

# THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY

## SPRING NEWSLETTER 2009

### **THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY**

The Richard Jefferies Society is a Registered Charity (No 1042838) and was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887). Membership is open to all on payment of the current annual subscription: £7 single, £8 couple, plus a £1.50 postal supplement for new overseas Members. Life membership, for those over 60, is available at ten times the annual rate. The annual membership year commences on 1 July.

Members receive spring and autumn newsletters, an annual report and a *Journal* and can take advantage of the Society's extensive library. Activities include winter meetings, a study day, special outings, events, a Birthday Lecture and an Annual General Meeting.

### **THE RICHARD JEFFERIES MUSEUM, COATE FARM**

The Richard Jefferies Society provides the volunteers to open the Jefferies Museum at Coate to the public on the second Wednesday of the month throughout the year from 10am to 4pm as well as the first and third Sundays of May to September from 2-5pm, plus 13<sup>th</sup> September 2009 (Heritage Day). The "Footsteps' writers" workshop is also held on the same Wednesdays. Admission is free. There is usually a good selection of Jefferies' books on sale at reasonable prices.

### **NEWSLETTER**

The spring newsletter has been edited by Jean Saunders, proof-read by John Price and despatched by Margaret Evans.

The deadline to submit material for the Autumn 2009 Newsletter is **1st September 2009**. Please send your contributions to the Hon. Secretary.

### **DATA PROTECTION ACT**

Members' names and addresses are held on a computer data base. We are required by the Data Protection Act 1998 to inform Members that they have the right to object to information being held in this way.

## FROM THE CHAIR

I am starting to write this on one of those cold days in January that we do not seem to have experienced for many years. The scene outside is beautiful, with hoar frost outlining the twigs and leaves of those evergreens that bring colour to the otherwise seemingly barren garden.

In contrast to this peaceful scene, I am conscious that, along with almost every other individual and organisation in the world today, your Society is facing a period of extraordinary challenge. On 10th February, a local Public Inquiry will be held in Swindon, when an Inspector will hear the appeal by developers against Swindon Borough Council's failure to respond to the new application to develop the land between Coate and the M4/A419. You can read much more about this on page 14, but you can be reassured that your Officers are doing everything we can to fight this proposal. And this time, we seem to be singing from the same hymn sheet as SBC.

The second big concern is the threat, floated at a meeting held with senior Officers and Cabinet members of SBC in November, that they would like to sell off Coate Farmhouse in the near future. The philistinism of the current Swindon leadership is quite astounding, given that they are trying to raise the profile of the town nationally, whilst presiding over one of the most poorly performing education systems in the Country. You will read much more about this elsewhere in this Newsletter and its accompanying documents, but we do need to know your views on what action we should take, if any, should the sale threat materialise.

In the current climate, it is only too easy to descend into "grumpy old man/woman" mode at the slightest provocation. There was recently, however, a development which so alarmed me, that I wrote to the Oxford University Press in my capacity as Chairman of the RJS.

The stimulus for this was the announcement that the new edition of the Junior OED had taken some words out and included some new ones. This would normally be sensible and admirable, but let us consider for a moment some of the words taken out:

Adder, boar, bullock, colt, cygnet, doe, drake, ferret, gerbil, goldfish, heron, kingfisher, lark, magpie, minnow, newt, otter, piglet, raven, spaniel, starling, stoat, thrush, weasel, wren;

And

Acorn, ash, beech, blackberry, bluebell, bramble, brook, buttercup, catkin, chestnut, clover, conker, county, cowslip, crocus, dandelion, fern, fungus, gooseberry, gorse, hazel, hazelnut, heather, holly, horse chestnut, ivy, lavender, oats, pansy, pasture, poppy, primrose, sycamore, walnut and willow.

- and some of the words included;  
interdependent, drought, biodegradable, endangered, food chain, incisor, classify
- as well as : blog, broadband, voicemail, chatroom, analogue, celebrity, EU,

bungee jumping, committee, etc. etc.

Taking words out must imply that they are no longer of relevance to the young people of today, and/or that they are unlikely to encounter them in their reading. Children's dictionaries should enable youngsters to look up words they come across in their everyday reading, but with which they are unfamiliar. 150 years ago, there would have been no need to include "adder", "lark", "piglet", "hazel", or "dandelion" in children's dictionaries on this basis, because nearly all youngsters would be familiar with the organisms themselves. Today, what does a child from an inner-city do when trying to read *Bevis* or *Wood Magic*? Most of the unfamiliar words in these texts will not be in their new dictionaries! And how can the concepts of "endangered", "food chains", and "classify" be explained if common examples are not known?

To finish on an entirely different note, I would like to invite responses to a suggestion put forward by a recent, but very mature member that the Society produces an RJS tie, with perhaps a headscarf or brooch for the lady members. He quotes the Henry Williamson Society as having such a tie. It is easily possible to produce such items of insignia today, but I wonder whether there would be any demand for such a product? I look forward to hearing your views.

John Price  
23 January 2009

### ***Wood Magic* adapted for ballet?**

A recent e-mail from Janice Lingley, a Society Member, suggested that "Jefferies' *Wood Magic* could form the subject of a wonderful adaptation for ballet to delight both children and adults alike". She should be interested to know whether other Society members have any views on this.

## **REPORTS OF MEETINGS**

### **Birthday Lecture 2008: Richard Jefferies "Spirit Country"**

Over 70 people gathered in Liddington village hall to listen to American-born Roger Vlitos speak about artistic people who drew inspiration from Richard Jefferies and his downland landscapes – particularly the theme of timelessness. The talk was beautifully illustrated with quotes and pictures.

In 1943 Roger's father, an 18 year old American serviceman from Brooklyn, was on a trainload of Allied servicemen delayed at Swindon station on their way to prepare for the D-day landing. There he met an elderly couple who took him up on the Downs. The landscape reminded him of the sea. Coming from New York, he had seen nothing like it before. The Swindon couple took him to their home and gave him tea and a copy of *The Story of my Heart*. The book is somewhat battered now. It travelled in the young man's navy canvas pack-bag and was a prized possession. Roger was given the book some 5 years ago. His father went on to become a Professor of Plant Physiology. Roger was educated in England and was drawn to live in Wiltshire, because of

the Jefferies influence, to work as a photographer and lecturer.

The following artists, writers, poets, photographers and musicians were highlighted in Roger's lecture.

**William Cobbett** (1763-1835), farmer and writer, described Wiltshire as the land of chalk and cheese – the impoverished soils of the chalkland hills contrasted with the productive lowland dairy farms.

**Thomas Hardy** (1840-1928) wrote a tale of the four moonlit nights at the Devil's Den; the cromlech at Overton Hill on the Marlborough Downs. The story was entitled *The Devil's Door* or *Marlbury Down*.

Land reform and social reform were never far from the thoughts of **W H Hudson** (1841-1922), an ardent follower of Jefferies. Best known for *A Shepherd's Life* based on a farming community in south Wiltshire, he was part of the back-to-nature movement. Hudson insisted on being buried in the same cemetery as Jefferies in Worthing and in a similar looking grave.

**Charles Sorley** (1895-1915), another Jefferies follower, regularly walked the Marlborough Downs and is remembered as a war poet. He was killed in action in World War I.

**Frank Bridges** (1879-1941), composer, tutor of Benjamin Brittain and a conscientious objector, set Jefferies' words to music selecting extracts from *The Open Air* and *The Story of my Heart* for the purpose.

**W H Davies** (1871-1940), who wrote *The Memoirs of a Supertramp* ("What is this life, if full of care, we have no time to stand and stare?") recounts in *A Poet's Pilgrimage* meeting a flea-bitten tramp who couldn't stop scratching himself during a walk from Calne to Marlborough. They accompany each other for most of the journey admiring the landscape.

**John Betjeman** (1906-1984) commissioned the *Shell Guides* and sparked a campaign to save the out-buildings at Coate Farm, Jefferies' birthplace, supported by Spike Milligan, Johnny Morris and other celebrities of the 1970s. In the 1930s, Betjeman described the Downs as "pagan".

**Robert Byron** (1905-1941) was commissioned by John Betjeman to write about Wiltshire for the *Shell Guide* (1935). Byron described Swindon as "a place whose existence is regretted by seekers of beauty..."; "Avebury is a ghost" and "South Wiltshire is away with the fairies."

**William Blake** (1757-1827) shared Jefferies' theme of eternity now (his "grain of sand") and a love of cosmology that was reflected in his poetry.

**Samuel Palmer** (1805-1881). Jefferies went to live in another chalk country, known as Samuel Palmer Country. Palmer was an artist who loved similar landscapes to Jefferies and shared his interest in cosmology.

**J W North** (1842-1924), the artist and Jefferies were great friends. A slide of a typical North painting was shown depicting a rural scene in Somerset.

**Richard Mabey** (born 1941) chose to illustrate the cover of his *Landscape with Figures: an anthology of Richard Jefferies's Prose* with a typical rural scene entitled "The Mowers" and painted by **George Clausen**.

**Edward Thomas** (1878-1917) was one of the best of the Great War poets and wrote *Richard Jefferies. His Life and Work* which contains some perceptive extracts about Jefferies' downlands and the associations with the sea that were never far from Jefferies' thoughts.

**Reverend William Gilpin** (1724-1804) was the first person to coin the term “picturesque”. In 1770 he was not complimentary about his description of the “dreary” Marlborough Downs where our ancestors deposited their dead. Gilpin encouraged the planting of beech clumps to improve the bleak landscape.

**E H Shepard** (1879-1976) best known for his Winnie-the-Pooh illustrations visited Coate in the 1930s to illustrate a new edition of *Bevis*.

**Paul Nash** (1889-1946) met Edward Thomas in France in the Great War. Nash returned home shell-shocked. He came to Liddington Hill and painted it as an homage to Jefferies. Other paintings shown by the lecturer included a “Landscape of the Megaliths” and “A Nest of Wild Stones” – the grey wethers on Overton Hill. Paul Nash’s photographs were also used in the *Shell Guide* including the Avebury sentinel stone and the Uffington White Horse.

**Eric Ravilious** (1903-1942), a war artist, enjoyed painting the downland chalk figures, that were covered up during war-time. One of his pictures shown was of the Westbury White Horse as seen through the window of a third class railway carriage.

**Edith Olivier** (1872-1948), a psychic, may have given rise to Byron’s comments about Wiltshire folk being “away with the fairies”. She heard fairground noises at Avebury but no fair had taken place at that location for 60 years – it became known as a ghost fair. One night, she recounted driving through an avenue in Avebury bordered by standing stones that didn’t exist. Archaeologists, under her guidance, unearthed buried sarsens.

Olivier was also a friend of **Siegfried Sassoon** (1886-1967), another Great War poet, who captures the Downs on a sunny day in his poem “On Scratchbury Camp”.

**Rex Whistler** was a friend of Edith Olivier. The etched memorial window (only postcard size) in Alton Barnes church was created by Rex’s brother, Lawrence.

Olivier also knew **T E Lawrence** (“of Arabia”) (1888-1935) who bought land on the Downs at Barbury because he didn’t want anyone to change it. He was another Jefferies’ devotee.

**Alfred Williams** (1877-1930), another Swindon writer and the “Hammerman Poet” shared Jefferies’ passion for Jefferies’ Land. He is immortalised along with Jefferies on the memorial plaques at Burderop Down and Liddington Hill.

**John Piper** (1903-1992), a war artist, was involved in “The Earth”, an opera. He was a Jefferies enthusiast and the opera was based on Richard Jefferies’ essay ‘The Idle Earth’. In 1944 he painted a picture of Overton Hill which depicts the unrestored West Kennet Long Barrow. Piper liked to capture “pleasing decay” and decrepitude in his paintings and had a particular fondness for scarecrows or “tattie bogglers” as subject matter.

**Bill Brandt** (1904-1983), photographer. A photo of one of the Avebury stones called “The Barber-Surgeon Stone” was shown (the bones of a barber were found underneath it). A Roman Catholic priest demanded that the bones be handed over for Christian burial, whilst the Pagans had other ideas and some obfuscation was employed to conceal their whereabouts – they had been put in a storage box in the Natural History Museum. Brandt’s “Homage to

Richard Jefferies” at Barbury Castle appeared in *Literary Britain* in 1945.

**Agnes Miller Parker** (1895-1980), whose wood-cuts add value to many of the Jefferies books brought out by Lutterworth in the 1940s, is Roger’s favourite engraver. He showed pictures taken from *The Old House at Coate*.

**Robin Tanner** (1904-1988) produced wood-cuts and etchings of Wiltshire and admired the works of Richard Jefferies. His work is somewhat “Palmeresque” and there are some of his exhibits in the Devizes Museum.

**Fay Godwin** (1931-2005), photographer and ex-president of the Ramblers Association photographed the beech clump on Hackpen. She disliked photographs with figures.

**John Fowles**, the writer, collaborated with Fay Goodwin. He was a Life Member of the Richard Jefferies Society and was known to have read *Bevis* every year as a special treat.

The **Henry James** connection: his brother William was a pioneer psychologist and studied Varieties of Religious experience and Nature Mysticism. Edward Thomas quotes him in an essay on Jefferies in the *Hills and the Vale*. James corresponded with Dr Maurice Bucke about “cosmic consciousness” – also quoted by Jefferies.

**David Inshaw**, born 1943 and based in Devizes, also reflects timelessness in his paintings of the Downs where he read *The Story of my Heart*. David is a founder member of the “Brotherhood of Ruralists” established in 1975. Several pictures of his rural landscapes were shown along with one painting of goldfinches that was inspired by Jefferies’ essays about the birds. We were pleased to welcome David Inshaw who had joined us for the lecture.

Roger’s enthusiasm for the subject of his talk came across in his lively, memorable and interesting presentation of quotes, pictures, photographs and drawings. He showed little of his own work but the beautiful photograph of Jefferies’ bridge at Tolworth was stunning. Many, in the audience, were new to the work of Jefferies and left the meeting keen to learn more and to seek out other artists mentioned who were similarly influenced by the Downs.



## **The creation of *Richard Jefferies: An Index***

Hugoe Matthews was invited to give a brief explanation of the concept and arrangement of the book at the Society’s AGM held on 11 October 2008.

Hugoe explained that he started work on the book over three and a half years ago and was later assisted by Phyllis Treitel. Initially Hugoe set out to cover 10,000 printed pages of Jefferies’ writing – an impossible task without the need to produce a book of gigantic length. A selection had to be made and this was the first hurdle to conquer. A selection principle was established whereby any passage, phrase, word, article, or book where Jefferies had something substantial to say on a subject was sought out. The odd repetition of a word, e.g. noting a rook, was not recorded but if the rook was demonstrating something of interest, this was included. Quotations from authors that Jefferies had read were not included. The subtitle of the *Index*

says it all – it is an index of *themes, thoughts and observations*.

Jefferies' philosophical thoughts gave rise to some interesting inclusions in the *Index* that might not be apparent to all. For example, Jefferies first mentions "dust" at the age of 19 quoting from an Edward Young poem "where is the dust that has not been alive?" and uses it as a metaphor in the "dust which settles on the heart" at the start of *The Story of my Heart*.

Hugoe and Phyllis also wanted to make the *Index* readable and to leave plenty of space for readers to annotate and add their own findings, making the book a working tool.

The *Index* could also serve as an anthology of references that could be used to dismiss statements about Jefferies that were not true (eg that he wrote/or did not write about certain themes). The example quoted was that Jefferies never had a pet, when he made clear that he owned a cat that was used to control vermin on farms in an article for the *Livestock Journal*. Jefferies' expertise on agriculture is very relevant to today and is included as a theme in the book.

Part III of the book provides a chronological list of Jefferies' published works. The original list produced as a pamphlet three years ago, has been fine-tuned and is now definitive. Each piece of work (457 in all) has been given an opus number which is then used as a reference in the main body of the *Index*. Readers then have the opportunity to find out more about the subject should they wish to do so.

The only index of any of Jefferies' work appeared 120 years ago in *Jefferies Land*. This *Index* is a first attempt to undertake such an ambitious task and it can now be used as a database to help researchers and provide a source of ideas for talks, articles, anthologies or theses. It could also be expanded quite easily to include other research work. For example Mark Daniel's list of dialect words used in Jefferies' works. Whilst the use of a word-search on computer might have limited value, the electronic age has now made the task of adding information to the *Index* a relatively simple task.

*Richard Jefferies: An Index* by Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel (Petton Books, 2008), hard-back, 260 pages, £15 – available from the Society.



## **Edward Thomas World War I Battlefield Tour**

On a cold December afternoon, fourteen Society members visited the Richard Jefferies Museum to hear Margaret Evans add detail to her report of this memorial tour that was organised by the Edward Thomas Fellowship.

Margaret submitted an outline report of the event in the Society's Spring newsletter 2008 (pp35-37).

Along with the help of Ray, Margaret's husband, who had also taken part in the four day tour in November 2007, she identified the places and people mentioned in her previous article and showed a splendid selection of photographs and slides.

The tour lecture was a moving tribute to the thousands of young men who

lost their lives in a pointless war and who suffered in the awful conditions of the trenches. The scale of the losses was illustrated by the many memorials visited during the tour – these were all massive in their own right in order to bear the names of all the dead.



## COATE FARM AND MUSEUM REPORT

### **Possible loss of Coate Farm**

No more has been said about leasing the Museum and house to the Society but a meeting with senior officers and councillors in November revealed that Swindon Borough Council is now considering selling the old Jefferies farm on the commercial market. The Society would be offered first refusal to buy the property. A value of around £250,000 has been placed on it, but we estimate that a further £150,000 would need to be spent to restore the buildings. Should the Society attempt to take on such a long-term commitment? Could we raise the funds? Members are agreed that if the house is sold on the open market, we will lose the Museum forever. The Society's Executive Council is looking at all options and we are keen to hear your views about whether we should do everything possible to retain Coate Farm as a public facility. It is a daunting prospect for a literary society to contemplate but approaches to other bodies, including the National Trust, have not been productive so far. Please contact the Hon. Sec and make your views known.

### **New Acquisitions at the Museum**

In the Society's spring newsletter 2008, p.13, Jean Saunders reflected on whether "The Bailiff's Daughter of Islington" might have been Jefferies favourite ballad. This prompted a response from Valerie Haworth, a new Member, who reported that she knew the song well. Hughie Jones (from the Liverpool *Spinners*) still sings it as part of his repertoire. Valerie sent a cassette tape (entitled *Luv Stuff*) with Jones' rendition of the song and very catchy and lively it is too. The ballad can be heard at the Museum.

### **Donations**

Society Member, Robert Brown, of The Winchester Book Shop, donated two boxes of books by Jefferies and other nature writers to sell at the Museum. Brian Burrows and Eric Jones have continued to supply us with useful books for the Museum reference library. We are most grateful.

### **Attendance figures**

In 2008, the Museum attracted 758 visitors compared to 1150 visitors in 2007, 650 in 2006 and about 100 a year before that. 2007 was a somewhat exceptional year thanks to the running of projects supported by the lottery award. Our thanks go to all the Members who helped at the Museum and to new volunteers who have stepped forward – notably Keith Maxwell, Gill Bromhead and Margaret Hunt. We are still contemplating whether to open the

Museum every Sunday afternoon from May to September. If anyone is prepared to help on a regular monthly basis, please contact the Hon. Sec.

### **Vandalism**

Thankfully it was a vandal-free year at the Museum until 25 September. On this fateful day, Swindon Borough Council felled an ancient yew tree of major literary and spiritual importance in full knowledge that the Society was totally opposed to its destruction – the work was undertaken when no-one was around. The yew tree in question is pictured on the front cover of this newsletter.

In *Restless Human Hearts* (published 1875 and written when he was still living at Coate) Richard Jefferies wrote:

The great thrush – the missel-thrush – wildest and fiercest of all its class, untameable, unsociable, had built for twenty years every spring in the yew-tree just in front of the breakfast-parlour window. That tree was his inheritance. The thrush of that day had inherited it from his father, and he again from his grandfather – three generations. Very jealous the thrush was, too, of his domain; no other bird dared build in that tree, no other dared even perch upon the branches, if he, the lord and master, was there.

It was not just Society Members who were out-raged by the incident, the good people of Swindon were equally angry. The incident generated considerable negative publicity for the Borough Council, but no regret was expressed by them and we were unable to track down any of the wood.

The loss stimulated poetry readings too and recollections of special moments influenced by this particular tree. Wendy MacLeod-Gilford wrote this whilst looking out the parlour window on 25 July 2007:

Old Yew  
Glancing out of the window at the old yew tree  
Two woodpeckers creep up and up the trunk  
Looking for a tasty meal.  
Then frisky grey squirrels follow  
With the sun shining through their furry, frondy tails.

On a more positive note, a seedling spawned from the ancient yew was found under the old tree and was planted as a memorial to Richard Jefferies on the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jefferies birth on 6 November. A small stone cairn was built to mark the position of the ancient yew.

### **Swindon Library**

Swindon's new central library was opened last autumn. The library is well laid out although there are few desks without computers where you can just sit and read a book! The extensive Richard Jefferies' collection of works is now readily accessible on the second floor, but only for reference purposes.

Contrast this with the mobile library in Worcestershire that probably has the best selection of Jefferies' books anywhere in the country. Society Member Jon Halsall is the driver and reports that the books do well. Jon said that countryside books "are like gold dust these days due to the almost vanished rural way of life of old, and due to the fact that there are hardly any written any more. A good way of promoting Jefferies would be to encourage donations of his books (new editions in good condition) to rural mobile libraries."

## SAVE COATE CAMPAIGN

By the time you read this, a local public inquiry will be underway at the Marriott Hotel, Pipers Way, Swindon. It starts on Tuesday 10 February and is likely to run until mid-March in order that a government planning inspector can listen to both sides of the argument (Swindon Borough Council is opposed to the planning application) and advise Hazel Blears, Secretary of State, whether Redrow Homes and Persimmon Homes should be granted planning permission to build 1800 houses and offices along with the provision of land for a university campus at Coate. The University of the West of England has expressed interest in developing a faculty at Coate, albeit that they are also in negotiations with Swindon Borough Council about a town centre site for a college. UWE is keeping its options open at this stage but we are trying to persuade their Deputy Vice-chancellor that Jefferies' Land is more valuable as an educational resource for students as it is now. The planning inquiry is open to the general public Tues-Thurs 10am-5pm and Fri 9.30am-2pm. If you are able to attend, do come along. John Price will be presenting evidence on behalf of the Society.

52,000 people have now signed the Save Coate petition. George Miller has submitted an impressive list of supporters from the arts/literature world whilst Kaye Lacey gathered more names recently at a literary event:

### Statement

Richard Jefferies (1848-1887) was a singularly gifted writer who left a body of work of enduring interest. He has been a source of inspiration and awakening to many since his time, including major writers, artists and musicians, and is at the heart of the English tradition. He is still widely regarded as among the foremost, if not the finest, writer to have celebrated the English countryside in prose: in particular he described in minute and vivid detail the scenery, wildlife and human life of the farm at Coate and its surroundings where he was born and brought up. Now a much loved Country Park for the people of Swindon, Coate is under threat of major development which would completely destroy its rural character and erase from the landscape a cultural site of national importance. We the undersigned oppose this proposal.

### Signed by the following. Comments by asterisked names below

- \* Andrew Motion – poet laureate
- Tom Stacey – writer, traveller and journalist
- Anne Sebba – biographer and journalist
- Victoria Glendinning – biographer
- Will Self – writer, satirist
- Peter Blake – artist
- Professor Frances Spalding – art historian
- Catherine Shaw – literary agent
- Ronald Blythe – author
- \* Richard Mabey – writer, broadcaster
- \* Simon Barnes – *Times* nature columnist
- \* Martin Bell – foreign correspondent, former independent MP
- Peter Upton – artist and author
- Roger Upton – author and falconer
- Gerald Northrop Moore – musicologist

Glyn Hughes – poet and novelist  
 Professor Kelsey Thornton – academic  
 Nicholas Parry – artist and publisher  
 Lionel Kelly – academic  
 Mavis Nicholson – broadcaster and author  
 \* Lindsay Clarke – novelist  
 Ray Ward – artist  
 Phillip Drew – Professor Emeritus (Glasgow University)  
 Roger Deakin – writer, conservationist, film-maker  
 Graham Arnold – artist  
 \*Graham Ovenden – artist  
 Robert Gillmor – artist, illustrator  
 \* Adam Thorpe – poet and novelist  
 Jeremy Hooker – poet  
 Professor W J Keith – Toronto University  
 Amanda Hopkinson – head of Centre for Literary Translation UEA  
 Sarah Bierley – conservationist  
 Stephen Bierley – sports journalist, nature columnist  
 \* Lady Treitel – Jefferies scholar, conservationist  
 \* Adam Daly – author of *The Outcast's Burden* and other visions of the apocalypse  
 Joanne Harris – writer, author of *Chocolat* .  
 \*Kim Taplin – poet and writer on rural themes in literature  
 \*Julian Pettifer – naturalist, broadcaster and author  
 Raficq Abdulla – writer and broadcaster  
 Lisa Appignanesi – president of PEN  
 Simor Burt – former president of PEN  
 Jonathan Heawood – Director of PEN

### **Comments**

#### Glyn Hughes

Richard Jefferies' writings are among our most important classics. He is unique in his range. On the one hand his mystical sense of nature has stimulated a great many minds. On the other hand, his minute scrutiny of the countryside around him has given us a better observed and more sympathetic account of country life, its inhabitants and its creatures, than that of any other author I can think of. He is “local” only in the sense that the particular is true of the whole ... what he is not, is “parochial”.

What happens in nature has been dismissed for many years as of minor importance. This is probably the cause of the disregard for this important shrine where Jefferies lived. In more recent years, we have come to realise that our relationship to the natural world is at the centre of our situation, our political situation, and its dilemmas. The writings of Richard Jefferies are more important than ever. What an irony it is that an educational institution could be at the heart of this vandalism!

#### Adam Thorpe

I am absolutely appalled at this development proposal in an area I've known since childhood. Richard Jefferies is England's greatest rural writer, and a profound inspiration to many people, not just writers like myself. This is short-term yobbishness which will condemn those responsible in the eyes of the future. I am willing to do all in my power to stall or stop this absurd plan.

#### Richard Mabey

The proposed development at Coate is grotesque in its scale and in its insensitivity to this green oasis. And the Inspector's abuse of the English language quite barbarous. I challenge him to justify his claim that this is a “sustainable” development. Sustainable by the human walkers and other species that will be displaced? Sustainable in terms of

the non-renewable resources used in the massive building works? A sustainable loss of irreplaceable green infrastructure, and of its contribution to climate regulation? Sustainable means “capable of being carried on indefinitely”. How many more developments like this do Swindon BC and its supporters think the planet can sustain?

Martin Bell

My father, the countryside writer Adrian Bell, was not only familiar with the work of Richard Jefferies, but I believe that he was also considerably influenced by it.

Simon Barnes

We take for granted the things we already have: it is only on seeing it for the first time that we would realise their true value. Jefferies writes not just for his time but for our own time: could this have been more amply demonstrated than by this witless piece of planning?

Andrew Motion

Richard Jefferies is a neglected but indispensable writer: a prose-poet of the English landscape and a pioneer environmentalist. His work forms a vital part of our heritage, and of our thinking about the present and future of the countryside.

Graham Ovenden

Jefferies is a seminal figure in the great English pastoral tradition. His work is indivisible from the poetry of Clare and Hopkins, the music of Elgar, and the paintings and etchings of Samuel Palmer. It would be criminal to destroy the countryside which inspired so much of his finest work.

Lindsay Clarke

Richard Jefferies is one of this country's finest and most scrupulous writers about the beauty of the English landscape, and I am strongly opposed to the current proposals for the violation of the Coate landscape that he so carefully observed and so deeply loved.

Lady Treitel

It is saddening to see Swindon Borough Council parting with its few remaining green fields to developers – for profit. Worse still when those fields border a public park of great beauty and with intimate Jefferies connections. It's worrying too. Watch our Avebury! Only six miles away.

Adam Daly

*After London* made a particular impression on me, especially the highly detailed and evocative descriptions of a ravaged landscape, with the central image of the vast primordial lake covering much of south west England. Also the apocalyptic dimension was of great interest, anticipating the work of such diverse writers as H G Wells and H P Lovecraft.

Kim Taplin

Richard Jefferies is important to me as a touchstone of authenticity. His celebration of the natural world reminds me of what is real. When people speak of living “in the real world” they usually mean the world of human chicanery and greed. Jefferies wrote mainly about the given world of the earth and the plant and animal kingdoms. His language is simple and alive. His writing invites us to observe nature, to refresh ourselves in its presence. It nourishes the spirit, in a way that vague and pretentious homilies cannot do, with the beauties of the real. Good nature writing, like good writing of any kind, has to be very specific. Coate and its area were his primary locality and should be cherished as much as Grasmere as the home of a great writer.

Julian Pettifer

I grew up in Wiltshire, not far from Coate, and as a child was deeply influenced by *Bevis*. Little enough of Coate remains that Jefferies would recognise and every effort must be made to save something of the heritage landscape.

# STUDY DAY: ILLUSTRATORS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES' WORKS

SATURDAY 25 JULY 2009

RICHARD JEFFERIES MUSEUM, COATE

## PROGRAMME

- 10.30 Doors open and refreshments.
- 11.00 **Speaker:** An illustrated talk by John Price on “Illustrators of Richard Jefferies’ Works”.
- 12.30-2.00 Lunch break. Time to look around the Museum or Coate Water. Meals available at the Sun Inn or bring a packed lunch.
- 2.00 Individual contributions by Members (5 minutes each). \*
- 3.45 Tea
- 4.30 Depart

\* Guidance: Many artists have chosen to, or been asked to, illustrate the works of Richard Jefferies. From J W North's illustrations in *The English Illustrated Magazine* to much more recent artists such as Graham Arnold, dozens of Illustrators have chosen their own ways of illuminating the texts.

In the morning presentation, an attempt will be made to survey the whole field – albeit superficially, and in the afternoon, we invite members to bring their own favourite examples, and summarise briefly why they have made their particular choice.

Facilities should be available on the day for both transparency projection and Powerpoint projection.

There is free parking available at Coate Water Country Park and limited parking at the Museum and along Day House Lane. Parking is also allowed at the Sun Inn, particularly so if taking luncheon there. Directions to the Museum are given on the back page.

## E. M. FORSTER AND RICHARD JEFFERIES

W J Keith

Many readers of Jefferies will be aware of E. M. Forster's passing references to him in Chapter XIV of his novel *Howards End* (1910). They occur, however, in a passage that seems superior and even condescending. Leonard Bast, a lower-class Londoner, is described as "the third generation, grandson to the shepherd or ploughboy whom civilization had sucked into the town ... one of the thousands who had lost the life of the body and failed to reach the life of the spirit." He has been telling the more affluent Margaret and Helen Schlegel of his impulsive all-night walk in rural Surrey, and then remarks: "Curious it should all come about from reading something of Richard Jefferies." But the Forsterian narrator goes on to comment: "Within his cramped little mind dwelt something that was greater than Jefferies' books – the spirit that led Jefferies to write them." The remark is, as one might expect, astute – yet oddly grudging. Forster belonged to the highly sophisticated, socially elevated "Bloomsbury Group" (Virginia Woolf, Lytton Strachey, Roger Fry, etc.) – and it shows.

However, a thick volume of Forster's hitherto-unpublished non-fiction writings has recently appeared under the title *The Creator as Critic*, edited by Jeffrey M. Heath (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2008), and it contains another passage about Jefferies that is at once longer and decidedly more positive in tone. This occurs in an essay-cum-memoir entitled "Swimming in the Sea." Forster is writing about Algernon Charles Swinburne's enthusiasm for swimming, but observes that the poet was never able to convey the fullness of his experience in his writing, with the result that "its images never stick in one's memory." Then he goes on:

Richard Jefferies is one of the few writers whose images ... recall facts and therefore keep their shapes when the book is closed. In the opening chapters of *Bevis* there is an account of learning to swim which is most accurate and most beautiful ... And in *Bevis*, all through the technical directions one hears the water speaking and saying to the little boys "I am all right, I do the swimming almost. Leave all you can to me." (199)

The passage continues for a few sentences, but I have reproduced Forster's gist. He goes on to contrast "swimming in the sea" with *Bevis* and Mark's "regrettable" confinement to fresh water. However, he ends the paragraph by saying that "Jefferies swam like himself –... he knew the same little things, felt the lightness that suddenly leaps into the body when the head sinks."

It is unfortunate that this insight never appeared in Forster's lifetime, and that its belated appearance is in an enormous and decidedly specialist volume (over 800 pages and priced at £45). But it is now accessible at last, a development that all Jefferies admirers should welcome.

### DISCOVERIES III: PORTRAITS OF AN AUTHOR

*George Miller*

Virtually all portraits of Jefferies derive from one image, a studio photograph by the London Stereoscopic Company (see photograph on page 19). According to Cyril Wright this was taken on June 16 1879, though the Notebooks suggest Jefferies was at home that day. Looker dates it 1881 and another writer, Bryn Purdy, 1882. It would appear to show an older man than the previously unpublished photograph by Elliott and Fry reproduced in *Richard Jefferies: a Bibliographical Study* (1993). In this the features are more delicate and sensitive, more open and unresolved; and the hairline is lower, the beard less full. But this came from an album of authors published by Richard Bentley and Son, who didn't sign Jefferies up until June 1884. Another unpublished photograph in a private collection I have seen shows the same dreamy, unfocussed look as the Elliott and Fry portrait.

The most prolific image derived from the LSC portrait is the etching by William Strang, first published in the large paper edition of *Field and Hedgerow* in 1889 and reused in Longman editions of Jefferies through to 1936. This is a very fine and accurate reproduction, but compared with the original the face is more lived in, the expression more mature and self assured.

The next portrait based on the LSC photograph was the memorial bust by Margaret Thomas unveiled in Salisbury Cathedral in 1892. Photographs of this and another version of it in the National Portrait Gallery have again been frequently used in Jefferies publications. The Thomas portrait takes the tendencies apparent in the Strang image to an extreme. The mouth and eyebrows droop, the bridge of the nose is more prominent, the brow is lofty, the beard baroque: a countenance heavy with the weight of experience, and thought, and suffering. As Kedrun Laurie explains in a closely researched article this transformation owed much to the influence of Besant and Jefferies' widow in their desire to ennoble Jefferies as a sage, a profound questioner who yet returned in the end to the Christian fold.

The bust, with its sanctified location and God invoking inscription, has not always found favour with Jefferies' admirers. W H Hudson strongly disliked it, but forgives the artist on the grounds that she only had a photograph to work from. In fact Thomas had produced a much more truthful image from the same photograph at an earlier date. This was to illustrate an article by Arthur Kinglake in the magazine *Illustrations*, edited by Francis George Heath (see illustration on the next page). The article, in the December 1888 issue, begins:

A photograph is a marvellous aid in retaining for living and loving ones the features of those who have gone. A friend of the late Richard Jefferies, not unmindful of some very slight attention shown by me to the family of this lamented author, sent me a photograph of him, from which Miss Margaret Thomas has made an excellent drawing...



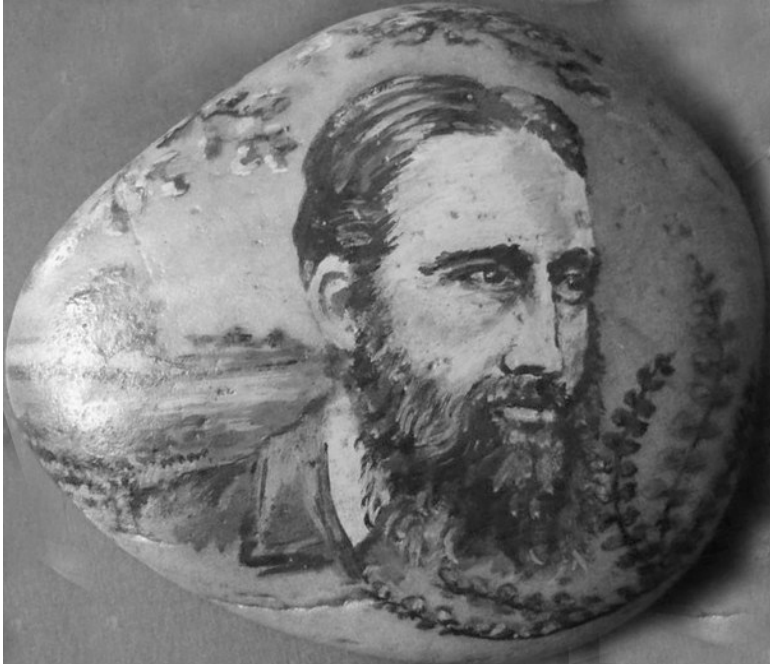
Drawing of Richard Jefferies by Margaret Thomas, 1888.

Kinglake (brother of *Eothen* author A W Kinglake) in fact launched an appeal for Jefferies' family in the *Morning Post* and was later instrumental in commissioning the bust. He was a close friend and patron of the sculptor. The friend of Jefferies' he refers to was the artist J W North who worked tirelessly for the family and in support of the bust project. Heath, the editor, was another member of the memorial committee, and contributed a separate article in praise of Jefferies in an earlier issue of *Illustrations*.

It is clear from Kinglake's introduction that Margaret Thomas's brief on this occasion was to produce a likeness, not an interpretation or soul portrait. The result, in the youthful freshness of complexion, the even composure of the lips and the still, reflective rather than brooding, expression of the eyes, is very different from the bust, and in my view more genuine.

Two other notable portraits from the LSC photograph are those produced for the centenaries of Jefferies' birth and death. I have seen the one by Stephen Makepeace Wiens, unveiled November 6 1948, only in a monochrome reproduction. It is recognisably Jefferies but like the bust a heavier man, both in weight and attitude, with something guarded or truculent about the expression. Peter Nutt's painting of 1987 though correct in detail fails for me

to capture anything of the spirit of the original. One that does do it for me is a painting on a pebble by Jane McCuska, c. 1985. It was given me by Professor Peter Drew of Glasgow University who required his 19<sup>th</sup> century history students to read and comment on Jefferies. Miss McCuska produced the portrait in lieu of an essay and if it didn't help towards her degree it was certainly a work of more lasting interest.



### References

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- Laurie, Kedrun. *Margaret Thomas, Sculptor of the Bust of Richard Jefferies in Salisbury Cathedral*. RJS Journal, 13, 2004.
- “John William North and Richard Jefferies”, an article based on a talk given to RJS, by S P Milton, December 2003.

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### ***World's End***

*World's End* has now been published in paperback by the Richard Jefferies Society and is available for £10 (including postage) from Norma Goodwin (use pull-out sheet for orders on pp 19-22).

Last and best of the three novels Richard Jefferies published under the Tinsley Brothers imprint, *World's End* opens with a compelling foundation-myth of the manufacturing city of Stirringham, whose phenomenal growth is ironically traced back to the activities of a water-rat.

The plot centres on the machinations surrounding the great Baskette claims case, based on a real-life event. From the sulphurous atmosphere of Stirringham the focus shifts to a lonely village on the Downs, where Aymer Malet, an impoverished artist in love with nature and *le beau idéal*, becomes engaged to Violet Waldron. The scenes of rural life are depicted with much charm and freshness but Stirringham's baleful influence impinges in the form of a particularly gruesome murder. The novel has considerable biographical interest in its portrait of the young artist hero. His struggles mirror those of the author, whose fascination with the paranormal is evinced in the eerie trysts of the lonely châtelaine Lady Lechester with a mysterious winged daimon.

*World's End* displays Jefferies' gift for limpid narrative at its best; throws out many original, suggestive and often astonishingly prescient ideas; and contains several passages of intense lyric beauty. This new edition of a novel never before reprinted carries an authoritative introduction by Andrew Rossabi.

## OBITUARIES

### **Roger Frith, Poet**

Roger Frith, an Honorary Life Member of the Society, died last year. He played an active part in promoting Jefferies' work. Roger delivered our "Birthday Lecture" in 1983 and 1998. We have tapes of the Scofield/Frith Jefferies collaborations that we listen to regularly. Some of his research work has been deposited at Reading University by his family. We are honoured that his good friend, Sir Arnold Wesker, wrote the following obituary. It was a complete surprise to learn that Roger also wrote poetry in addition to his other creative talents.

#### My love of names

In *World's End Valley*, dearly my true love says:

'Where are they now, who lived lovely at Tofts, and demounts;

Gay Bowers, and West Bowers; Old Bassetts, Cuckoo's Farm, and Great Graces?

I have tried many times to shape this obituary. The problem is that Roger Frith's life and work is unknown, unique, complex and most certainly unfashionable.

The Giberacks, Little and Great; Cotskitchen and Dancing Dicks;  
Cock Larks, and Sir Hughes; Farther-Howegreen under Kits Hill? –  
for never a Church made me sadder than Ulting Wick's.

The age is one of celebrity which Roger was not – he was eccentric. Worse – he was single-minded about his style of writing but he was distinctive. Read a new Frith poem and you could recognise the poet through his language, his rhythms, and the tone of his response to people and places, to life. But no one would publish him, his was not only an unfashionable voice it was an uncomfortable one. He had to search out patrons to pay over the years for his eight volumes to be printed. At Roger's request I wrote the introduction to the first volume 'The Serving Boy'. He requested me because, as he announced to everyone, I had 'discovered' him.

'Oh where!' – the wind in her hair – 'Where in the wind's wake,  
is he who kissed his love under Runsell Green, though no furze  
bloomed at Twitty Fee?'

I dry my true love's eyes, for their unknown, best-love sake.

I first met Roger in 1963. One day I received a card from a young man asking me to come and hear him read his poems for the first time to students attending a course at the British Drama League, which was across the road from our Centre 42 offices in Fitzroy Square. I attended but had to apologise for not being able to stay for the discussion. Roger began, and was so terrified that he foamed at the mouth with nerves. No actor becomes as terrified as this simply because he's confronting an audience for the first time. Roger was in this state because he knew he was handling private experience; he was exposing his life – and for the first time. The young students in attendance were as breathless and unbelieving; they, too, seemed aware they were in the presence of someone special.

'... And Ringers, and What Hobs – what hobs held what kettles there?  
Were they merrier by far than Rainbirds, Red Robbins, though each unaware?' –  
One sings less a cherry-nosed tenant, unaware now my dear.

Afterwards I sent him a telegram telling him 'you really are a poet!' A good and a bad thing to have done. Good because he deserved the encouragement; bad because poetry was not my world (perhaps my response was to the man and the drama of the atmosphere around him rather than to the quality of the poems delivered); and subsequently I could do little to help him. I tried to persuade editors to publish him, but failed. Not even the Arts Council, though recognising 'promise' (which, supposedly, they are given money to encourage), dared not back a poet so obviously not of his time. Nor could my reputation as a playwright, rather than a poet, have helped. Nevertheless, over the subsequent years Roger earned the right to call himself poet, playwright, and broadcaster.

'Oh we should be wed by the Reverent Gooday of Crackbone!  
Yet where is he, and our guests: Sarah Boreham of Wasses?  
John Cousin of Three Ashes?' –

Oh they too are gone my dear. They too are gone ...

Roger was born on 4 April 1936 in Wanstead, Essex, the only child of parents who had been professional singers. He was educated at Chelmsford Technical School. His father was particularly talented but had been driven to drink by

his horror of the First World War. From 1919 to 1935 – sixteen years – he had been a vicar-choral at St. Paul’s Cathedral but was sacked by Dean and Chapter for unreliability. At the outbreak of World War Two Roger was evacuated to Hallaton in Leicestershire where, he claimed, his love of nature began.

‘Long since Elizabeth’s Aylmer of Mowden Hall?  
Long Wood and Lost Wood; Blakes Wood and Dameses Lane?’ –  
Only doves set free from his hand, could a Queen’s tooth recall ...

In 1948 his parents went into service – his mother, Gladys, as cook, his father, Arthur, as butler. Arthur’s chronic drink problem resulted in constant shifts from mansion to mansion. Roger couldn’t bear watching his parents destroy each other, and fled into the Royal Navy where he stayed four years ending with a nervous breakdown. He was released on medical grounds and returned to live with his mother in the lodge (Crix Lodge) of the Mansion owned by the Strutts where she was cook. Elaine Strutt took Roger under her wing contributing to the early volumes of poems he privately published, and my wife, Dusty, catered for three of his launch parties. After the breakdown, and while living with his mother at Crix Lodge he worked as a fruit farm labourer and an auxiliary postman before winning a scholarship to the Central School of Speech and Drama. He was good enough to play for two seasons with the Old Vic company followed by roles in ‘Maggie May’ and ‘Man of Magic’ in the West End. I cast him as an understudy for the part of Roland in my play ‘The Friends’ at the Roundhouse in 1970, a role which he had to take on from the first night. The actor originally cast went berserk!

‘And Golden Fairhead of Leys Hall?  
William Fairhead of Porridge-Pot Hall? And Benjamin Snow of Scarletts?’ –  
Each wrapped in his pall my dear. His pall ...

His volumes though privately printed were nevertheless sent around; the Critical Quarterly wrote: ‘*He works in the tradition of John Clare, Richard Jefferies and Edward Thomas and attains the singing note of a more feet-on-the-ground Dylan Thomas.*’ Laurie Lee described him as ‘*the real thing and a rare original*’.

But Oh! An old ring was found in Toppingho Hall Wood  
And it shines! Oh it shines to this day! –  
‘But I would wed thee with these names that we love’, says my love –  
‘forever and for good!’

His broadcasting career began in 1971 and included a Richard Jefferies trilogy with Paul Scofield; an adaptation of Edward Thomas’s war diary ‘When All Roads Led To France’; two features on John Clare, one performed by the actor, Freddie Jones, ‘A Song In The Night’, and the other delivered by Edward Woodward ‘Escape To Eden’. He adapted Goethe’s ‘Elective Affinities’, and wrote a radio play ‘Adlestrop’ starring Dame Judy Dench.

His first film ‘The Man On The Hill’, a portrait of Richard Jefferies, was shown on Channel 4 at Christmas 1987, again with Scofield playing Jefferies. His first stage play ‘A Song In The Night’ based on the last twenty-three years

of John Clare's tortured life toured the UK with Freddie Jones as Clare and Patrick Garland directing. To mark Clare's bi-centenary it was performed in 1993 in Westminster Abbey. BBC Radio 4 broadcast the play 'The Snuff Addict', which he wrote celebrating his mother and which was chosen by Beryl Bainbridge for Pick of the Week; she described it as '*brilliant and touching*'. He wrote a programme celebrating the composer Peter Warlock's centenary; and again for Radio 4 in 1995 broadcast a short story 'The Greengage Tree'.

Two new one man shows were premiered in 1994 and 1995 respectively: 'The Incomparable Max' based on the life of Max Beerbohm performed at the Cheltenham Literary Festival by Jonathan Cecil whilst Roger himself performed his portrait of the composer, Ivor Gurney 'Forget Me Quite' at the Hay-on-Wye Literary Festival. Those names: Jefferies, Clare, Warlock, Beerbohm, Gurney, all indicate Frith's non mainstream loves. I share, albeit unreasonably, other people's mistrust of privately published work. Though it might mean that the work was too bad to command a reputable publisher, it could on the other hand simply mean that the work was so special and out of step with current climates that no publisher was able to see beyond his contemporary eyes. It was true, Roger's work did not sound like his times. It was difficult for a publisher to identify its qualities.

In World's End's Valley, I wed my love today; and though we have no place to stay,  
She gave me her dower of Sweetdrops and Snorehams, Mollets and Nipsels,  
Flambands and Bilchbunters, ere we kissed, and walked away.

Hugh Parry is a freelance, though mostly retired, lecturer in English and classical literature, and far more knowledgeable about poetry than me. He has a great enthusiasm for Roger's work, and in an excellent essay about the poet describes him as:

'...singularly beautiful with feminine outlines half concealed by a powerful frame. He seems inseparable in my imagination from a wide-brimmed natty if battered felt hat, which I took to be an essential adjunct for a serious poet. He had a rich but light baritone, with a touch of huskiness and a melancholy, even plangent, tinge that never disappeared even when he was animated and amused.'

Parry's other observations, about Roger's poetry, are worth recording.

In technique, Roger was a dinosaur, but not a blinkered one. You can hear Hardy, whom he didn't acknowledge, Housman and Edward Thomas, whom he did. He used rhyme; he wrote simple quatrains; he constructed lyric stanzas of some complexity. He also, however, produced many poems, narratives especially, which are composed of long prosaic paragraphs made musical only by the surge of his desire to heave the experience out of his memory on to the page...When there is a fin-de-siecle prettiness in the format, he often muddies the crystalline flow with assonance, false stress and jolting cross-rhythms. He inherited musical genes, and I see this habit, not as carelessness, but as the poetic equivalent of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century music he loved – Delius, Quilter (who was one of his Godfathers), and Vaughan Williams – in which the pastoral idyll or melancholic rapture is just tweaked from time to time by dissonance. His diction was idiosyncratic, too. He loved words for their own sake, collecting a jackdaw treasury of oddities – 'excecated', 'illapsed', 'allodial', 'parvanimity', 'circumfusions'.

Roger became a close friend of our family. He loved my three children who, in turn, adored him. He was tall, good looking, gentle, and a story teller. He also knew a lot about nature – flowers, birds and growing things, and he conveyed to them a sense of wonder about life. When he entered through our front door the child nearest would send up the cry: *Roger is here! Roger is here!* And the next one above stairs – it could be an adult – would pick up the cry: *Roger is here! Roger is here!*

Just as important (in the life of my eldest, Lindsay Joe, especially) was that another Godfather was Reg Pratt, the chairman of West Ham Football Club, and so Lindsay, a West Ham supporter, occasionally got to sit in the chairman's box to watch a match!

I have many images of Roger: offering me, from his little tin box, a pinch of snuff which I always took, sneezed over and enjoyed though I never quite knew why; watching him glide into a group of my friends or relatives and immediately become part of them with his sympathetic questions and kindly attentions; he enjoyed my cousins and aunts though my Jewish mother couldn't quite piece him together, as though he was too good to be true.

But my most vivid memory is of his humour and gaiety. We own a cottage in the Black Mountains snugly set between a valley in front and a hill to the rear. Roger was expected one holiday time, we weren't sure exactly what time of day, but we heard his approach. He was coming down the back way – from the mountain road, over a gate and down to the back of the house – singing in his baritone voice, strong, full of fun and joy filling the landscape as though it was his audience, and our hill his amphitheatre.

*'The hills are alive,' he sang,  
'With the sound of music ...'*

And up went the children's voices:

*'Roger is here! Roger is here!'*

© Arnold Wesker  
16 October 2008

### **Wendy MacLeod-Gilford**

My dear friend Wendy (pictured right last February by Mick, her husband) decided that she could see no end to her mental and physical anguish and threw herself into the River Thames on 14 November at a favourite spiritual beauty spot – near Days Lock, Wittenham.

I know that she could not bear to cause her husband any more worry.

I have known Wendy for about 20 years as a result of our common passion for nature and as an environmental campaigner. She was born on 31 October 1939. Her father, Cecil MacLeod-Iles, was one of the founder Members of the Richard Jefferies Society – the family lived in Pinehurst, Swindon in the 1950s. Wendy went to Swindon college and later worked at the Harwell atomic energy research establishment in Oxfordshire. After over 20 years of working there, she was so horrified by what she saw that she vowed to get the place closed down and cleaned up. Wendy kept up membership to the Society when her father died and was instrumental in getting me to join. She was always ready to help at the Museum or at Society gatherings and could always be relied upon to get on with whatever job that needed doing. She provided

various items and exhibits for the Museum. She was the final proof-reader for our edition of *World's End* before it went to the printers. Wendy was constantly distressed at Swindon council's attitude to the Museum and an entry in her diary written when she was only 14 years old shows that nothing has changed. She wrote on 6 July 1955 that she had seen Richard Jefferies' home: "Lovely house, gone to waste", she noted. Wendy was a founder member of the Footsteps writers group that meet at the Museum and she was inspired to write poetry again. The loss of the yew tree in the back garden affected her badly and she sent me a brief poem that she had previously written about it (see page 13).

It was some time before Wendy's body was found and quite some distance from Days Lock. At her wishes, she was buried at a green burial ground at Watchfield, Oxfordshire, opposite the wind turbines, on January 2nd. Her husband read out Jefferies quote about eternity – it was her father's favourite as well as hers. The sun came out for a brief period especially for her while long-tailed tits and gold-crests flitted by. I hope to plant a Jefferies' yew tree seedling on her burial mound.

I understand Wendy's sound reasoning for wanting to die – she chose a perfect spot to end her days in search of her own eternity and to bring the peace she so longed for – but we will miss her.

Jean Saunders  
2 January 2009

### **CITINGS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES**

Brian Burrows found a reference to Richard Jefferies in the September issue of *Bird Watching*. On page 66, a walk around Coate Water is described by Graham Uney, a writer, photographer and walking and wild-life holiday guide for Wilderness Scotland. He wrote:

A terrific range of habitat types brings an array of birds to this site, including common wildfowl species, garden and woodland birds, grasslands specialists, and even the odd rarity, giving the opportunity for a great day out. September is a good time to visit, primarily for the chance of turning up something exciting passing through on migration. This (September) is the prime time for passage terns, including Common, Arctic and regular Black Terns, too.

This is a good time for Little Gull on passage, while waders such as Common Sandpipers, Green Sandpipers, and occasional Greenshank put in an appearance in September. There are also regular movements of Yellow Wagtails recorded here at this time of year.

The site is managed as a Country park by the Swindon Borough Council Ranger Team, and there is a useful visitor centre on site. Coate Water was made famous as a great birding site by the writings of local naturalist Richard Jefferies (1848-1887).

Margaret Bathe spotted a review of Andrew Motion's *Ways of Life: On Places, Painters and Poets*, in the *Daily Telegraph*, 20 September 2008. Philip Hensher "finds the Poet Laureate's observant prose in harmony with the virtues of his poetry." Mr Hensher writes: "There are many writers I would like to read him on, but perhaps the most urgent is the exact and rapturous 19th-century country writer Richard Jeffries [sic], the author of *Bevis*." The article doesn't make clear whether Andrew Motion mentions Jefferies in his

latest book. (We now know that he doesn't mention Jefferies.)

Prof Roger Ebbatson came across a very interesting journal article on the figure of "Hodge", which makes extensive use of Jefferies' writings on the topic, and is well worth reading. The reference is Mark Freeman, "The agricultural labourer and the Hodge stereotype, 1850-1914", *Agricultural History Review* 49 (2001), pp. 172-86.

**The Argus**, 3 November 2008, reported progress on the restoration work undertaken at Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing. The article reports that a new Friends of Broadwater and Worthing Cemetery Group has set up and the next move is to apply for various grants so the cemetery, off South Farm Road, can be saved for future generations. Proposed works include recording details on every surviving memorial, installing notice-boards, restoring vandalised graves, repairing Tarmac paths, publishing an historical booklet, and possibly establishing an education centre in part of the chapel. The graves "included world famous naturalists Richard Jefferies and William Hudson, said by some to be founders of the Green movement...The Richard Jefferies Society had donated £500 to re-letter his damaged memorial, while the RSPB had offered cash for restoration work on Hudson's plot."

The **Western Daily Press** (5 November), **Daily Telegraph** (6 November), and **Swindon Advertiser** (7 November) all ran features announcing the support of the Save Coate campaign by over 30 individuals drawn from the arts and literature world that included Andrew Motion, Joanne Harris, Peter Blake, Julian Pettifer, Glyn Hughes, Victoria Glendenning, Will Self and Adam Thorpe (see pages 14-16).

Nancie Cator supplied a copy of an article that appeared in the November issue of **BBC History Magazine**. The title of the article is "Britain's Green Pioneers", in which Richard Jefferies features, together with William Morris, Ruskin, Carpenter and Jeager. The article is by Clare Griffiths and the first paragraph is given to Jefferies' views, as expressed through his novel *After London*. A portrait of Jefferies is also included. It is worth reproducing the introduction:

IMAGINE A FUTURE in which urban Britain is reclaimed by nature: forests have grown up obliterating former towns and land once tamed for cultivation. This is not a 21<sup>st</sup>-century vision, but a story created in 1885 by the ruralist writer Richard Jefferies.

Jefferies' novel *After London* offers a fantasy of how wilderness could triumph over civilisation, yet, even in this imaginary country, the traces of man's impact on the environment could not be entirely swept away. In the depths of Jefferies' 'wild England' lurks the noxious swamp once known as London, so polluted that nothing can live there, and too dangerous even to visit: "Upon the surface of the water there was a greenish-yellow oil, to touch which was death to any creature".

*After London* is a reminder that anxieties about man-made threats to the environment significantly predate more recent concerns about radioactive contamination and global warming. In the 19th century, notions of economic progress tended to be measured by the increased speed of communications, volumes of production and the greater availability of consumer goods. But there were many good reasons for being sceptical about the resulting character of modern life. Urban development, the proliferation of factories and the demand for fuel left much of the population exposed to adulterated food, contaminated water supplies and smoke-filled air which darkened the skies and contributed to respiratory problems. In the 1880s, at the time that Jefferies was writing, groups were campaigning to improve air quality, as London smogs claimed

the lives of hundreds of people. Descriptions of chemical residues and poisonous fumes were far from simply a novelist's fantasy.

George Miller noted that ***Gone Fishing: Anthology of Fishing Stories*** (Macmillan, 1995) edited by the actor Michael Hordern contains an essay of Jefferies' – probably 'A London Trout', which was also a great favourite of his late friend the writer and critic (and fisherman) Christopher Wordsworth. While George remarked that he hadn't systematically collected anthologies, he believes there are a dozen or more major fishing anthologies that include this piece, and that a large section of the public knows Jefferies by this alone.

George Miller noted the following, probably from the dust jacket, about Susan Hill's ***The Magic Apple Tree***: "Painting the village year in glowing colours and loving detail Susan Hill provides us with a country book to learn from and enjoy alongside those of Richard Jefferies, Francis Kilvert and Flora Thompson." Review quotes include Ronald Blythe: "I like best her descriptions of woods, fields, ditches, weather, plants and creatures." Jefferies is and, I believe, will remain a yardstick against which any book about rural England will be measured.

Michael Taylor was interested to find Jefferies mentioned in ***Building Jerusalem - A Portrait of My Father*** (Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 2000) by the historian Sir Alan Bullock. On pages 7/8 he writes of Frank Bullock, who was born near Bath in 1887, the year of Richard Jefferies' death: "He came across the book, *The Story of My Heart*, first published in 1883, which seemed in almost uncanny fashion to put his feelings about nature into words." Sir Alan further notes that "The inner experience with which Jefferies began his story, at the age of eighteen, was set on the top of a Wiltshire hill" commenting that Frank himself had written: "There was a hill called Brown's folly and this I climbed many times alone, and once after dark to the great danger of neck and limb. As I grew older and more independent, I escaped from morning chapel services and wandered out into the country to seek some self-awareness and new relationship with the mysteries of religion and life – much to the bewilderment and anxious concern of my relatives. These long walks and communings had a deep effect upon my inner life." The affinity with Richard Jefferies is plain to see.

Barry Didcock in a review of a BBC TV programme, "Survival Instincts", in ***The Sunday Herald***, 23 November said:

In 1885 the nature writer Richard Jefferies published *After London*, set in a city devastated by an unspecified catastrophe. The survivors are essentially knocked back into mediaeval times, nature quickly gains the upper hand and – the important bit as far as Jefferies was concerned – the capital becomes a poisonous marshland. London, city of vice, is wiped away.

John Kennett, Society Member and mainstay of the Eltham Society, wrote a splendid article for the December edition of an Eltham magazine entitled ***SEnine***. John regularly writes the history articles for *SEnine* and was keen to highlight the 160<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jefferies' birth and his Eltham associations in this edition. Thank you, John.

Duncan Pepper recently finished reading ***Kenneth Grahame - A Biography***

by Peter Green (1959). The author makes several comments on how Jefferies' work (*Bevis* and *Wood Magic*) influenced Grahame's books such as *Dream Days*, *A Golden Age* and especially *The Wind in the Willows*. *The Story of My Heart* may well have been influential in the late 19th Century rise of neo-paganism including Grahame's *Pagan Papers*.

Dan Walwin, a visitor to the Coate Museum, e-mailed to say that Jefferies is mentioned in Roger Deakin's posthumously published diary records **Notes from Walnut Tree Farm**. On page 14, Deakin complains that he cannot find Jefferies' books in print anywhere.

Martin Haggerty came across an appreciation of Jefferies in Sheila Rowbotham's new 2008 biography of **Edward Carpenter: A Life of Liberty and Love** that Martin was about to review for *The Journal of William Morris Studies*. On page 20 Ms Rowbotham reflects on Carpenter's alienation from his family in early adolescence and sought to escape from home. "His other refuge was the Downs where he would walk for hours, his mind free-floating, or, like the nature writer Richard Jefferies, whose work he later came to admire, he would lie in a hollow, brooding and watching the clouds go by."

Martin Haggerty also discovered an article by Jem Poster in the second issue (Spring 2008) of the literary-artistic journal **Archipelago**. In an essay, entitled "Ghosts", Jem Poster discusses at length Edward Thomas and Richard Jefferies in relationship to the evolution of mysticism and the notion of timelessness. The article is much inspired from reading Thomas's *Rose Acre Papers* (1907) and Jefferies' influence on Thomas's thoughts about "ghosts".

Jon Halsall recently discovered two charming books by W P Hodgkinson, illustrator and nature-lover. Published in the 1940s, **The Eloquent Silence**, has a chapter dedicated to "Richard Jefferies – and others". He writes: "Jefferies was a visionary whose utterances might seem to one person to be mere vapourings, to another a lifting of the veil." To Hodgkinson, *The Story of my Heart* was like his autobiography but inspired by his childhood growing up in the Severn Valley. We know nothing about Hodgkinson apart from his affinity to Jefferies. Does anyone have any information about him?

Norma Goodwin noticed that *After London* was selected in the **Guardian** supplement of 22 January 2009 as one of the "1000 Novels everyone must read". Listed in the category "Science fiction and Fantasy" it said:

This environmental fable is set in the vague distant future (our 'now?'). After a mysterious disaster ('the event'), society has relapsed into barbarism, and the countryside has reverted to idyllic wilderness. In the centre of England, a vast crystalline lake has formed. Felix Aquila sets out in a canoe on a voyage of discovery and finds London "utterly extinct", surviving only as a pestilential swamp. The novel continues with him moving west – "ever towards the sunset" and his idealised dream-love, Aurora Thyma. A strong candidate for the most beautiful of all Victorian novels.

Finally, it is a delight to announce that the **Swindon Advertiser** is now entering the fourth year of publishing an illustrated monthly page dedicated to Jefferies' Nature Notes. We are most grateful for the support of the newspaper

that also advertises our meetings and Museum open days. Continued thanks go to John Webb for supplying the newspaper with a ready-made, informative and attractive feature.

### **NEW BOOKS BY MEMBERS**

***Roof Whirl Away*** by Tom Saunders. This is Tom's second collection of short stories. It follows on from his well-received 2004 debut *Brother, What Strange Place is This?* The stories are both varied and stylish, with a whole range of vivid characters caught in moments of reverie, indecision and drama. The transformative power of art is examined in "Bonny Craiggallan". Shame and the political process come together in "The Great House of Easement". A 19<sup>th</sup> century naturalist's final journey, inspired by Richard Jefferies, becomes the basis for the poignant "Lasting". Contact Jean Saunders for a copy, priced £6.99 including postage.

***The West Country: a Cultural History*** by John Payne, Signal Books, to be published soon. The research for the book will form the basis of a talk to the Society in December about how Richard Jefferies "fits" into this broader view of West Country matters. More information in the next newsletter.

### **HOW DID YOU FIRST DISCOVER RICHARD JEFFERIES AND THE SOCIETY?**

**Valerie Haworth** of Cheshire bought *Jefferies' England* and *Jefferies' Countryside* from a beneficiary whilst working at a solicitor's office in 1980. The books were left in a small unwanted pile after the disposal of her client's assets. Whilst acting on behalf of the Executor she was well aware that a trustee must not benefit from his/her trust and forced money on the beneficiary who wanted her to take the books. Shortly after, Valerie spotted and bought *The Gamekeeper at Home* with the Whympers illustrations and her interest grew. Ms Haworth, a member of the Edward Thomas Fellowship, joined the Society as a result of an appeal for a copy of the Edward Thomas biography of Richard Jefferies made in the Fellowship's newsletter. Jean Saunders got in touch to help out and also supplied Valerie's wish-list of other Jefferies' books. Whilst Valerie was well aware that the Society existed, she decided that now was the time to join!

**Max Tonson-Ward**, a Chelsea Pensioner, was delighted to discover the Society last September. He wrote: "The little flame that was my long-lasting interest in Jefferies was blown out by troubles during my final years in the opera house. You have re-lit it for me; and now it burns as brightly as in 1932, when a perceiving aunt in England sent to me in Vancouver *Bevis*. Long, long ago! I was 12 then: I am 90 now. In 1938, as soon as I got settled into my music scholarship in London, I used my new found freedom to visit Coate. I took photos with my cheap camera and pasted the little pictures into the fly-leaves of *Bevis*, where I still look at them."

**P M Watson**, a long-term Member, found something in common with Dorothy Cornforth (Autumn newsletter, 2008 p 6). "I also discovered Richard Jefferies

through reading Henry Williamson's early works. It was in my sixth form days in 1935. I joined the Society in 1962 after a mention of it in the *Guardian*. I received a very welcoming letter from the Chairman Mrs Frances Gay whom I met at Henry Williamson's lecture. I enjoyed a drink and an interesting conversation with Henry Williamson for whose work I had a high regard. The first books of Richard Jefferies I read were *The Open Air* and *The Story of my Heart*. Being very impressed with the latter book I carried a copy with my gear while serving in submarines during the war! I now have a collection of over 50 books by or about Jefferies which I treasure."

## **NEWS FROM OTHER SOCIETIES**

### **Alliance of Literary Societies**

The ALS annual gathering this year will be in Dublin from 12-14 June. The AGM will be held on 13th, and will be accompanied by speakers on Dublin's literary heritage. On the previous evening, to accommodate delegates who may wish to arrive on the Friday, there will be an informal dinner. Saturday afternoon will include a walking tour of James Joyce's Dublin, followed by a formal dinner. On Sunday morning there will also be optional activities based on Dublin's literary heritage. The event is timed to coincide with the Dublin Writers Festival and the Bloomsday Festival 2009. The base for the weekend will be the Best Western Academy Plaza, 10-14, Findlater Place, off Upper O'Connell Street, Dublin 1, telephone +353 1 878 0666 email: stay@academyplazahotel.ie. Please mention the Alliance when booking. The ALS has negotiated a room rate of 89€ single, 109€ double per night, room only. A full Irish breakfast is 12€. Contact Helen Newman should you require further information (see contact details on page 4).

### **Friends of the Ridgeway**

Phyllis Treitel reported that last year was the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Friends of the Ridgeway. Members of this Society may remember the name of Denis Grant King, who established the earlier campaigning group – The Ridgeway Conservation Conference – to which this Society was also affiliated. To celebrate the anniversary, a handsome issue of the Journal was published (in full colour); it included a quotation from Jefferies. It also celebrated the achievement of most of its aims.

If any member would like to join (£5 per year) and take part in its (mainly) outdoor events, please contact Phyllis Treitel (see page 4). Next ambition: The Great Stones Way.

### **Henry Williamson Society**

Journal No 44 of the Henry Williamson Society, of which this Society receives a copy, is full, as usual, of new Williamson material, and this time mentions Jefferies at least six times. One mention consists of a letter, dated 7 July 1937, to Constance Bennett to accompany a copy of Henry's Richard Jefferies Anthology. Ann Williamson, who has edited the HWS Journal for some years, is laying down her editorial pen. Her successor has not been named.

### **John Clare Society**

The John Clare Festival takes place in Helpston, near Peterborough, from 10

to 12 July 2009: talks, walks, entertainment. The newly restored John Clare Cottage should also be open to members. More detail in due course at [www.johnclare.org.uk](http://www.johnclare.org.uk).

### **Edward Thomas Fellowship**

The Fellowship is currently considering, at our invitation, a proposal to hold their 2010 Study Day at the Richard Jefferies Museum.

## **Where Will You Go When The Concrete Comes?**

*Stuart Butler*

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A canal-cut reservoir at Coate Water,  
A manuscript of field, sky and lake-land  
For Richard Jefferies and his muse,  
Wandering east from England's Chicago.  
Recreation for Railway families,  
Who couldn't afford the annual Trip,  
Just trying to forget the Great War  
And short-time working.  
It's where my mother dived deep into the waves  
Wind-whipped and keen before the polio scare,  
And where mum and dad courted before the War.  
It's where I paddled in the 1950's,  
Thrilled by miniature railway rides,  
Egg sandwiches and ice cream cornets,  
In long summer holiday equal measure,  
Until the smell of creosote and Woodbines  
Wafted through the wooden changing rooms,  
With the 11 Plus, The Beatles,  
And Don Rogers on a thousand transistor radios.  
It's where young men impressed their girl friends  
With a clean sweep of the oars from out the boathouse,  
Cries of joy echoing in the willowed, muddied banks,  
While the great crested grebe stared up to the Downs  
And the thatched cottages up in Hodson,  
"The Gamekeeper At Home", still.  
You can see all these memories reflected in the waters,  
You can see all of yours too,  
Take a walk and peer into the shifting surface,  
There they are just waiting to be netted,  
With the rod and line of recollection,  
But where will they all go when the concrete comes?

September 2008

## WEB-SITES

Please note that the Society now has a dedicated web site. You will find links to other relevant Internet sites including a forum that will be supervised by our new student representative, Rebecca Welshman. It will take some time to build up all the pages but we shall include articles and talks, newsletters, photographs, news-cuttings and quotes.

We are most grateful to Jo Dunningham, a web designer, who has set up the main web pages for us free of charge. She is a member of the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust and is pleased to help the Society in this way. If you do have access to the Internet, please make use of the facility and take part in discussions on the Forum.

There is also an electronic mailing group where Members can share up-to-date information. Send an e-mail to the Hon. Sec. if you would like to join.

Rebecca Welshman reports that Jefferies is going to be part of the University of Exeter's Centre for South West Writing. It is the Centre's aim to promote and protect the work of South West literary figures, including outreach work and links with the National Trust (including, for example, literary walking trails in the landscape). This means that people will be able to access information about Jefferies through the University English Departmental WebPages, and Jefferies will be seen alongside other major literary figures of the South West, such as Austen, Hughes and Plath, and the Dymock Poets - see: <http://centres.exeter.ac.uk/southwestwriting>

Rebecca's initial role will be to contribute an online forum page of information about Jefferies, emphasizing his links with the South West, and the work that she is pursuing about him. There will be link from there to the new Jefferies Society web pages and forum.

For more information contact:  
The Richard Jefferies Society  
Hon. Secretary  
Pear Tree Cottage, Longcot,  
Oxon SN7 7SS  
Tel. 01793 783040

Email: [info@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk](mailto:info@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk)

Website: [richardjefferiessociety.co.uk](http://richardjefferiessociety.co.uk)

## PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2009

- Saturday 7 March\* Joint meeting with the Friends of Alfred Williams. Select a short extract to read by or about Richard Jefferies or just come along and listen.
- Saturday 4 April\* “How did Richard Jefferies get about?” Talk by Phyllis Treitel.
- Saturday 9 May A visit to the grounds of the Burderop Estate and the garden of the Gamekeeper’s Cottage, Hodson. A chance to see the bluebells in flower in Hodson Woods and to lunch at the Calley Arms, Hodson. Meet at the Richard Jefferies Museum at 11am to arrange car-sharing for the event.
- Saturday 25 July Study Day: Illustrators of Richard Jefferies’ Works. (see page 17 for details).
- Saturday 7 November AGM and Birthday Lecture – Liddington Village Hall (further information in the next newsletter).
- Saturday 5 December\* “Richard Jefferies; footnote or central character in the West Country’s cultural history?” Talk by John Payne.

\*Meetings begin at 2.00pm in the Jefferies Museum. Doors open at 1.00pm.  
Meetings are open to the public and free to attend.

### Directions

The Jefferies Museum opens onto the Marlborough Road, Coate, Swindon, opposite the petrol station, next to the Sun Inn and on the corner of Day House Lane.

Parking is free at Coate Water, only 5 minutes walk away. Those with a disability can park at the Museum; space is limited but when the ground is firm the old cow-yard can be used and there is plenty of parking space. Parking is also available in Day House Lane and at the Sun Inn.

From Swindon town centre (Fleming Way), there are several bus services that stop next to Coate roundabout. These include: Monday to Saturday - daytime: Numbers 10, 12, 13, 14 and 21. Monday to Saturday - evenings: Numbers 12, 13 and 14.

### Notice for 2010

The Study Day in 2010 is likely to evolve into a weekend event in Sussex visiting Richard Jefferies’ grave at Broadwater Cemetery, his final home at Goring and Pevensey Castle.