

# The John Clare Society of North America

## Newsletter

Volume Fourteen, February 2013



### From the Editor

This year's *Newsletter* contains two moving tributes to David Powell, one of the greatest Clare scholars of the twentieth century. The first tribute is by his widow, Sylvia Powell, the second by his friend Eric Robinson. It also includes a "Musings" essay, a report on the proceedings of the panel at the recent MLA annual convention, an update from The John Clare Cottage, a call for information, a list of recent academic writings, and a new feature, "Notices," which will describe new books about Clare at greater length. Please feel warmly encouraged to send me your "musings" in whatever form, citations of recent work, and accounts of events. I'd be very glad to hear from you. — Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, Wesleyan University

### Musings

#### *An Outing to Langley Bush*

#### *By Roger Rowe*

As many will know I have been an athlete all my life. One of the joys of spending quite so much time out on the tracks and paths of rural England is to realize that often one is treading on land

largely unspoilt in half a millennium. This is particularly true of the cliff-paths and common land I know so well in my native East Devon, but often visiting (as I do) what has become properly known as "Clare Country," I have had many opportunities of covering the lanes and paths that Clare would have known well.

Just a few months ago I was running south down King Street (now known as Langley Bush Road) from Helpston, when I realized that the woods on my right and left were almost entirely unchanged since they were walked by Clare in the early years of the nineteenth century.

As I often do on my perambulations, especially in the Helpston area, I was musing on some of Clare's lines. As I ran down past what I call "Swaddywell Corner" I reached the place where King Street makes a sharp turn west towards Southe Woods, and I spied the new Langley Bush, now in the shade of a huge pylon line. A raised grassy mound stands in the middle of a ploughed field.

Langdyke or Langley Bush, the tree from which the area takes its name, is a hawthorn growing on an ancient mound at the junction of four parishes—Ufford, Helpston, Upton and Ailsworth. It has been reported that a thorn bush is likely to have grown there since 948 AD and the present tree was planted in 1996.

It has not only been replanted, but also there has been added a memorial plaque to mark the historic site, all very much in keeping with Clare's original words in his 1821 poem "Langley Bush":

O Langley Bush! The shepherds sacred shade  
Thy hollow trunk oft gain'd a look from me  
Full many a journey o'er the heath I've made  
For such like curious things I love to see

How ironic therefore that, as I subsequently discovered, to visit the site and stand next to the hallowed tree the visitor has to trespass on "private" land:

"The Langley Bush is situated on private land. Permission to visit the mound should be sought from Fitzwilliam Farm (Milton Estates)."

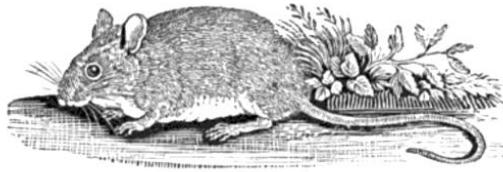
So reported the 'Village Tribune' in December 2009.

I turned back the way I had come, returning to Glinton via Rice Wood, Helpston, Maxey and Northborough. A "happy/sad" and rather thoughtful morning in the Spring sunshine. All the way I continued to ponder on how Clare would view Langley Bush in 2012, nearly 200 years after the enclosures? Perhaps not too differently from how he saw it in 1830 in his poem "Langley Bush":

The little hill did naked lie,  
The old old bush was broke and gone,  
My heart had felt it glad to die  
To miss life's sorrows coming on.



Roger Rowe lives in England and writes about John Clare at [www.johnclare.blogspot.com](http://www.johnclare.blogspot.com).



**In Memoriam**  
**David Powell, 1925-2012**  
*By Sylvia Powell*

November 12

Dear Friends of David Powell,

It is with great sadness that I write to tell you that David passed away. He died of bronchial pneumonia and quietly slipped away on the morning of Thursday 20th September, the fifth day of his stay in the Northampton General Hospital.

After a private service at the crematorium on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> October, the family joined friends at Kingsthorpe Baptist church for a Thanksgiving service and afternoon tea.

David was born in Hitchin, Hertfordshire in 1925 where his father was a Baptist minister, but his schooldays were spent in Scunthorpe and Southampton. After service in the Royal Navy he graduated in English Literature at the Southampton University, followed by a degree in Librarianship at the University of London. After spending many years at Northampton Public Library he transferred to Nene College (now the University of Northampton) and retired in 1985.

David was a specialist in John Clare's poetry and prose, so I will close with one of Clare's poems:

**Little Trotty Wagtail**

Little trotty wagtail he went in the rain,  
And tittering tottering sideways he neer got  
straight again  
He stooped to get a worm, and looked up to get

a fly,  
And then he flew away ere his feathers they  
were dry.

Little trotty wagtail he waddled in the mud,  
And left his little footmarks trample where he  
would.  
He waddled in the water-pudge and waggle  
went his tail,  
And chirruped up his wings to dry upon the  
garden rail.

Little trotty wagtail you nimble all about,  
And in the dimpling water-pudge you waddle  
in and out,  
Your home is nigh at hand, and in the warm  
pigsty,  
So little Master Wagtail I'll bid you a good-bye.

Yours truly,

Sylvia Powell

### In Tribute and Memory *David Powell as I Knew Him* By Eric Robinson

I can scarcely believe that David Powell has died. We spent a half-century together editing the nine volumes of the Oxford English Text "*Clare*" poems (with the help of Margaret Grainger, Geoffrey Summerfield and Paul Dawson, and supported in our work by several other lovers of Clare's poetry). Here are just a few of my memories of this Northamptonshire librarian who spent the whole of his working life in that employment.

There are some similarities between David Powell and John Clare. Both were rather short men but very wiry, and great walkers. Both spent the best part of their lives in one English county: they were both Northamptonshire men, but from different ends of the county. Both were church-goers, though David was more consistent

in his Sunday observance. Powell and Clare were both great readers, specializing to some extent in the writers from the Midland Counties. Both were determined men who persisted in their literary labors all their lives. David, however, was not a dialect speaker like Clare and did not, so far as I know, ever work as an agricultural laborer. He certainly did not care for gardening though he did some at the request of his first wife. It was, however, his good fortune to be responsible for tending the Clare Collection at the Northampton Central Public Library.

His first literary essay was about Clare and also constituted part of his degree in library science. It was natural for him to compose and publish a record of Clare's personal library. He was, as you might expect, a perfectionist in his literary references and an expert in his annotations. He was the most persistent member of the editorial team for the O.E.T. *Clare* and a regular correspondent on Clare minutiae. Though he was always consistent in his views, he was usually open to persuasion on difficult points if one presented a reasonable case to him. In short, he was invaluable. He was well known to the Tibbles, and to other Clare celebrants living near Northampton, but Helpston was a foreign country to him for many years.

Strangely enough, he enjoyed large cities both in the USA and in England. He regularly frequented the British Library when it was part of the British Museum in London (and later when it was transferred to Euston), and also the Collingwood newspaper section of the British Museum. When I emigrated to the USA and began to work on Clare collections at Harvard, Yale, the University of Texas at Austin and in Philadelphia, David joined me on a few occasions. Rather to my surprise, he quickly adjusted to the urban scene: we walked a considerable distance from our hotel to the New York Public Library, working in both the Pforzheimer and Berg Collections. David loved the buzz and energy of the New York streets and acclimatized himself to them faster than I ever did. He also visited me in Washington, DC—enjoyed the “touristy” activities as well as working at the Library of Congress and the Folger Library.

Thus, this denizen of Northampton became an admirer of big-city living—at least for limited visits.

Though Clare knew a great deal about the sports and games of his neighborhood, he was not a great participant in football or cricket. David's enthusiasm for sports had more focus. He was a strong supporter of Northampton City soccer and the Northamptonshire Cricket Club. In fact, there were times in the summer when I came over to England to work with him, that cricket took precedence over Clare, much to my annoyance. But I remember David walking from Northampton to Peterborough to raise money for the John Clare Society. That walk was not so long as Clare's famous walk from the New Forest to Helpston, but David would have been quite capable of doing that trek as well.

Although David and I seldom exchanged views on religious matters (and I never went to church with him), I sense that both Powell and Clare were religious men. David was the more conventional in his views, but I have little doubt that David's faith was a shaping force in his life. David told the truth and kept his word. He will long be remembered.



Eric Robinson is a scholar and editor of John Clare's work. Until his retirement, he taught at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

### Second Edition of David Powell's Scholarly Research Guide

Please take note of the announcement of David Powell's *First Publications of John Clare's Poems* (Second Edition) at the end of the newsletter.



### Clare Cottage Update By Sara Blair-Manning

- We won a gold medal for the Clare-themed garden "The Rural Muse" as part of the Chelsea Flower show in May (see picture below) and managed to get some amazing worldwide media coverage. We shortly will begin installing the garden at the rear of the John Clare Cottage and will be ready to open it to visitors in late spring 2013—although the snow is not helping here at the moment.



- After purchasing the Exeter Arms Public House, where Clare was laid out prior to his burial, we are continuing to raise funds to carry out the extensive works needed to create a new education and learning centre and an area where we can display a large collection of artifacts.
- We delivered the first "We Love Words" Festival of Poetry & Literature in September. It was very

well received and we are now booking the next festival, which will take place on September 20-28, 2013. It's looking to be an impressive line-up—the event will feature many well-known names from the literature and poetry worlds.

- We are continuing our local education projects, but we are also establishing a new national project which will bring children from inner city areas to Helpston to experience a real day in the country, get their hands dirty, and help to create a “new wood” project using plantings inspired by Clare’s writings. We are also investigating the possibilities of establishing programs based on “getting back in touch with nature” and the positive effects this has on wellbeing.
- We are overhauling our website and adding podcasts and more extensive social media coverage.
- Visitor numbers and revenue have increased at the cottage during 2012—which is fantastic given the economic gloom.
- As usual, we struggle to keep things on track with no regular funding and appreciate any help that anyone can give. We are always grateful for donations to help raise awareness of the life and works of John Clare and sustain and develop the running of the cottage. Please see our website to learn about individual and corporate sponsorship and benefit opportunities. Individuals may become supporters at “The Wren,” “The Landrail,” and “The Skylark” subscription levels. If you wish to be kept informed of future events at the Cottage, email [events@clarecottage.org](mailto:events@clarecottage.org).



Sara Blair-Manning is Chief Executive of The John Clare Trust Ltd & The John Clare Cottage.



## Recent Academic Writings

Ronald Blythe, “John Clare and the Paper Chase,” *John Clare Society Journal* 29 (July 2010): 5-13.

John Goodridge, “‘The Clare That You Can See around You Today’: An Interview with Carry Akroyd,” *John Clare Society Journal* 29 (July 2010): 71-79.

John Goodridge, “Junkets and Clarissimus: The Clare-Keats Dialogue,” *The Keats-Shelley Review* 25.1 (April 2011): 32-54.

Mina Gorji, “John Clare’s Weeds,” in *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left: The Red and the Green*, eds. John Rignall, H. Gustav Klaus, and Valentine Cunningham (Farnham, England: Ashgate, 2012): 61-73.

Sara Guyer, “Figuring John Clare: Romanticism, Editing, and the Possibility of Justice,” *Studies in Romanticism* 51.1 (Spring 2012): 3-24.

Gary Harrison, “John Clare’s Poetics of Acknowledgment,” *Romanticism* 18.1 (April 2012): 41-54.

Ben Hickman, *John Ashbery and English Poetry* (Edinburgh, Scotland: Edinburgh University Press, 2012).

Simon Kövesi, “John Clare & ... & ... & ...: Deleuze and Guattari’s Rhizome,” in *Ecology and the Literature of the British Left*, 75-88.

Simon Kövesi, “John Hamilton Reynolds, John Clare and The London Magazine,” *Wordsworth Circle* 42.3 (Summer 2011): 226-235.

Jennifer Orr, “‘No John Clare’: Minute Observations from the Ulster Cottage Door, 1790-1800,” *John Clare Society Journal* 29 (July 2010): 51-68.

Chase Pielak, *Remembering Animals in Romantic Literature: Memorializing Creatures in the Work of Charles Lamb, John Clare, Samuel Taylor Coleridge, and William*

*Wordsworth* (Claremont Graduate School, February 2012).

Eric H. Robinson, “John Clare’s Words and Their Survival in America,” *Wordsworth Circle* 41.2 (Spring 2010): 94-98.

Andrew Smith, “Ruins, Radicals and Reactionaries: John Clare’s Enclosure Elegies,” *John Clare Society Journal* 29 (July 2010): 37-50.

Stephen Wade, “Dickens, John Clare and Mr Dick,” *Contemporary Review* 294.1705 (June 2012): 229-232.

Sam Ward, “‘To List the Song & Not to Start the Thrush’: John Clare’s Acoustic Ecologies,” *John Clare Society Journal* 29 (July 2010): 15-32.

Marta L. Werner, “‘Reportless Places’: Facing the Modern Manuscript,” *Textual Cultures: Texts, Contexts, Interpretation* 6.2 (Autumn 2011): 60-83.

## Notices

**By Stephanie Kuduk Weiner**

John Goodridge, *John Clare and Community* (Oxford University Press, 2013).

It is my pleasure to devote our first “notice” to this splendid new book about Clare’s twofold relation to community: his participation in the fellowship of poets and his effort to record the culture and ecology of his native village.

Beautifully written, trenchant, and perceptive, this study is both accessible to non-specialist readers and valuable for scholars of Clare.

Goodridge (Professor of English at Nottingham Trent University) reads Clare’s poems within carefully reconstructed contexts of biographical and literary history. His painstaking research opens the poems up in wonderful, sometimes startling ways, and enables us to hear echoes and voices—from the pages in Clare’s library and from the fields and taverns around Helpston.

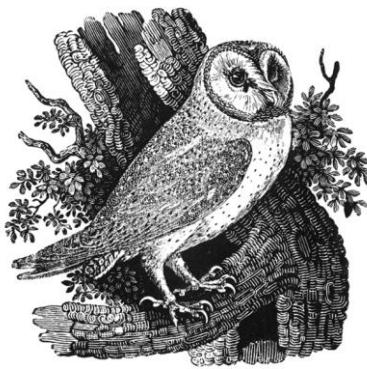
In the first half of the book Goodridge explores Clare’s rich debts to his “brother bards” John Pomfret, John Cunningham, and Thomas Gray as well as, and in greater detail, Chatterton, Keats, and Bloomfield. Over the course of these chapters Goodridge builds up a thickly textured portrait of Clare’s active, creative reading of these writers, who offered him literary strategies, models of poetic identity, and ways of coping with the pressures of authorship and the world of print. Indeed, they “helped teach him how to live, and inspired him to continue writing, no matter what might happen” (23).

Goodridge turns in the second half of the book to Clare’s representations of rural life, focusing in turn on poems about enclosure, bird’s nests, festive rituals, and oral storytelling. In all these poems, Goodridge demonstrates, Clare mingles literary and folk culture, employing a range of styles, metrical forms, narrative and lyric modes, and sustained metaphors to capture the vitality, fragility, and value of his subjects.

*John Clare and Community* complements two superb recent book-length studies of Clare. Like Sarah Houghton-Walker’s *John Clare’s Religion*, Goodridge’s study attends fruitfully to Clare’s narrative poems and shows how throughout his work he drew together expressive culture and print culture, low and high, authorized and dissident traditions. And like Mina Gorgi’s *John Clare and the Place of Poetry*, Goodridge places Clare in a vibrant literary atmosphere that fostered reading and writing, genial conviviality and the long-distance fellowship of letters and poems.



Stephanie Kuduk Weiner teaches in the English Department at Wesleyan University. She is the author of *Clare’s Lyric: John Clare and Three Modern Poets*, forthcoming from Oxford University Press.



## Call for Information

*By Art Homer*



I am collecting material on John Clare's influence in North America. This project began as a presentation for the 2014 sesquicentennial John Clare

Festival in Helpston, and has sparked interest for presentation at other venues such as the Association of Writers and Writing Programs (AWP) Annual Conference, and possibly an updated anthology in the manner of *Journey from Essex: Poems for John Clare* (Graywolf Press, 1981). The Graywolf anthology introduced me to Clare when I was a young U.S. poet, and this is the region in which I have made most progress in collecting material.

For the Helpston presentation, and as a resource for future projects with writers, scholars, and musicians, I am particularly interested in material with which I am less familiar:

- Canadian poets influenced by John Clare;
- Research showing Clare's influence upon the environmental movement(s) in North America; and
- How songs collected by Clare became part of the musical heritage of North America.

If you have information on any of these topics, or on other aspects of Clare's influence in North America, please contact [ahomer@unomaha.edu](mailto:ahomer@unomaha.edu) or 402-554-2771.



Since 1982 Art Homer has taught poetry and nonfiction at the Writer's Workshop at the University of Nebraska at Omaha, where he was named a Regents Professor in 1995. His most recent of four poetry collections, *Blind Uncle Night*, was published by WordTech Press in 2012.

## Proceedings of the John Clare Panel at the MLA Convention, January 5, 2013

*By Nathalie Wolfram*

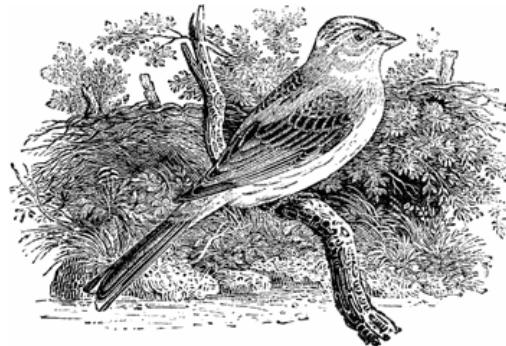
At this year's MLA Convention in Boston, the John Clare Society of North America hosted the session "John Clare: Nature and the Self," chaired by Samantha Harvey (Boise State University). The session included papers by Ashton Nichols (Dickinson College), Judith Abrams Plotz (George Washington University) and Scott Hess (Earlham College).

In "From Wild Badgers to Human Beasts: John Clare and the Question of Nonhuman Nature," Nichols approached Clare's poetry through the lens of animal studies. According to Nichols, Clare's idiosyncratic understanding of the role of animals in human life derived from the complex ecology of his home region of Helpston. England remained a wild country in Clare's time, teeming with fauna since banished from the landscape by industrial growth. Accordingly, Nichols suggests, Clare's poetic sensibility extends beyond the human world and, through Clare's unselfconscious access to nature, into discourses of habitat preservation and animal ethics. In poems such as "The Badger" and "The Nightingale's Nest," he argues, Clare exhibits a more extensive sense of the world of nonhuman creatures, whose disconnectedness from human morality confers superiority. By setting up a perspective from which the human is merely a detail

within the landscape and by roving between multiple human and animal points of view, the poems decline to assert significance beyond the material reality of what is described.

In “The Subaltern Soil Speaks, Has Standing, or, Swordy Well Speaks, Makes Its Case,” Judith Plotz explored the resonances of post-colonial criticism and eco-criticism in Clare’s poetry. Her title, an allusion to Chris Stone’s seminal legal essay “Should Trees Have Standing?” set up her argument that, in “The Lament of Swordy Well,” Clare presciently claims rights for Swordy Well itself. Among these rights, she argues, are the right to restitution and the right to obtain restoration; through a “rights creep,” those rights beget further rights. In this “apologia on behalf of the rights of nature,” she argues, Swordy Well claims self-ownership and personhood. In asserting its right to life, to speak, and to be spoken for, Clare’s Swordy Well “embodies virtues ethically more advanced” than the corporate agents of enclosure and industrialization.

Scott Hess presented an account of what he refers to as an “ecology of authorship.” In “John Clare, Ecological Abstraction, and the Abstraction of the Self,” he hypothesized that, in Clare’s poetry, nature and the self mutually constitute one another, much as two mirrors pointed at one another create an “infinite regress of meaning.” Clare’s poetic speaker in his nature poems possesses a distinctive subjectivity that enables him to move through the environment at the same time that he is totally immersed in it. While Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey” organizes a landscape around a single point of view that enables the speaker’s revelation that nature and the imagination are equivalent, Clare’s pre-asylum poems such as “The Skylark” present complex networks of focalization that shuffle between human and non-human perspectives. Through this difference in perspective, Hess identifies in Clare’s nature poems a critique of other Romantics’ way of seeing nature exclusively in relation to themselves.



During the discussion period, the panelists responded to a question about how these three approaches to Clare’s nature poetry might benefit from a Marxist analysis. While there was a consensus that many of the poems addressed during the panel raise urgent questions about class conflict and the decline of subsistence economy, Nichols also noted the hazard of treating Clare—who desperately wanted to join the elite ranks of high-cultural poets—as a proto-Marxist. The discussion period concluded with another audience member’s observation that, in this way as in so many others, Clare remains a “man of contradictions.”



Nathalie Wolfram received her Ph.D. from Yale University and is currently an adjunct assistant professor at the University of Montana. Her most recent article, “I am my master’s servant for hire”: Contract and Identity in Richard Steele’s *The Conscious Lovers*, appeared in the winter 2012 issue of *The Eighteenth Century: Theory and Interpretation*. She is currently researching a project on English toy theater.

## **Revised Clare Reference Book**

Second Edition of the Scholarly Research Guide  
By David Powell (1925-2012)

### **SECOND EDITION**

*First Publications of John Clare's Poems*  
by David Powell

A revised and augmented second edition of the definitive guide for researchers on John Clare, this 100-page book offers detailed bibliographic information on the first place of publication for every poem included in the complete *Oxford English Texts* edition of Clare's poetry (9 volumes, 1984-2003). In this volume, readers of John Clare can discover where each of his poems first appeared in print. The second edition is thoroughly revised and augmented on the basis of new research, with dozens of poems and places of first publication appearing here for the first time.

Reflecting many years of scholarly research by a distinguished editor of Clare's poetry, this indispensable volume provides a comprehensive survey of Clare's poems published in books and periodicals of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Every scholar of John Clare, especially those who are engaged in research concerning the reception history of Clare's poetry in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, should obtain a copy of this essential work. Readers of John Clare's poetry will be fascinated to learn where each one of his poems was first published.

This spiral-bound paperback book lies flat for ease of reference. It is exclusively available from the John Clare Society of North America for just \$12.00 (USD) per copy. We will ship to any destination worldwide, and there is no extra charge for shipping, handling, or sales tax. Please consider ordering additional copies for friends, colleagues, students, and university libraries!

To order this book, please visit our website: [www.johnclare.org](http://www.johnclare.org) and click on the link to purchase John Clare books and postcards.

## **Election of Society Officers**

The annual business meeting of the John Clare Society of North America was held at the MLA Convention in Boston on January 5, 2013. In accord with the bylaws of the John Clare Society of North America, the following officers were elected to five-year terms, effective August 1, 2013:

President: Eric Robinson, Falls Church, Virginia

Vice President: Bridget Keegan, Creighton University

Executive Director: James McKusick,  
University of Montana

The Program Chair is Samantha Harvey, Boise State University. The Newsletter Editor is Stephanie Kuduk Weiner, Wesleyan University.

The officers look forward to working closely with all members to advance the objectives of the John Clare Society of North America.