the Society.

The John Clare Society committee had recently given me honorary membership – wow! I felt so honoured – and I had turned up to my first John Clare Festival, armed with my necessary sun hat, all my meals in a big cool box, and my anxieties.

Well, that is history now. One by one you welcomed me, and invited me to feast: on literature at Helpston Primary School (as I think it was named in those days); at the WI Hall for delicious banquets; in St Botolph's Church for the poetry reading and evening concert.

None more so than Peter Moyse, who greeted me like a newly found friend, especially when he found out that we had lived in the same Hertfordshire town (during my teens). He was still raw from his Mary's death. I like to think that by sharing that she had been a science technician at St George's School, Harpenden, he could let go a tiny part of his grief; certainly it was a bond between us from then on. He sat next to me at the evening concert and gave me a *sotto voce* commentary between the acts.

In all my subsequent annual visits to Helpston, no longer with cool box, with the confidence I was among friends, and now with my partner, Jim – who loves the poetry and music even more than the lunches – Peter always embraced us both, and we both loved and love him.

A true local friend and advocate of that most local of poets; ambassador of what is so open, curious and intimate about John Clare's legacy.

Perhaps if John Clare were here, he'd write: *I love to hear the soft dialects of Peter Moyse...*

Perhaps he is.

### Kathy McVittie

*On the way to Westminster Abbey for the 2014 Poets' Corner ceremony.*

*Photo: Peter Leverington*

