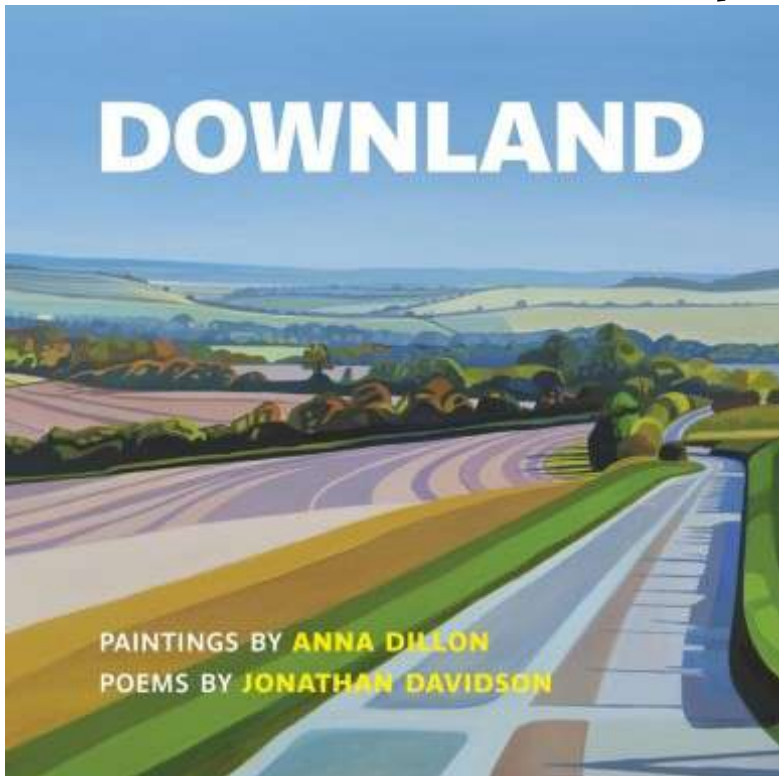




AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2024



Anna and Jonathan will be giving the Richard Jefferies Society
Birthday Lecture via Zoom on 4 November 2024.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY 2024–2025

2024

Mon 4 November 2024, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. BIRTHDAY LECTURE. Anna Dillon (artist) and Jonathan Davidson (poet) will talk about their new book *Downland*, published by Two Rivers Press, about the North Wessex Downs—a landscape beloved by Richard Jefferies.

Mon 9 December 2024, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. READINGS—*After London*. Choose a special extract to read (about 5 minutes) and discuss why this book has been so influential and relevant to the current environmental situation.

2025

Mon 13 January 2025, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. STUDY DAY—*The Scarlet Shawl*. Does Jefferies' first novel, published by Tinsley 150 years ago, warrant the severe critical comment it has received? (paperback copies can be purchased from the Society for £3 incl. UK postage).

Sat 5 April 2025. ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (note 1pm start) and SPRING LECTURE (2.30–4pm). Richard Jefferies Museum. Details to follow in Spring 2025 newsletter. Michael Malay will be talking about *Late Light*.

Mon 3 November 2025, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. BIRTHDAY LECTURE: Further information in the next newsletter.

Mon 8 Dec 2025, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. STUDY and READINGS: *The Dewy Morn* Further information in the next newsletter.

MEMBERS WHO HAVE REGISTERED THEIR EMAIL ADDRESS WILL RECEIVE NOTICES AND LINKS TO ZOOM MEETINGS NEARER THE TIME AUTOMATICALLY.

NEWSLETTER: edited by Jean Saunders and Peter Robins. The views expressed are not necessarily those of the editors or the Society. The deadline to submit material for the Spring 2025 Newsletter is **1 Feb. 2025**. Please send your contributions, preferably by email, to the Hon. Secretary as below. The newsletter is also available on the Society's website as a free download. Every effort has been made to trace all copyright holders and to obtain their permission for the use of copyright material.

CONTACT: Jean Saunders (Hon. Sec.)
The Old Mill, Mill Drive, Foulsham, Norfolk NR20 5RB.
☎ 01362 683210. Email: richardjefferiessociety@btinternet.com
Website: <http://www.richardjefferiessociety.org>



CONTENTS

	Page
Inside Cover	Dates for your Diary, 2024–5
2	From the Vice Chair
4	News in Brief
To those Departed	
7	Eric Jones
13	Phyllis Treitel
17	Katherine Tryon Schneider
19	Kim Taplin
How I Discovered Richard Jefferies	
20	Gideon Perret
22	Roy Cartwright
Citings of Jefferies	
23	
Articles	
29	Rev. Goodman's 'A Nature Student'
32	'Lovers of Nature'
35	<i>Field and Hedgerow</i>
36	A Shocking Device
Books	
38	Books by Members
Reports of talks	
39	<i>Wild Fell</i> —Lee Schofield
42	Butterflying: Towards Some Meaning—Matthew Oates
Back Cover:	Richard Jefferies Award winner: <i>Late Light</i> by Michael Malay
Front Cover: The cover of <i>Downland</i> (Two Rivers Press, May 2024)—a kind of guidebook in paintings and poetry to illustrate the most popular stretch of The Ridgeway National Trail. Richard Jefferies Society Birthday Lecture	

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION

The Richard Jefferies Society is required by law to obtain permission from members to hold their contact details on a database. That information will be used for communication purposes (e.g. sending out newsletters etc.) and will not be divulged to a third party. On termination of membership, information held will be removed from the database.

FROM THE VICE CHAIR: *Colin Corkerton*

Next year, 2025, will mark the 75th anniversary of the founding of the Richard Jefferies Society. During this time we have been lucky to have had very many distinguished members, and we continue to do so, but inevitably we lose members as they pass away. Sadly, this issue records the loss of two members, Professor Eric Jones and Lady Phyllis Treitel, who contributed significantly to both our knowledge of Jefferies and the running of the Society.

My only contact with Eric Jones was at our Executive Council meetings on Zoom but I learnt from this how Eric would make us carefully consider the decisions and was prepared to offer an alternative view. Reading Patrick Dillon's appreciation of Eric in the following pages shows what we have lost.

I never met Phyllis Treitel but probably the most referenced books I have on Jefferies are *Richard Jefferies: An Index* and *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies*, collaborations between Phyllis Treitel and Hugoe Matthews. (Both books are still available to order from the Society). Often, I will read something and wonder what Jefferies had to say about this subject and off I go to look at the *Index*. Or what was Jefferies doing at a particular time and *The Forward Life* is taken from the bookshelf to find out. Phyllis contributed so much more than this as you will see from the following personal memories and tributes to her. Both Eric and Phyllis were not only important contributors to the Society they were obviously good friends to many as well.

All involved with the Society, both past and present, will be keen that we can look forward to many more years of the Society's existence. However, inevitably there will be challenges along the way and one is very much on the mind of the Executive Council now, the departure of Jean Saunders from all her roles within the Society in approximately eighteen months' time. Reading 'From the Chair' in past newsletters I can see she has been thanked many times for all that she does and as someone who is still a relative newcomer to a role on the Council, I can only add my thanks. I mentioned above the books I refer to for finding about Jefferies, if Jean was a book she would not even be on the shelf, she would be permanently to hand for her encyclopaedic knowledge of all things relating to him. However a small group of Council members is working hard to find replacements. (Note the use of the plural). If you would like to help, please contact me by email on cdc.corkerton3@gmail.com. We are not looking for another Jean, we know such a person will not exist, but however small a contribution you think you might be able to make it will be appreciated.

Another challenge which is certainly not unique to us is to find new members, especially younger ones. The survey that many of you completed earlier this year showed a heavy bias to the more senior age groups. This was not unexpected and

ties in with the experience of many literary societies and other organisations. There appears to be plenty of interest in writers, but it is difficult to convert this into membership. If you have ideas how we might address this please let me know. In my role of vice-chair, and because I live in Devon, I have tried to spend as much time as possible in Jefferies Land. My wife and I spent time the week before the April AGM exploring the area. I have been to the museum to enjoy some of their Lazy Sunday music events and whilst there spoke about the Society to those attending. Together with fellow trustee Andrew Dawes, I visited the summer fair at the Church of the Holy Cross in Chiseldon. This was where Jefferies and Jessie Baden were married in 1874 and several Jefferies are buried.



Colin Corkerton admiring the Kate Tryon paintings on show at Chiseldon church.

Photograph by Andrew Dawes.

Whilst these visits have not necessarily led to new members yet, I believe it is important for the Society to be visible in the area and I will continue to attend as many events as practical. We will also contact other groups in the area to spread the word about the Society.

Elsewhere in the newsletter you will see details of our winter talks on Zoom. The first of these will be a presentation by the artist Anna Dillon and poet Jonathan Davidson on their book *Downland*. At the following meeting we will look at *After London*. In the book London has experienced an ecological collapse for an unknown reason. This is very resonant with today, although the reasons for our ecological concerns are well known. As I write this the lack of insects this summer has been very noticeable. There has been no shortage of flowers but Jefferies' midsummer hum has been absent. The hope is the wet winter and spring are the cause and this year will prove an exception, but it seems a long time until next summer to confirm this, or not. In the new year we will look at Jefferies' first published novel *The Scarlet Shawl*. If you are thinking of joining us for this meeting, the Society's publication of the novel is still available to order.

... continued on p.28

NEWS IN BRIEF

Jefferies' preface to Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne* (Walter Scott, 1887) was one of the last things he wrote and which George Miller classed as 'a critical gem, a model—indeed a marvel, of apt and appreciative comment.'

White's house and garden is now in peril as a result of increases in cost beyond its control. Energy, insurance and staff costs have all risen. The museum has no public subsidy and relies on visitor income.

Seventy years ago a group of conservationists wrote to *The Times* (18 May 1954) appealing for funds to convert Gilbert White's home, The Wakes, Selborne, to a museum. Earlier this year *The Times* (10 Apr) published a letter alerting the public to the severe financial challenges now facing the museum. Alan Titchmarsh is a signatory among other interested parties. An appeal for donations has been launched to avoid potential closure.¹

Colin Corkerton came across a wildlife organisation on a farm in Camarthen titled The Bevis Trust and named after Jefferies' *Bevis*. Incorporated in December 2015 its objectives² are:

(a) to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and the promotion of biological diversity including by providing land on which areas of natural habitats shall be preserved and managed.

(b) to promote the conservation, protection and improvement of wildlife and their natural habitats, including by the reintroduction of indigenous species to areas of land referred to in object (a).

(c) to advance the education of the public in the conservation, protection and improvement of the physical and natural environment and the maximization of biological diversity and the conservation and protection of wildlife including in harmony with modern farming methods; and the fostering of public interest in the understanding of the same.

Colin came across the organisation that was mentioned in a book by Bevis Watts titled *River Journey: searching for wild beavers and finding freedom*. The book is about the discovery of beavers in Bristol and Bevis Watts' involvement in this. Watts has featured in our newsletters many times. See *Autumn* 2016, p.22, *Autumn* 2021, p.31 and *Spring* 2024, p.25.

¹ www.gilbertwhiteshouse.org

² <https://www.bevistrust.com/about/>

Swindon Link gave the Society a plug in its April magazine urging local people to join the charity. With the Facebook group growing and with most of the participants not paper members, Jean Saunders fears were relayed that the Society might end up as a virtual organisation and not a real one without young fresh blood to keep it going.

Those of you who have access to the Internet can watch some real gems regarding Richard Jefferies. Try out YouTube from time to time and search Richard Jefferies to see what comes up. The Society has its own channel and we have posted various films and recordings of talks too that include the talks by Lee Schofield and Matthew Oates (see Andrew Dawes' reports in this newsletter.) Andrew Rossabi's Lecture to the School of Philosophy last year (see *RJS Spring Newsletter* 2024) has now been viewed 1,200 times and has brought an appreciation of Jefferies to a new worldwide audience. Congratulations and many thanks to our President.

Valerie Haworth was kind enough to represent the Society at the Alliance of Literary Societies AGM weekend this year. She reported as follows:

The RJS was one of 29 societies represented (by a total of 61 enthusiasts) at the ALS AGM weekend in May, hosted this year by the Arthur Ransome Society at the Jetty Museum, Bowness on Windermere.

After a welcome from ALS Chair Marty Ross we were addressed by its President James Naughtie, the eminent BBC broadcaster and head of Radio 4's Book Club since its inception, who was delighted to see so many of us present. He praised the work that literary societies do to maintain the habit of *reading*, despite the instability of the world around us, and emphasised that it is especially important to 'keep the flame burning' for writers who may go out of fashion for a while—so that 'they will return'.

Three talks during the day—about Arthur Ransome and his work; the connections between him and various other writers; and the rescue and restoration of the boat *Nancy Blackett* and her work in 'promoting' AR—were well-received.

A tradition of these gatherings is the raffle of books donated by member societies. One of the RJS's contributions particularly delighted the winner whose daughter was writing an essay about him 'for English lit.'

The AGM proceeded efficiently. Inevitably a few societies drop out from year to year—sometimes because they cease to exist—but this year there were new joiners, with promises of more for next year.

Although there was insufficient chance to make more than a few new acquaintances and talk about each other's authors, there was more opportunity next day when we were free to visit various Ransome-related venues around the

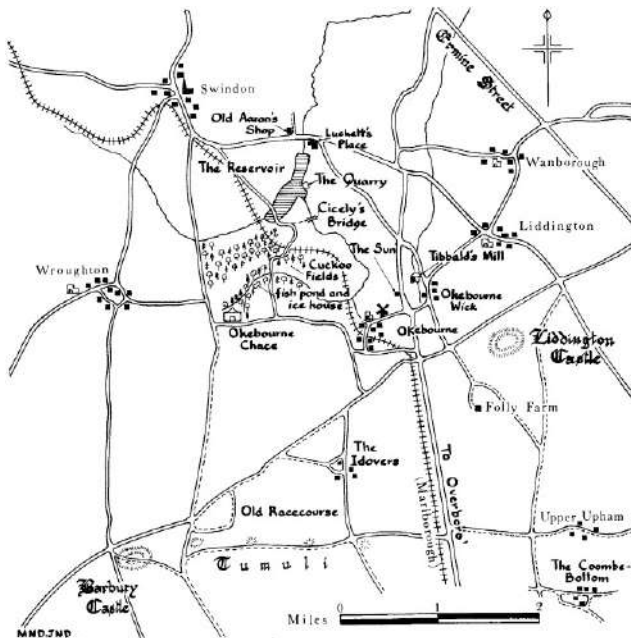
delightful Lake District and the weather was kind.

Next year's event, in mid-May, will be hosted by The Kipling Society at the University of Sussex, Falmer near Brighton. Details will appear in advance in the ALS Newsletter.

Many thanks to Andrew Dawes who wrote a feature about the RJS for the Alliance of Literary Societies 'Society of the Month' page for July 2024. <https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/2024/07/01/richard-jefferies-society/>

John Shortland came across a fascinating 9-minute film that explores the 'ghost train' route of the former Swindon to Marlborough railway line (a train journey that Jefferies knew well) comparing a modern day aerial view alongside an 1881 map of the area. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jDtMeEvRWLE>.

Jefferies writes fondly about Marlborough (Overboro') in *Round About a Great Estate*. Here's a map (with railway) that the late Mark Daniel drew to accompany the 1987 edition of the book published in conjunction with the Society.



Many thanks to Rebecca Welshman, who will be taking over as Editor of our *Journal* in 2026, and to Andrew Dawes who will be our new Membership Secretary from next year.

ERIC JONES, NATURALIST AND POLYMATH—AN APPRECIATION

Patrick Dillon



Eric Jones by the Mulberry Tree at Coate
Photograph by the late John Webb,
20 July 2008.



Society visit to Fairford on 28 June
2003 led by Eric Jones. John Price
and Phyllis Treitel also in the picture
extract. Photo by Patrick Dillon.

Eric Jones, for many years a prominent member of the Richard Jefferies Society, died on 1 March 2024. He was 87. Eric was a distinguished academic and prolific writer, a formidable intellectual who held professorial positions in universities in three continents, and whose list of scholarly publications and achievements runs to many pages.

Internationally, he is best known for a trio of books: *The European Miracle*, *Growth Recurring*, and *Barriers to Growth*. They are still in print, have been translated into several languages, and are on reading lists in universities across the world. His period was the early modern through to the present, roughly from the late sixteenth century. It begins with the so called ‘Age of Enlightenment’, which has given us reason, rationality, and realism. These are the three ‘R’s that Eric lived by. They are also the capabilities that have shaped the modern, industrialised world, which was a theme in his three major books.

Eric believed in crafting an argument, working from the ground up, painstakingly piecing together evidence into an explanatory framework. The method is that of scientist-anthropologist, meticulous observation, recording,

and analysis, building up a rich story from the minutiae of human experience. He had a keen eye for detail, and recorded everything, in notebooks and in a card index system. He started in the 1950s, before computers, and stayed with his analogue system throughout his career, rearranging cards and notes each time he needed to assemble evidence for a new book. It is said that some traditional crafts are lost because today people do not have the manual dexterity of those in the past, when it was honed over a lifetime. The same might be said of mental dexterity. Nobody today would build up a meticulously cross-referenced card index database, and many would struggle to build scholarly books from such a resource.

Nominally, Eric was an historian, but his interests were wide and spanned economic history, environmental history, and ecological history. He worked seamlessly across these fields, a distinctive synthesis which in the UK is pretty much unique. He was a cross-disciplinary researcher, although he would never have used the term. Instead, he claimed to work from the local to the global, emphasising interactions in both directions, borrowing anything that seemed appropriate for his argument, and disregarding standard academic boundaries.

Eric was often ahead of the game. His first book, *Seasons and Prices*, published in 1964, was based on a detailed analysis of the effects of weather on agricultural production. It was compiled from records kept by farmers through the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He was one of the first to seriously consider the economic consequences of what we now recognise as climate change. This was a phase in his career when he was known as an agricultural historian. At the time he was acting lecturer in history of agriculture at Oxford University and Fellow of Nuffield College. A few years later, he got a lectureship at Reading University and was a founding research director of the Institute of Agricultural History, which later became the Museum of English Rural Life. In those days one could read a shelf full of books on English agricultural history, but Eric's essays got to the kernel of the story in a few pages. There followed professorial positions in North America and Australia, through which he developed and consolidated his reputation as a leading economic historian in the field of global geopolitics.

Eric attributed his observational and recording skills to being a naturalist, and especially to bird watching. He started in his early teens, and throughout his life kept notes and commonplace books. His very first publication was a natural history piece on the nuptial display of the nuthatch, written whilst a teenager. He was an admirer of the eighteenth century clergyman-naturalist Gilbert White, who wrote the *Natural History of Selborne*. White was one of the first to take a systematic approach to recording nature. It was an approach that Eric perfected:

a deep understanding of the local patch, immersion in the landscape, its wildlife, and the historical record, weaving it all together into a coherent account.

I regard Eric as one of the last to observe and describe nature in the Gilbert White tradition, and to report the business of the countryside in a straight forward, unsentimental manner. It is a tradition that stretches from White, through Richard Jefferies in the nineteenth century, and W.H. Hudson in the early twentieth. All are notable for the sheer range of their interests. Eric does not describe the landscape as such, rather he gives you detail of its wildlife, birds, historical features, farming practices, vernacular qualities, enough to enable you to create your own image. He invites curiosity, and as he demonstrated in his later books, if you dig deep enough you can find extraordinary questions, such is the richness of historical detail in the landscape. It's there, just waiting for someone to pull it all together. His last books are full of quirky subject matter. He writes about things that others have failed to notice, seemingly insignificant local practices, which when presented in broader context, turn out to be significant.

Eric Lionel Jones was born on 21 September 1936, in Andover. He met Sylvia Bower at school and they married in 1958. They have a daughter Deborah, a son Christopher, and a granddaughter Laura. Eric graduated from the University of Nottingham with a BA Hons in 1958, and researched for his D. Phil at Oxford University. It was awarded in 1962, and was followed in 1985 by the higher doctorate D. Litt. After Oxford and Reading he went to Northwestern University, USA, as professor of economics. In 1975 he moved to La Trobe University, Australia as professor of economics, where he remained until 1994. He was professorial fellow of the Melbourne Business School, University of Melbourne, 1990-2009, and associate of the Centre for Business and Public Policy, 2005-2008. He held visiting professorships at several universities across the world, and from 2019 was senior fellow at the Beloff Centre, University of Buckingham.

Eric joined the Richard Jefferies Society soon after he returned from Australia in 2001. He became a member of its Executive Council, and for six years served as Vice Chair. He was elected an Honorary Vice President in 2021. He was a member of the sub-committee that set up the bursary to support research and publication about Jefferies, writing a short article to promote it in *Rural History Today*, the newsletter of the British Agricultural History Society. *The Journal of the Alliance of Literary Societies* issue for 2015 was on 'literary places'. Eric's piece was on 'Richard Jefferies and Coate'. He was a regular at study days where his readings were wide ranging, and he contributed citations and book reviews to the *Newsletter*.

Eric had Jefferies connections, a Jones ancestor lived in the cottage at Hodson near Swindon, which Jefferies describes in his book *The Gamekeeper at Home*.

Gamekeeping was part of Eric's ancestry. His great grandfather, who lived in Longparish near Andover, used to walk 30-odd miles to Ashbury in Berkshire to visit gamekeeper relatives. Eric and I re-enacted the walk in 1986, and his accounts of it provided a template for some of the family history he wrote later. In 1993, he described his research in a lecture to the Society at Ashbury. In 2008, it was published in the *RJS Journal* as 'The Gamekeeper away from Home: a sequel to Richard Jefferies'.

Arguably, Eric's greatest services to the Society were through his lectures and writing. In 2004, he gave the Birthday Lecture, 'The Land that Richard Jefferies Inherited', versions of which were published in 2005 in *Rural History*, and in the Society's *Journal* (as 'Richard Jefferies Writing Criticised and Defended'). The *Rural History* article was the sixth most downloaded during the first fifteen years of Cambridge Journals Online. Eric outlines the economic, social and environmental history of the 1860s to 80s, with references to sporting estates, farming practices, and rural labour in north-west Wiltshire and the Upper Thames, themes and connections that were developed in *Middle Ridgeway*, the book that he and I wrote in 2016.

A spin-off article is 'Sources of Protein for Rural People in Richard Jefferies' Day', published in the *RJS Journal* in 2014. He reviews the various sources of protein available to rural people from medieval times until the mid-nineteenth century, and the factors that determined their access to it. Richard Jefferies claimed that people of his time were healthier than the previous generation. Eric attributed this to Free Trade, the import of food, and improvements in its distribution.

In 'What Counts as Regional Writing?' *RJS Journal*, 2011, he argued that to qualify as 'regional', writing should be topographical and fall into the subjective category of 'lyrical realism', conveying the spirit or personality of a region. Jefferies' Coate, he says, 'is decidedly more Coate than Coate itself'. It was a dictum that Eric observed, as he immersed himself in the history of the locality around Fairford. Eric spoke on 'Richard Jefferies and Cirencester', at the Cirencester Civic Society in 2019. A version of the talk was published in 2020 in the *RJS Journal*. A few weeks before he died, he finished work on a new edition of a booklet on the Buscot and Coleshill Estates for the National Trust.

In 2012, he gave an engaging lecture to the Society on 'Saving Kennicott's Grove: Successful conservation at an American Coate'. This was published in volume 23 of the *RJS Journal*. The story is a good example of the Jones *modus operandi*. Through his reading in England, Eric finds connections between nineteenth-century illustrator Charles Whymper, and Robert Kennicott, an America naturalist. Taking up a position at Northwestern University at Evanston, Illinois, in 1970, Eric encounters prairie groves, a transitional and now

endangered habitat where woodland merges into prairie. A surviving area, with an historically significant dwelling, known simply as the 'Grove', has been associated through the generations with the Kennicott family. In the 1920s and 30s, it had been a literary resort, the home of writers and like-minded visitors from Chicago. Now it was threatened with the building of 274 residential condominiums. Eric is involved in the campaign to save it, and makes a well-researched heritage argument. Back in England forty years later, he is embroiled in a similar struggle to save Coate from being swamped by residential development. And the link that brings the connections full circle: Charles Whympster illustrated Richard Jefferies' *The Gamekeeper at Home*.

Eric wrote introductions to Audrey Smith's, *The Interpreter: A Biography of Richard Jefferies*, 2008, and *The Farmer's World: Richard Jefferies' Agricultural Journalism in the late 1870s*, 2016. Jefferies died before he was able to write his 'keystone' work, a supreme study of the 'land question',¹ so Eric tells us in his introduction to *The Interpreter*. The beginnings, he says are in *Hodge and His Masters*, and *Round About a Great Estate*. These are Jefferies' works that Eric most valued, along with *Wild Life in a Southern County* and *The Amateur Poacher*, a view which is evident in his Birthday Lecture and his introduction to *The Farmer's World*. Here Eric is back on familiar ground, agricultural history. *The Times Literary Supplement* described his introduction as 'even-handed and insightful... an outstanding commentary', and the *Agricultural History Review* 'an excellent introductory essay'.

In many of the condolence messages sent to Eric's wife Sylvia, friends and colleagues mention the professional and personal support he gave them. At Melbourne Business School, he was aware that the students did not have enough general knowledge of countries where they might want to 'practice', so he developed two courses specifically designed to broaden the thinking of economists and businessmen. One was called 'Future Trends', the other 'Asia Pacific'. Eric was generous with the help he gave people with their careers. He was a big influence on mine. I was a twenty-two year old student of ecology when we first met, in 1972. Our meeting came about through his interest in Gilbert White. I had discovered a thriving colony of rare harvest mice, the smallest British rodent, first described by White, but seldom recorded in the intervening two hundred years. The mice build exquisite nests of woven grass, suspended in the stems of tall vegetation. The breeding ecology of this species was to be the subject of my undergraduate dissertation. Eric's friend Lew Lewis, himself an

¹ The Land Question' refers to matters of land ownership, access, capitalisation, and taxation that were high on the political agenda through the nineteenth century and in to the twentieth. See *The Land Question in Britain, 1750-1950*, edited by Matthew Cragoe and Paul Readman, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

exceptional naturalist, came to hear of the discovery and informed Eric, who built a visit into his busy schedule during a short trip from America.

It was my good fortune that Eric saw potential in me, and decided to nurture it. He became my mentor and very long-term friend. I could not have asked for better academic guidance. Although he was not my formal supervisor, the PhD training he provided was second to none. A rigorous analysis of sources and attention to detail was expected, finding the new angle, but not overstating the case. All of this enhanced with many days in the field, where we witnessed and recorded the landscape, its processes and inhabitants, at the ‘intersection between ecology and economics’. He used the ‘intersection’ expression frequently, and his many books demonstrate how adept he was at applying it.

There are many happy memories to reflect on. So much shared history, jaunts around the countryside, time spent in Australia and America, lectures attended and given, ideas exchanged and developed, books written and not written. All of this interwoven with the business of living, friendship, humour, celebrating the highs, giving support during the lows. Fifty years to the day after we first met, we revisited the site of the harvest mouse colony in Aston Tirrold, the village where my daughter Anna still lives. She was two months old when Eric first saw her. Now, the three of us, along with Sylvia Jones and Priscilla Trenchard, scoured the dense vegetation bordering a drainage ditch, and to everyone’s delight, we discovered a solitary harvest mouse nest. This was September 2022. It was the last time we were together in the field (see photograph below).



PHYLLIS TREITEL: PERSONAL MEMORIES AND TRIBUTES

1 JUNE 1929–1 MAY 2024



Phyllis by the Mulberry Tree on duty at the Richard Jefferies Museum.

Photograph by the late John Webb, 20 July 2008.

Richard Jefferies and the Society had a special place in her heart. When Phyllis's memory gave up—diagnosed with Alzheimer's in 2018—she still talked about the Society with fond memories. We will not forget Phyllis.

There is a feature about Phyllis's life in the *RJS Autumn Newsletter* 2020 (pp.23-25). Some tributes follow:

Peter Robins (Co-editor of the *RJS Journal* and *Newsletters*)

On the 2 May 1987 members of the RJS gathered at Shanklin Villa, Sydenham, to celebrate the unveiling of a plaque to Jefferies marking the time he spent there with the Harrilds. There I first met a slim woman with short grey hair who was Phyllis Treitel. We got on well and began a correspondence, mainly about Jefferies but over the years it widened to take in our personal lives and interests. We met subsequently at a Brighton RJS meeting and once at her Boar's Hill home where I was introduced to her husband Guenter. Phyllis was also a

member of the John Burroughs Association and Friends of the Ridgeway and a keen collector of commemorative medals.

We explored Jefferies, sharing our respective research. Phyllis was busy at this time with Hugoe Matthews in producing their two books, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (1994) and *Richard Jefferies: An Index* (2008) which meant spending long hours at the British Library poring over the extant notebooks and letters.

In 1992 Phyllis introduced the first *RJS Journal* of 32 pages which helped to make the Society more professional. Phyllis contributed to it over the years and I followed from 1997 onwards. Over the last decade Jean Saunders and I have built on Phyllis's initiative, publishing an annual expanded *Journal* of up to 200 pages.

In her letter to me of 7 Jun 2017 Phyllis expressed her thoughts about new discoveries:

As for Jefferies: I think we ought all to start again, reading the newly discovered material & filling in the gaps with the details of his life. Too much emphasis was made of his early life & too little in the early days, with no detail, of his later movements. ...The new information is interesting, & valuable, but it hasn't changed anything. His early death is another anachronism; nowadays he'd be kept well for much longer. Would that have led to worthwhile writings? Or was it a side effect of his illness that made him so sensitive to the life around him & and also stimulated his need/desire to get his feelings on to paper before it was too late?

In the last letter I received from Phyllis, dated 27 Nov 2017, her concerns about revising Jefferies' life with new material were dispelled when she wrote enthusiastically,

I have my copy of Andrew's biography. Amazing. So large, so easy to handle. I began reading & and could hardly give up, I found it so interesting & and so well written. I must tell him so. I have by no means finished it but am deliberately not hurrying.

The letter was the last communication I had from Phyllis, for her diagnosed dementia brought our correspondence to a sudden close after thirty years.

Geoff Hirst. Treasurer to the Richard Jefferies Society 1999-2014

At some time during early 1999, Phyllis Treitel corresponded with an organisation called REACH (Retired Executives' Clearing House) in an attempt to find a new treasurer for the Richard Jefferies Society. At the same time, and unknown to me, my wife had similarly written to the same organisation to research roles for me in the voluntary sector to ensure I continued to be socially useful and (in her words) not spend all day listening to Radio 3. Having solved the mystery of the appearance of a number of possibilities from REACH I

focused on two—one as a human resource advisor for a community project in Oxford and the other the treasurership of the Richard Jefferies Society.

I duly contacted a certain Lady Treitel, and we arranged a lunch meeting at the Goddard Arms, which, by coincidence had been a personal watering hole when I was attached to Barclays Bank's Inspection team on their visit to the Swindon Old Town branch. I must confess that I'd never heard of Richard Jefferies when the papers first came to me, but I was wise enough to rectify that by the time we met. Another coincidence was that I was to follow in the footsteps of Dick Bedwyn as treasurer. Not only was he also a Barclays manager but he lived a little more than one hundred yards from me in Witney.

I was surprised to meet this rather small, wiry lady, and who had prepared her interviewing so thoroughly. I was glad too that I'd done my homework. From that day, and having accepted the role, I had met a great future friend whose support I could rely on, and our association in office lasted for fifteen years. It continued too, after my moving to the Yorkshire Dales and especially during my wife's terminal cancer. I may be wrong, but I believe Phyllis too had gone through that particular mill but thankfully come out on the other side. The handover from Dick Bedwyn was seamless but I did replace his handwritten accounts with spreadsheets, which Jean Saunders and now Colin Corkerton are still using. Phyllis certainly approved.

When I was able to travel to the Annual General Meetings after 2005 I usually stayed with friends in Witney but once, when that was not possible, I did stay at Eidsvoll and had a wonderful evening with her and Guenter. Guenter of course was the oracle on Jane Austen! I took a fresh pineapple as a sweet course for the evening meal which for some reason, was met with great acclaim. They had not, they said, had a whole fresh pineapple for years. What small details we remember.

She was one of the wisest and most intelligent and loyal individuals I was ever acquainted with. It has been a privilege to know her.

Andrew Rossabi , President.

My chief memory of Phyllis is of her sharp intelligence and impish humour. There was always a little twitch at the corner of her mouth that never yet quite broke into a smile.

It was she who, together with Hugoe Matthews, helped make the Society more professional and scholarly in its work, and the concrete symbol of that was the *Journal*. 'It's a very little baby,' I recall her saying at the time of its launch. There was quiet opposition from the hard core of Swindonians who had started the Society and had seen it prosper and wished it to continue as before.

Feelings ran high on both sides and there were often fraught moments at Society meetings. But reform was necessary and was carried through.

Her articles on 'The Other Side: Jefferies and America' and 'Jefferies' Somerset Venture' were excellent. It was a pity she didn't write more articles. The Chronology she co-authored with Hugoe was her magnum opus and she spent a lot of time in the British Library Manuscripts Room transcribing Jefferies' letters. Her revised transcript of the notebooks was another herculean task she undertook. She was extremely careful and methodical in all her work.

Her death marks the end of an era in the history of the Society following the deaths of Bill Keith, Hugoe, and George Miller.

Jean Saunders, Hon. Sec.

My first contact with Phyllis was some 25 years ago when I was the co-ordinator of Swindon Friends of the Earth. Swindon Council proposed a policy in a review of the Swindon Local Plan for development between Commonhead and Coate and I had fought off a previous policy that was thrown out at a planning inquiry. Little did we know at the time of all the other development pressures on the land that would follow. Phyllis telephoned me and I kept her up-to-date with regard to planning matters related to Jefferies Land and she invited me to speak about planning issues to the Richard Jefferies Society in December 2004. It was by accident that I ended up taking over Phyllis's role as Hon. Secretary about a year later when I volunteered to help a bit!

Phyllis made me very welcome and gave me such good advice as well as passing on about ten boxes of papers for the Society. I knew absolutely nothing about Richard Jefferies and was completely out of my comfort zone in a Society that was strongly academic—let me loose with a load of left-wing vegetarian hippies and I was in my element. But through all the paperwork I read I was very much aware of Phyllis's keen brain, her thoroughness and her sense of humour (I bought her a Cyclamen, 'Ah! a Cyclaperson!').

Phyllis used to pick me up on her way to Swindon for Society meetings as there was no evening bus where I lived and I still have a great reluctance to use a car. So we got to know each other well and I got on with Guenter too as my mother was also brought to England from Germany by Kindertransport. When my mother was suffering from dementia Phyllis confided in me that she would take a pill. Phyllis never got the chance, but my mother did.

And then I moved from Oxfordshire to Norfolk and I picked her up for the AGM at Liddington in 2017. I was alarmed at the clear indication of dementia setting in. I grieved for her then—the person I knew, respected and admired was leaving her body. How cruel. Dear Phyllis.

REST IN PEACE, KATHERINE TRYON SCHNEIDER

2 May 1931–15 November 2023

Many of you have read Kate Tryon's charming accounts of her many visits to Coate¹ in order to capture in oils² places that Richard Jefferies described in his books. You might not know that it is thanks to her granddaughter, Katherine Schneider, that we were able to publish Kate's adventures in Jefferies' land. We were saddened to hear about the death of Katherine last year. According to a relative Katherine was very fond of her grandmother, who essentially raised her and transmitted her love of nature to her. Kate pointed out different species of birds and plants to her as they walked through the woods foraging for watercress. Katherine was responsible for donating her grandmother's manuscripts to our dearly departed Sheila Povey whom many members remember for all her research about Jefferies and who was our membership secretary for many years. Sheila showed Katherine around the Richard Jefferies Museum on a visit to England in September 1997 and captured her in the photograph below by the front door. Kate Tryon posed by the same door for a photograph in 1912.

Katherine's mother Sylvia is also known to us. She was a student at Vassar College and wrote an article about Richard Jefferies for the college magazine in 1912 that we republished in the *Richard Jefferies Society Journal* No 37 (2022). It was Sylvia, who also visited England in 1960, in order to present the newly opened Richard Jefferies Museum with 35 of her mother's oil paintings which still adorn the walls and which are much admired by Swindonians who can still recognise features that they know so well but much changed through Swindon's expansion and road building.

We were informed in late February of the death of Katherine by Janet Jensen who had just ordered the first three volumes of Andrew Rossabi's biography of Richard Jefferies. She is the girl friend of Kate Tryon's great grandson, Bradley Tryon—a second cousin of Katherine. They had been looking after Katherine in her last few years. Janet provided some information that shows how this lovely lady followed in both her grandmother's and her mother's love of nature and how it meant so much to her.

¹ *Adventures in the Vale of the White Horse: Jefferies Land* by Kate Tryon (1865–1952) was published by the Richard Jefferies Society on 14 August 2010 from her manuscript dated 1910. By 1912 Kate Tryon was half-way through a follow-up that she titled 'Walks in Jefferies-Land, 1912' but never completed. The Society printed this as a pamphlet in September 2010. Copies of the manuscripts are in the archives of Swindon Library.

² Kate Tryon was an artist with a passion for nature. During her six visits to Jefferies Land between 1910–1938, she produced two hundred and thirty oil paintings—thirty-six of which were donated to the Richard Jefferies Museum.

Her obituary opens:

‘During her childhood days in the Depression, Katherine grew up largely in the care of her distinguished grandparents, Kate and James Libby Tryon. Her father had died suddenly when she was only two, and her mother, Sylvia, was often busy teaching English to high schoolers. ... during her last days at the hospital, she was begging to get out, see some foliage, or do something fun.’



Katherine Tryon Schneider 1997
Photograph by Sheila Povey



Kate Tryon 1912
Photograph by William Hooper



Katherine Schneider

A TRIBUTE TO KIM TAPLIN (1943–29 MARCH 2024)

Jeremy Hooker

Kim Taplin was my good friend for many years. I think we first met at a conference of the Powys Society sometime in the early '70s and our interest in John Cowper Powys and his brothers was the original link between us. Soon we were sharing our devotion to writers about nature and rural life in the English tradition, such as John Clare and Thomas Hardy, and, especially, Richard Jefferies. Over the years, Kim herself contributed notably to this tradition with her essays, and books such as *The English Path* and *Tongues in Trees*. These were lucid prose works by a woman who was essentially a poet. She published one major collection, *By the Harbour Wall*, with Enitharmon Press, several pamphlets, and an experimental novel. I urged her to publish selected poems, but her lack of contacts and her natural reticence held her back. In consequence, she has yet to be widely recognized as a vital poet of our time, a nature poet with an acute sense of all living things. She was also a feminist with a keen political sense, as evidenced by *Muniments*, her long poem based on the nuclear sites in Britain. Kim also wrote anguished, but vitally observant, personal poems, such as 'This Year, next Year', occasioned by the breakdown of her marriage. I would discuss this poem with creative writing students as a fine example of the personal 'voice', grounded in the particularities of time and place.



Kim was a great walker, and wrote about her walks in two entertaining books: *Days Off in Oxfordshire* and *Walking Aloud*, subtitled 'Rambles in the Cherwell Valley'. I shared walks with her in the New Forest and Oxfordshire, when I benefited from her keen observation of the world around us, and we talked about everything—our lives, our children, books, politics, religion, the ecological crisis. Kim had an essentially religious disposition. She was a practising Christian when we first met. Later, she was more sceptical, but always a person with compassion for a suffering world, and reverence for nature and humanity. Kim was a troubled soul, which is to say she was fully alive in our time, and painfully aware of what in her poem 'Lapwings, for instance' she called 'man-made unmaking'. Her delight in nature was ecstatic—in the true sense of the word, it took her out of herself. In almost her last email to me she spoke of having seen a Clouded Yellow. Her happiness at seeing the rare butterfly denoted more than a natural observation; it expressed her essential being.

HOW I DISCOVERED RICHARD JEFFERIES

Gideon Perret

It all started in the summer of 1987. I was sitting on my favourite outcrop of rock in the Palatinate Forest near the French border overlooking the small village where I had grown up. The book I had with me was *The Norton Anthology of Poetry*, a tome that I had carried up to my favourite spot in order to work on my university reading list.



Gideon with Biene

The assigned text was an excerpt from Gary Snyder's *Myths & Texts* (1960), a slim collection of poems about his time working as a logger in the wilds of Oregon. Having grown up on a farm, I didn't know too much about poetry, but I knew about nature, about forests, and about logging, as most of my friends' dads worked in the nearby sawmill, as had my dad, who had died very early. The poems resonated with me, as this seemed to be the perfect place to read about pines and pine cones. I didn't know what to make of the myths in those days, but the meaning of the texts was clear to me, I just had to look around to find meaning in words. This is where my passion for what's called 'nature writing' was born.

I continued on this path until 1996, when after two years of teaching at university I decided to leave academia and become a school English teacher. I hadn't won the scholarship that my wife and I would have needed to survive financially. However, I never stopped reading my favourite writers: Emerson, Thoreau, Melville, Robinson Jeffers, and of course Gary Snyder. There was something not quite right about this list though. At least it always seemed strange to me that my favourite writers were all American. Why had I never encountered any nature writers from the UK, although I had lived and taught

there? This seemed a literary vacuum that was only filled in 2007 by Robert Macfarlane's *The Wild Places*, and a year later by the Summer 2008 issue of *Granta* called 'The New Nature Writing.' Richard Jefferies was mentioned in *The Wild Places*, but I didn't take any notice and was instead rather fascinated by Edward Thomas, who I started reading excessively. Though I knew about his Jefferies biography, I still didn't think too much of it.

I saw a book review of volume one of Andrew Rossabi's *A Peculiarly English Genius: A Biography of Richard Jefferies* in the Edward Thomas Fellowship's newsletter. This, of course, reawakened my love of tomes, and so I wrote an email to Jean Saunders to order the book. I remember that Jean mentioned the postage to Germany before she sent the book, which did not put me off at all. She also said that she had just received an email from a lady in Germany who was looking for a new home for her collection of Jefferies books, and asked if I was interested. Of course I was! A week or two later I was in possession of a fine collection of books by and about Jefferies. It turned out the lady, who lived in Freiburg, not too far from where I live, was a journalist who had studied in London in the 1980s, where she became fascinated with Jefferies. I am not sure what happened next, but within a year I became a member of the Richard Jefferies Society, probably due to Jean's gentle coaxing.

Since then Jefferies has been more on my mind than I thought he would, also thanks to the Zoom meetings that I find very interesting. I still haven't read everything he wrote, but he keeps intriguing and surprising me. *Amaryllis at the Fair* has become my favourite book by Jefferies. I criticise my students whenever they call a novel a book, but in this case what else would you call *Amaryllis*? I love its quirky characters as much as its digressions. My favourite scene is when Amaryllis sits on top of the wall watching the people go to the fair. This is where the book resonates most with me. I did something similar when I was young. There is a pond about half a mile from where I grew up, my own Walden Pond, or Coate Water. In summer there used to be an annual 'Summer Night's Dance' near the pond. I was too young to go, and instead spent the evening sitting on the balcony of our house watching the people walk by, listening in on their conversations. Wiltshire is so different from the Palatinate Forest, and yet I find resonance in Richard Jefferies' writings. I am tempted to say I am haunted by Richard Jefferies.

HOW I DISCOVERED RICHARD JEFFERIES

Roy Cartwright

The year was 1957 and the School was in Sanford Street, Swindon—a boy's only school back then. English classes often took this approach: a book would be chosen for us to read aloud and the teacher would stop you and point to someone else, 'you boy continue' and god help you if you had not been paying attention. The book this day was *Bevis* and I was mesmerized by it as the places he wrote about I have visited so many times. Yes, it was Coate Water—the reservoir for the Wilts & Berks Canal.



My next encounter was on a wet Wednesday many years later when I stumbled on the museum at Coate and walked in to find Jean Saunders. We had a long chat and I told her I would have to buy *Bevis* and read it again some time. 'I have a used copy here,' she replied 'that you can buy if you wish'. She charged me £5 for it and the money went into the collection box. It was not until I arrived home and started to look at it that I saw the price on the back—£2 10 shillings [but that was some years ago].

I, like John Price, found *Amaryllis at the Fair* my favourite book but that is because I know every inch of every place that is mentioned and have walked in her footsteps so many times.

The years went by and I read on Facebook that there was live music at the museum so I went along to listen. The place had become much more than a museum—it was a community hub, a place for every sort of creative works. From painting to singing, from nature walks to play park for the tiny tots in the local area, from traditional folk law to Halloween and Wassailing. Richard Jefferies might have approved of this use of his home. What better way of remembering his talent than to bring others into it from every part of society?

Since then I have used Facebook to report activities at the Museum where I found the Society and then joined—surely others will follow. I do feel strongly that everything the Society posts on Facebook should automatically go on the museum page and vice versa. I know the two are separate but I think of them as being two sides of the same coin so I send as much information as I can about the museum and what they do to the Society's page and much of it gets posted there, I am happy to say but not all of it.

I hope you all enjoy reading this as much as I have writing it.

CITINGS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

In *Archipelago* 2:3 (Clutag Press, 2024), Gideon Perret found an excellent article, 'The Beauty of Michael Viney' by Edna Longley. The article refers to Viney's posthumously published *Michael Viney's Natural World* (Letterfrock: Artisan House, 2023), a beautiful book, highly recommended. In his 'Editorial' Andrew McNeillie has this to say about Michael Viney: 'How he triumphs in the name of nature and environment. By whom too we are reminded of a vital English tradition of rural and nature writing, from Gilbert White, Richard Jefferies, W.H. Hudson, to Edward Thomas.' (p. x)

In the same issue of *Archipelago* there is also an essay by Andrew Hadfield called 'State of Play' that quotes Stuart Maconie several times. This reminded me of Maconie's *The Full English: A Journey in Search of a Country and its People* (Manchester: Harper North, 2023), a book that had been in my pile of books to read for too long. Writing about Swindon, he quotes Richard Jefferies on p. 57: 'Richard Jeffries (sic) in his history of Swindon³ wrote that "publicans discovered that steel filings make men quite as thirsty as hay dust"'

Andrew Dawes found a reference to Richard Jefferies within *John Moore True Countryman* (Blacksmith Publishing, 2007) by David Coles, the biography of author, naturalist, broadcaster and campaigner John Moore.

In the chapter detailing Moore's mixed fortunes as a writer during the 1950s, mention was made of Moore's 1957 book *September Moon*, concerning the casual workers who then came to Herefordshire to work on the cider apple harvest. The book garnered mixed reviews on publication, however the writer and poet Richard Church, a friend of Moore's and one time editor of Moore's works at J.M. Dent, wrote a more positive review,

Not since Richard Jefferies died, have we had a spokesman of the English country life, the very spirit of place, who can conjure the smells, sights and sounds as well as the mysteries, silences and portents of night and day down on the farm, along the winding lanes, and through the lush woodland as John Moore does.

Members may wish to be reminded that nine members of The Richard Jefferies Society visited John Moore's Museum in Tewkesbury in May 2016. A report of that visit may be found in the *RJS Newsletter Autumn 2016*, available on the Society website.

³ *Jefferies' Land: A History of Swindon and its Environs* by the late Richard Jefferies, edited by Grace Toplis (London: Simpkin, Marshall, Hamilton, Kent & Co., 1896), Ch. III: 'Swindon in 1867'.

Richard Stewart was sad to see, in the last newsletter, the reported demise of *The Countryman*. Over the years Richard had four articles published, including 'Story of My Heart' in the Summer 1998 edition. This explored Jefferies and 'the spirit of place', with four of the six illustrations based on Coate Farmhouse. The article was to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the birth of Richard Jefferies and included Day House Lane, Chiseldon, Liddington Hill, Burderop Down, Hodson Bottom and Coate Water, as well as the farmhouse where he was born. The two colour illustrations were of the nearby Downs and a sunset at Coate Water. Richard ended the article with Jefferies hoping that 'Ultimately the sunshine and the summer, the flowers and the azure sky shall become, as it were, interwoven into man's existence. He shall take from all their beauty and enjoy their glory'.

Andrew Dawes came across this quote in a copy of Kenneth Allsop's *Adventure Lit Their Star* (Penguin, 1972), a novel about the arrival of the little ringed plover to England (from the point of view of the bird). The first publishers quote a review inside from *Country Life* that reads 'I should place it among such works of fiction as Richard Jefferies' *Bevis* and those of W.H. Hudson ... a small masterpiece'.

An essay, 'Concerning Out-Door Books', by Brander Matthews (pictured right), ranging from Homer to Ellwanger, appeared in the June 1891 issue of *The Cosmopolitan*. In this extract Matthews inevitably contrasts Thoreau and Jefferies, first quoting from a letter of Thoreau's and concluding that Thoreau was master.

Brander Matthews (1852-1929) was a writer and critic and first professor of dramatic literature at Columbia University, New York, and a biographer of Shakespeare and Molière.



'I have lately got back to that glorious Society called Solitude, where we meet our friends continually, and can imagine the outside world also to be peopled. Yet some of my acquaintances would fain hustle me into the almshouse for the sake of society, as if I were pining for that diet, when I seem to myself a most befriended man, and find constant employment.'

There was an Englishman who died a few years ago and is classed by many with Thoreau; but the essential difference between them is that Richard Jefferies never could have written this paragraph from Thoreau's letter. Jefferies never seemed to himself a befriended man—if I read aright Mr. Walter Besant's kindly biography.

Jefferies did not find constant employment or, at least, he lacked Yankee faculty to turn his gifts to account. He had none of the brag and swagger of Thoreau, but he lacked also the core of stalwart manliness which made the American anxious to stand up and be counted when John Brown was hanged.

Jefferies was feebler in fibre, more feminine, more of a vine than an oak. Nor had he the wit and the saving humour of Thoreau. In an essay on Nature and Books, rather rambling than coherent, Jefferies tells us that he had duly studied Greek and Latin; but he writes as though he were wholly self-taught, as though he had lacked early advantages. His essays suggest a man not literary, not bookish, and almost uneducated. Yet he writes well in his own fashion, for he is telling the world what he has found out for himself; and no one ever did that and wrote ill. His range was even narrower than Thoreau's but his observation was both wider and deeper. His style is individual; it has colour; it has juice and sap; but it is not like Thoreau's, the style of a master. Mr. Lowell tells us that there are sentences of Thoreau's 'as perfect as anything in the language, and thoughts as clearly crystallized.' Now, no one, not the most partial critic, could make such a claim for Jefferies.

Andrew Dawes found a few references to Richard Jefferies within *Spirit of Place—Artists, Writers & The British Landscape* (Thames & Hudson, 2020) by Susan Owens. This book explores literary and artistic works influencing our own interpretation of the British landscape.

The frontispiece is reproduced directly from the Gertrude Hermes' wood-engraving frontispiece of the 1938 edition of Jefferies *The Story of My Heart*.

The chapter exploring the influence of Victorian writing, under the heading 'Feeling', referenced Jefferies a number of times. Unlike urban-based authors Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins the author states Jefferies—'was a country child'—who could write with authority on what would happen if the land stopped being cultivated. To emphasise this mention is made of Jefferies' 'science fiction novel' *After London*. Later within a sub-chapter 'Spirits of Place', an overview of Jefferies' memoir *The Story of My Heart*, highlights Jefferies' 'soul thought' emotional process.

A final reference to Jefferies comes within a lengthy discussion of the influence of the Greek god Pan. In a reference to E.F. Benson's 1912 story *The Man Who Went Too Far*, the author suggests this work comes close to parodying Jefferies' own memoir, with Benson's protagonist Frank Halton 'prostrating himself on the turf and burying his face in the daisies and cowslips in a Jefferies-like ecstasy'.

Gideon Perret came across this not unexpected citing in Clover Stroud's *The Giant on the Skyline: On Home, Belonging and Learning to Let Go* (London: Doubleday, 2024). It is an exploration of the meaning of home. Stroud's life had taken root in rural Oxfordshire (probably Uffington) near the ancient Ridgeway and its hills, but her husband Pete's work has taken him to Washington DC. Her writing is often breathless, but when she does take a breath, talking to the locals, or climbing the hills, we get beautiful contemplative passages. She opens with a description of her ascent of Uffington Hill. On p. 97 she recalls her teenage years living in Minety when she and her older sister (who died in 2019) would visit the infamous memorial sarsen stone near Barbury Castle and read the words that 'somehow made us both feel that all wasn't lost'.



In his monthly column 'Country Mouse' in *The Oldie* (Spring 2024), Giles Wood cites from Jefferies' 'January in the Sussex Woods' (*Life of the Fields*): 'If men should acquire the art of flying, there can be no doubt that migration would become the custom, and whole nations would change their localities.'

A city break staying at an Airbnb is probably not what Jefferies had in mind but Giles recounts his trip to Lisbon only to find what modern-day complications meant. By the time he had learned the ropes of Lisbon it was time to leave.

The Henry Williamson Society Newsletter issue 30 (March 2024) contains the text of a fascinating talk given to their 2023 AGM weekend by HWS Chairman, Robert Walker, about HW's book *The Peregrine's Saga*, to mark the centenary of its publication. On the half-title page of the first edition of that book, he said, are some opinions of HW's earlier book of nature stories, *The Lone Swallows*. Most of those comments were complimentary and many refer to Richard Jefferies, for example, the *Glasgow Citizen*: 'The mantle of Jefferies has fallen on Mr Williamson and he is worthy to wear it' and *Northern Whig*: 'It is Jefferies at his best, Jefferies in his most spontaneous natural mood.'

In confirming that he is happy to be quoted in this Newsletter, Robert said, 'Henry was always aware of his debt to Jefferies—especially in his earlier works'.

Valerie Haworth found the following citation in *The Letters of T.E. Lawrence of Arabia* ed. David Garnett, 1938, and Spring Books, London, 1964 p.819 and in *T.E. Lawrence Letters Volume IX—‘T.E. Lawrence correspondence with Henry Williamson’* (Castle Hill Press, 2000) p.166. Lawrence was a friend of and regular correspondent with Henry Williamson and in a letter dated 11th December 1934⁴ from the Ozone Hotel, Bridlington, Yorkshire, apparently in the context of a comment by HW about the difficulty of selling books, he wrote:

You write almost disarmingly well. You write better than Richard Jefferies, splendid fellow though he was. Better for me, that is: I feel more heart and see less eye, in you. You look for the unusual, he for the average. Of course he had an awful life. No Alvis,⁵ no country contentment, or comfort anyhow. Few concerns apart from earning, and no war to light his background.

Gideon Perret reports that *Hedgeland: A Wild Wander around Britain’s Greatest Habitat* (London & White River Junction, Vermont: Chelsea Green Publishing, 2024) is an engrossing book diving deep not only into the ecology of the humble hedge, but also into the English language and English culture. The author, the Wiltshire-based writer Christopher Hart, sometimes uses epigraphs to give his chapters a fitting introduction. The epigraph to chapter 4 on page 110 is taken from Richard Jefferies’ ‘The Pageant of Summer’ (*The Life of the Fields*):

Watching the line of the hedge, about every two minutes, either near at hand or yonder a bird darts out just at the level of the grass, hovers a second on labouring wings, and returns as swiftly to the cover. Sometimes it is a flycatcher, sometimes a greenfinch, or chaffinch, now and then a robin, in one place a shrike, perhaps another is a redstart. They are flyfishing all of them, seizing insects from the sorrel tips and grass, as the kingfisher takes a roach from the water.

Observing the Countryside and the Seashore by Leslie Jackman (Michael Joseph, 1990) contains Jefferies’ advice ‘Never omit to explore a footpath, for never was there a footpath yet which did not pass something of interest’ (‘Footpaths’, *Nature Near London*).

In his editorial note⁶ Yash Bhagwanji (Florida Atlantic University) looked back at the last ten years of work achieved and published in the *International Journal of Early Childhood Environmental Education* (27 June 2024) and the further research still required to show the ‘benefits of nature-based learning experiences on children’s development, motivations, and educational

⁴ HW’s daughter-in-law Mrs Anne Williamson has noted that the letter was apparently misdated, as HW’s reply was dated 10th December.

⁵ Referring to HW’s beloved Alvis motorcar.

⁶ https://naturalstart.org/sites/default/files/journal/4_final_editorial_note_bhagwanji_june_27_2024.pdf

outcomes.’ He includes a quote from Jefferies’ *The Life of the Fields*: ‘The exceeding beauty of the earth, in her splendour of life, yields a new thought with every petal. The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live... all else is illusion, a mere endurance.’

In her introduction to Dillon and Davidson’s *Downland* (see cover) Maura Dooley opened with a quote from *The Amateur Poacher* (1879): ‘Those only know a country who are acquainted with its footpaths. By the roads, indeed, the outside may be seen; but the footpaths go through the heart of the land.’

Март Яфаров is in the process of translating *Bevis* to his native Russian and has been seeking help on the Society’s Facebook page for the meaning of words that he doesn’t understand. The first query was the word ‘stole’ used in the context of ‘stoles of willow’ and ‘Ash-stoles and poles’ that our members, apart from congratulating him on undertaking a Herculean task, described as the pollarded stump of a tree.

Jason Kelly, Department of Theology and Religious Studies, University of San Diego, has written a most interesting and in-depth essay for a special issue of the religious journal *Religions* titled, ‘Richard Jefferies’ Mystical Vision of Nature.’ He closes with ‘we can keep *The Story of My Heart* close at hand to reflect upon our moral duty to the earth and each other. Such a wonderful story is ultimately designed to inspire us to turn off the screen, leave the house, and “Go straight to the sun, the immense forces of the universe, to the Entity unknown; go higher than a god; deeper than prayer; and open a new day”.’ Read the essay at: <https://www.mdpi.com/2077-1444/15/8/910>

~~~

From the Vice Chair continued from p.3

Lastly, the 2025 Spring Lecture which follows our AGM next April will be presented by Michael Malay the winner of our Richard Jefferies Award for Nature Writing 2023 for his book *Late Light*. Michael was very keen to meet us in person and so please try and come along to the museum if you can. A reminder of this will appear in our Spring newsletter. In the meantime I recommend everyone read Michael’s excellent book.

Finally, you will probably have noticed that I have mentioned 1874 a couple of times already. 2024 marks the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Jefferies’ marriage and the publication of *The Scarlet Shawl*. In 1874 he also submitted a proposal for a new magazine. He said ‘... Such a magazine would be really *read*, & not picked up & thrown down again.’ I think this a perfect description for our newsletters. Enjoy the read.

## REV. GOODMAN'S 'A NATURE STUDENT'

*Gideon Perret*

Gideon Perret, a German member of the Society and an English teacher, ordered a copy of *Jefferies' Land* in March and was surprised to find an interesting newspaper article about Jefferies pasted onto several pages of the book and queried whether the Society had come across it before—we hadn't. The article titled 'A Nature Student' by Rev. John H. Goodman bore no date or clue as to where it might have been published. Gideon bought the book online from World of Books (based in Goring) bearing an ex-Bath library label. Gideon's reflections on the essay follow.

The newspaper article about Richard Jefferies simply called 'A Nature Student' by Rev. John H. Goodman that I found pasted onto several pages of my copy of *Jefferies' Land* is not only very well written and informative, it is also intriguing from a certain perspective. In the first sentence Goodman describes Jefferies as 'so peculiarly English, we might even say insular, in his prejudices', before he continues by stating that '[h]is pictures will be remembered in ages yet to come as being the best description of English country life in the reign of Queen Victoria'. And yet Goodman goes on to say a little later that '[i]f you place the compasses there [at Coate Farm] and draw a ten mile circle you have Jefferies Land'. Within this small circle, however, Jefferies 'saw wonders in common things, and found the wide world nestling at the bottom of his garden'. And though '[h]e read everything that came in his way (...) his greatest book was the great green book of Nature'. Indeed, for Jefferies nature was a book to be read. I am wondering, however, if Goodman himself was a *Nature* student as well, *Nature* being the book-length essay published by the Concord sage and Transcendentalist Ralph Waldo Emerson in 1836.

That nature might be approached as a text is not a notion peculiar to Emerson, and we mustn't forget that Emerson's transcendental ideas were influenced by German Romanticism. His writings, however, return to that notion with frequent insistence. Emerson himself is not mentioned in Goodman's article, instead he refers to John Burroughs and Henry David Thoreau, who he calls Jefferies' 'two Transatlantic cousins'. It is these two that Goodman seems to have in mind all along, Thoreau, Emerson's protégé, in particular. Consider this sentence from the first paragraph: 'And if our island be little and tight, to him [Jefferies] at any rate it was an epitome of the wide, wide world.' I can hear echoes of Thoreau, who famously said, 'I have traveled a good deal in Concord', an almost heroic exaggeration. And yet, in and around Concord he saw more than most of us could see in the wide world. Just like Jefferies, who

‘saw more in a few square yards of grass than most of us could discover in roaming over a continent.’ Goodman might also have William Blake’s ‘world in a grain of sand and a heaven in a wild flower’ in mind when he says, ‘[a] grain of wheat was to him a tiny man or woman wrapped round about with a garment and settled to slumber’. Or perhaps even Walt Whitman, whose *Leaves of Grass* was published in 1855? Jefferies, Burroughs and Thoreau reading nature as a text—Goodman manages in a few brushstrokes to convey this idea to his readers.

And still, if only as an afterthought, I keep wondering if Jefferies might also have been ahead of his time. Thoreau’s writings are speckled with episodes that do not show him reading nature. Instead he bodily engages with it, thereby becoming part of nature, a very modern and ecological idea. The episode from the chapter called ‘Brute Neighbors’ in *Walden* comes to mind, in which he playfully chases a loon, he himself being part of that spectacle in nature. This is different from what Wordsworth did in the Lake District. His *mind* ‘dances with the daffodils’, not his *body*. Or as the poet Gary Snyder has so succinctly put it in a collection called *No Nature*: ‘Nature not a book, but a *performance*’.

~~~

Editorial Notes

John Henry Goodman was born in the village of Wroxton, near Banbury, Oxfordshire in 1847, the son of an innkeeper and bootmaker. His birthplace, the White Horse Inn, is still a pub to this day and a Grade II listed building.



White Horse Inn, Wroxton; the birthplace of Rev. John H. Goodman.

By 1861 the Goodman family had moved to the Black Horse Inn where his father, William, was also postmaster. William was born in the village; his wife Martha Greenway was born over the county border in Warwickshire.

According to the obituary for John (*The Banbury Guardian*, 8 December 1938) 'Colonel and the Baroness North took a great interest in him and helped considerably in his education.' He worked as a clerk in a solicitor's office but in 1870 was accepted as a candidate for the Wesleyan ministry at Didsbury College. Three years later he married Sarah Austen in Maidstone, Kent. He was a very popular preacher and for 45 years had many circuits around the country but mostly in London; he was always welcome at his native home village. In August 1935 a new Methodist chapel was opened in Wroxton 'as a memorial to his great service to Methodism'. In his later years he prepared international lessons for Sunday School teachers. The Methodist library contains at least three volumes of his sermons. By the time of his death on 4 December 1938 he was living at 21 Priory Road, Hornsey in north London. He left three sons and four daughters; one son continued in his father's footsteps as a Methodist preacher.

Rev. Goodman's name and the essay title 'A Nature Student' do not appear in any of the bibliographical references to articles about Jefferies—this article is a new discovery. There is an advertisement in *The Young Woman* (7 August 1903) for the August edition of *The Home Messenger* (both published by Horace Marshall and Son) that lists, amongst the contents, an article by Goodman titled 'Holidays and how to use them'. There is also a report in the *Birmingham Daily Post*, 24 December 1891, of a talk he gave: 'What Should a Wesleyan Minister Read?', but the report does not mention Jefferies. Perhaps 'A Nature Student' was also printed in *The Home Messenger* but the date cannot be established.

He concluded his article 'A Nature Student' mentioning that Jefferies would have liked to be burned on a funeral pyre on top of a hill but, instead, he 'does sleep in a singularly beautiful spot near Worthing' which Goodman must have visited:

The great sun whose flame was to him the breath of life burns there in heaven; and the wind—the wind that told him so many secrets—blows through the grass blades; and the birds, his chosen companions, who never flew when he watched them, make that cemetery their orchestra; and the hum of insect life, which to him was an intelligible language, is there incessant. Within sight of the Downs he loved so well, within hearing of the sea, whose full life imagined to him the possibilities of the soul, he sleeps, and his passionate heart is stilled forever.

‘LOVERS OF NATURE’

Peter Robins

Jefferies, White and Thoreau were the subject of an anonymous, critical letter published in *The National Observer*, 9 July 1892.

‘LOVERS OF NATURE’ [To the Editor of *The National Observer*]

Ramsgate, 5th July, 1892

SIR,—I have lived several years in the tropics and have wintered many time in the cold regions of America. I have resided in or visited the chief cities of the world, and at all times and in all places have been a student of art and nature, and years ago I underwent a thorough scientific training, and yet I am puzzled, for I find in this country at the present moment a gigantic conspiracy for the apotheosis of mediocrity and the canonisation of the commonplace reporter on nature. In the last century an industrious parson—Gilbert White—recorded in a series of undistinguished letters certain rather superficial observations (superficial, that is, to a scientific mind) on birds and animals, with many blundering errors; and the great minister, the public, now writes that pleasant gentleman down a divinity; and yet he was neither artist nor scientific man, and in no way comparable or to be spoken of in the same breath with the scientific MacGillivray¹ and Naumann.² As a ‘lover of nature,’—a species including hop-pickers, photographers, water-colourists, and such grade cattle—MacGillivray proves most convincingly he had more of the poetic feeling than White or his inferior imitator, Jefferies—a person who would have been a journalist and whom you truly characterise as a mere ‘cataloguer’ of nature. Indeed, as Professor James has said of descriptive works on the questions: ‘I’d as soon read descriptions of the New Hampshire wells as his.’ If Jefferies was a great man, so are all out-door photographers, British water-colourists and that ilk. Jefferies was in sooth a poor imitator of Thoreau, who was more of an artist and a thinker, in addition to his Bradshaw (of railway fame) like powers. Thoreau established a convention (a poor thing, too) and Jefferies copies him, even to his suggestions for symbolical pictures of

¹ Ed: William MacGillivray (1796-1852) Scottish naturalist and ornithologist, author of *A History of British Birds* (1837).

² Ed: Johan Friedrich Naumann (1780-1857) German ornithologist regarded as the founder of scientific ornithology in Europe, author of *The Natural History of German Birds* (1820).

the seasons. Jefferies gave us slender information on various subjects, and such information as is known to every rustic. Indeed, one could not snare a hare according to Jefferies and how paltry and superficial his knowledge of such matters was may be seen by comparing that monument of dullness just now *The Gamekeeper at Home*, with the life of a real gamekeeper reviewed by you.³ And yet Cockney journalists praise Jefferies and a band of mattoids⁴ imitate him—the describer of Landseer’s lions as true to nature and very ‘fine and large’ art.

Sir, you have done much in teaching the Philistines that Mr. Whistler is an artist and the British water-colourist is not. Cannot you teach them that, if they wish to read about birds, there are MacGillivray and Seebohm⁵ and if they desire to read of the open air, they must seek the writings of artists like Pierre Loti?⁶ Bret Harte and the author of *Fo’c’stle Yarns*⁷ are ‘lovers of nature,’ but in addition men of genius, and as far above the mattoid dullness seriousness of Richard Jefferies and his many imitators, as Mr. Whistler is beyond the ordinary water-colourist or photographer. But can you explain why the dull and mediocre are boomed? Can it be because they are British? Or, is it the usual conspiracy of mattoids against genius. I ask you because you alone raised your voice against the revival of the Tom-Tit Cult—I am, etc.

A ‘LOVER OF NATURE’ AND OF ART AND SCIENCE

~~~

A response was published the following week (16 Jul) over the initials A.P.

Norwood, 11<sup>th</sup> July, 1892

SIR,—At the risk of being considered a dull or ‘mattoid’ person—whatever the latter adjective may denote—I venture to enter a protest against the statement of your Ramsgate correspondent regarding Gilbert White and Jefferies. As a humble lover of nature and art, I entirely fail to see in what respect the works of these authors are inferior to those of MacGillivray or Seebohm. The purpose and scope of such works are indeed so different

---

<sup>3</sup> Ed: *The Autobiography of an English Gamekeeper: John Wilkins of Stanstead Essex* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1892).

<sup>4</sup> Ed: A person of unbalanced mind. A borrowing from the Italian, coined by criminologist Cesare Lombroso in 1891. A later use of this word appears in P. H. Emerson’s *Naturalistic Photography* (London: Dawbarn and Ward, 1899): ‘And there can be insane impressionists and idealists, as lunacy students know, as well as mattoid impressionists, as was the late Richard Jefferies in literature, and, say Ruskin in art,’

<sup>5</sup> Ed: Henry Seebohm (1832-1895). Amateur ornithologist, author of books on birds of Britain, Japan and Siberia.

<sup>6</sup> Ed: See ‘Some Aspects of the Work of Pierre Loti’, *RJS Soc. Journal* 2020 No.35.

<sup>7</sup> Ed: Thomas Edward Brown (1830-1897). London: Macmillan 1881.

that they cannot properly be compared at all. If we desire strictly scientific natural history we of course turn to MacGillivray and Seebohm; but the ordinary mind is apt to remain unsatisfied with mere details, however accurate, as to the configuration and habits of birds. The learned treatise on ornithology, which is the only book for superior persons, may prove dry as dust to the wayfaring man. For, in our walks abroad we meet with many phases of nature and of animal life, which the scientific chronicler altogether overlooks; and these aspects of natural history are admirably set forth in the literature which your correspondent affects to despise. Every intelligent reader knows that neither White nor Jefferies professes to be more than discursive amateur naturalists. Their observations are, however, admitted to be wonderfully accurate on the whole, and their works have probably done more to attract people to the love and study of nature than whole libraries of the dry-as-dust literature. In what then consists the 'gigantic conspiracy for the apotheosis of mediocrity?'...

[the rest of the letter concerns Whistler and water-colourists]

~~~~~

This challenge prompted the writer of the first letter to restate his case in the issue of 23 July, 1892.

Broadstairs, 18th July, 1892

Sir,—I have no time to waste on the writer from Norwood—or was it Clapham? And I am compelled to doubt his sincerity, moreover; for had he read his MacGillivray, he would have found several papers wherein that author takes the wayfarer and 'lover of nature' afield, and shows him bird life discoursing in dialogue, after the manner of Master Piscator and his pupil. These papers prove MacGillivray to have been a man of artistic insight as well as being profoundly learned and scientific. Therefore, to class such men as 'dry-as-dust,' shows that either 'A.P.' has not read the papers in question, or he is deliberately insincere. And as yet it matters not which, for his remarks on 'Art' prove him in the street, where I will leave him with his Jefferies, that guide to the tom-tit and the groundsel.

—Yours etc,

THE WRITER OF THE LETTER

P.S.—By-the-by, 'A.P.' has wilfully misrepresented me. I never said 'the water-colourist is not an artist,' but the "British" water-colourist,' etc., and every one knows to whom that refers. Is 'A.P.' a British water-colourist, or mayhap a journalist?

No further correspondence on this subject was published after this issue.

FIELD AND HEDGEROW

A.E.W. Greenock

Jefferies' work had been appraised by many amateur and professional critics over the years, but an unusual twist was added by *The Academy and Literature* when it set a competition for its readers for the best criticism of any book, old or new, which the competitors had read that year. Thirty-five entries were received and the best five printed in the issue of 2 May 1903. One of them was an insightful entry by A.E.W. Greenock about *Field and Hedgerow*. The winner was a review of Mark Rutherford's *Clara Hopgood*.

'FIELD AND HEDGEROW'

THE secret and open way of wild things, the changing subtleties of sky and wood, the voice and sweep of onrushing winds—these are part of the open-air freedom which Jefferies knew, loved and enjoyed. But there is an undercurrent of almost defiant sadness, which reveals his peculiar temperament, and shows that while his gifts of vision and of knowledge are supreme, he has not the joy of the entire acceptance of Nature's order which we find in White of Selborne. The imagination of Jefferies every now and then shies at reality, and he turns abruptly aside from those pleasant ways along which, for the most part, we pass with a sense of wonder and delight. Like Hamlet, he sometimes considers too curiously, and so we come across thoughts like these:—"The earth is all in all to me, but I am nothing to the earth; it is better to know this before you are dead.' This may be true, but it is a truth which need not have been set down in the place where it is to be found. The brighter 'woodnotes' of Jefferies jar in these subjective moods and frequently unprofitable moralisings, which break the even flow of refined enjoyment which he has the power of exciting. We must accept so instructive and adequate a writer with all his limitations. If he erred at all it was in his passionate devotion to truth. He could not rest content with external beauty, but he sought to wrest from Nature her deeper meanings; and as happens with all who ask questions which are unanswerable, he leaves an impression of unrest and defective happiness which saddens, while it cannot lessen the value of his contributions to the mystery and poetry of Nature.

A SHOCKING DEVICE

Jean Saunders



DIRECTIONS.—Connect two metallic cords or wires with the Sockets in the end of the Box, and apply the handles connected with the other ends of the metallic cords to any part of the person through which it is desirable to pass the current of Electricity. Then turn the Crank, regulating the strength of the current by the speed, and by the Knob at the end of the Box; it being desirable to increase the strength only to that degree most agreeable to the patient. It is less unpleasant to the patient if wet sponges are placed in the ends of the Handles, and these applied to the skin, as they prevent the prickling sensation. The sponges should *never* be put inside of the Box whilst wet, as they rust the machinery. In applying it for Toothache, Tic-doloureux, or Neuralgia, the operator takes one handle and places his fingers or sponge over the part affected, while the patient holds the other handle. In applying it to the foot, place one of the handles in the water with the foot, and hold the other in the hand, or apply it to any other part of the person. The Bearings and Spring must be oiled occasionally.

FIRST CLASS PRIZE MEDAL AWARDED TO JOSEPH GRAY & Co., TRUSS WORKS, SHEFFIELD, AT THE INTERNATIONAL EXHIBITION, LONDON, 1862, FOR EXCELLENCE IN THE MANUFACTURE OF SURGICAL INSTRUMENTS.

Regular viewers to antique programmes on the television will have seen Electric shock devices that come up regularly for sale on these shows. They don't fetch huge money but arouse much amusement that Victorian people believed that receiving electric shocks could treat almost every conceivable

ailment including toothache, cancer, tuberculosis, diabetes, gangrene, heart disease, and lockjaw.

The example pictured opposite bears the label 'Improved Patent Magneto-Electric Machine for Nervous Diseases'. The operator placed two terminals on the victim and turned the handle to deliver a mild electric shock. The faster the machine was cranked, the greater the current. If the discomfort was too great the instructions recommended that a wet sponge should be placed between the terminals and the body.

Richard Jefferies' letter sent from Coate to Aunt Ellen Harrild and dated 12 July 1868:

Thank you for the box of books—before it has come—thank you then for the purpose of sending it:—also too for the electric machine. How well I remember the time when dear Uncle [Thomas Harrild] brought it home with him. If you remember he gave us shocks, and showed us the electric spark in your closet in the breakfast parlour—shutting the door to make it dark. On one occasion more particularly I remember he and I were in your sanctum sanctorum of jam pots and pickles, and he charged the Leyden jar very strongly, and gave himself such a shock that he actually jumped up, off the ground.

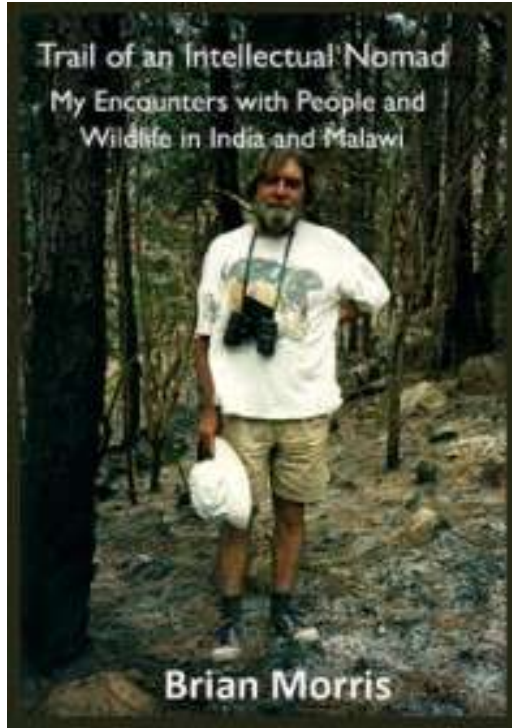
He offered me the machine once as a present to take home and I refused, if the truth must be told I believe from sheer cowardice. You know what an awful coward I used to be, especially I remember of thunder and lightning, and somehow or other I always connected that electric machine in my mind with the lightning. I was actually afraid to accept the machine. Many times since I have regretted refusing it, for it would have enabled me to perform many interesting experiments and assisted me greatly in my scientific studies. I shall not refuse it again, but thank you most sincerely for thinking of me. I shall carefully preserve it in remembrance of him, and I only wish he could be with you now to read this note and smile at my cowardice. For I was a coward in days gone by, especially of thunder. You remember the house being struck with lightning whilst you were at the Crystal Palace? Strange to say though it terribly frightened me at the time, I have never felt afraid of thunder since—that frightened my cowardice out of me.

Aunt Ellen sent the books and the machine straight away as a letter was sent in thanks just four days later to announce that 'the electric machine came unbroken—I was rather afraid of the glass getting smashed.'

Richard never mentioned the contraption again and I don't think it featured in any of his books.

I hope that his 'interesting experiments' mentioned in his letter to his aunt hadn't brought suffering to animals or humans.

BOOKS BY MEMBERS



Leaving school at fifteen, Brian Morris had a varied career in Malawi, before becoming a university teacher. Now Emeritus Professor of Anthropology at Goldsmiths College, University of London, he is the author of numerous articles and books on anthropology, religion and symbolism, hunter gatherer societies, concepts of the individual and radical politics. After writing much about Anthropology, Brian Morris finally shares about his life. While in his youth the academic future seemed very dim, an all consuming interest in nature was already there. The author does not only share the formative experiences in Malawi and India, but he also shares his intellectual development to become a Dialectical Anthropologist. His travel and research experiences are fascinating, and it is amazing how much fits into one life. *Trail of an Intellectual Nomad: My Encounters with People and Wildlife in India and Malawi* was published in paperback by Luviri Press on 20 February 2024 (ISBN: 978-9996080302 732 pp. £50)

LEE SCHOFIELD'S *WILD FELL* ZOOM TALK

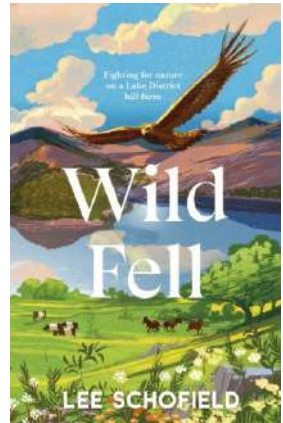
Andrew Dawes

It was very much second time lucky for members of the Society who logged onto Zoom on 11 March 2024 for a rescheduled and long anticipated talk by Lee Schofield, Senior Site Manager at RSPB Haweswater.

In 2023 Lee Schofield's book *Wild Fell: Fighting for nature on a Lake District Hill Farm* (Penguin) became the latest recipient of the Richard Jefferies Award. On receiving this Award Lee graciously agreed to present an online talk to the Society, scheduled for November 2023, detailing the management strategy at RSPB Haweswater in the Lake District. Unpredictably, as the meeting was about to begin last November, Storm Debi barrelled in over the Cumbrian fells taking with it much of the electricity supply. With Schofield's home suddenly having no power the talk was hastily abandoned and duly rescheduled for March 2024.

Following a brief introduction to almost 40 members who had joined the online meeting by Executive Council member Barry Sloan, who is also Chair of the Awards Committee, Barry then virtually handed the microphone over to Lee Schofield to begin his talk. Lee firstly thanked the Society for allowing him to speak on a subject dear to his heart, before briefly introducing his book and who he was to those who were coming to this story afresh. Lee had prepared an excellent slide presentation to accompany his words which opened with a stunning eagle-eyed view of the RSPB's Haweswater reserve to set the scene.

This empty mountainous scene was apt as Lee summarised what had been lost from this view—'holes in the landscape' as he called them—principally due to the activities of man in recent times. Though ironically many of the animal names given to this landscape remain. Eagle Crag no longer holds eagles, Heron Crag, a corruption of the Old English word for White Tailed Eagle, no longer hosts this bird. The ruined buildings of High and Low Loup no longer stand guard to packs of wolves roaming the slopes. Lee also outlined the current farmed landscape and practices in the hills, such as hefted



sheep, developed as a result of humans farming sheep flocks while living alongside this land predator.



Haweswater

The talk detailed an iconic species whose loss was to symbolise the work that was to follow, the golden eagle. Having been hunted to extinction golden eagles had returned naturally to Cumbria from their Scottish stronghold in 1969. Mournfully, after decades of conservation effort, the last resident golden eagle free-flying over the hills surrounding Haweswater Reservoir, and the last in England, died in 2015, ironically four years after the RSPB's landscape enhancement project began. Working with the reservoir landowners, United Utilities, the RSPB is now engaging with farmers and stakeholders to return the land not just to nature but to a nature-rich productive farmland which can support the local community.

Haweswater is a vast upland landscape covering some 30 square kilometres of glacially-carved mountains, sprinkled with native woodland, jutting crags, ink-dark bogs, isolated tarns, cascading streams and an alpine botanical community which Lee described as an assemblage akin to that found in southern Norway.

Lee's slides illustrated his passion for creating meanders in rivers, removing sheep off the high ground and replacing these with cattle and goats, ancestors of the native species which once roamed here. Juniper seedlings are being replanted. Drainage channels, once the preserve of post-war agricultural grant schemes, are now being filled in once again, in turn allowing lost upland tarns

and bogs to reappear. The work Lee and his team are undertaking is not a fanciful rewilding exercise excluding people in preference to the natural world, it is a never ending process aimed at rebalance, to achieve that middle ground where hill farming, food production, the rights of commoners and traditions are respected while nature slowly rejuvenates its lost ground. By 2050 it is hoped a different landscape will emerge, but one which would still be recognisable today.

There are detractors to this vision of course and Lee ended his talk with a summary of the negative views of the World Heritage Committee who visited Haweswater to outline their listing criteria while throwing a disclaimer at the RSPB that their presence was something of a wart on their reasoning behind the World Heritage Listing. In many ways it is fortunate those representatives outlined their thoughts directly to Lee as after careful reflection it prompted him to sit down and write *Wild Fell* in such an impassioned and eloquent way that it provides both a highly personal story, as well as documenting the highs and lows of this complex conservation project.

After a little over an hour the formal talk was brought to an end by Barry Sloan who thanked Lee for taking time out of his diary to provide such a stimulating summary of his work, before opening up the virtual floor to members to ask questions, of which there were a number, covering such topics as commoners' rights, badgers and eco-tourism and is what the RSPB is doing at Haweswater able to be implemented to other areas of Britain. An excellent appreciation of this talk through applause from the members brought this meeting, and Lee's talk, to a close.

On reflecting on this talk it seems a pity that Jefferies, himself a pragmatist in regards to change, was not able to listen to Lee's words. The consideration the RSPB is giving to local people, local economics and the rights of stakeholders, while influencing them into adjusting their custodianship of the land, to thereby allow wildlife return, without putting local families out of work is a process I'm sure Jefferies would have approved of. *Wild Fell* is a justifiable modern addition to the canon of nature writing which follows in the tradition of Jefferies' own output and to whom this Award bears his name.

A recording of the talk can be viewed on YouTube at
<https://youtu.be/-cPYMpQKrEE?si=7IE9Wgc1oSHbNe4b>.

MATTHEW OATES: BUTTERFLYING—TOWARDS SOME MEANING

Andrew Dawes



Matthew Oates (left) with Colin Corkerton, Richard Jefferies Museum, 27 April 2024.
From a photograph by Andrew Dawes.

Butterflying: Towards Some Meaning

Matthew Oates



Long-tailed Blue spotted flying over Jefferies' grave, late August 2023,
with Everlasting Pea growing a few yards away.

The 27th of April 2024 was a cool damp day, yet members and guests of the Richard Jefferies Society were transported to those warmer and sunnier days of summer as the Society Spring Lecture was given at the Richard Jefferies Museum. The Spring Lecture this year was with the well-known naturalist and butterfly expert Mathew Oates who has been associated with the Museum over the years. Matthew spent 25 years as an advisor on nature conservation to the National Trust, is a regular contributor to *The Times Nature Notebook* as well as being a renowned butterfly expert, not least about his great passion, the purple emperor butterfly.

Close to thirty people were seated in the Museum, with another twenty joining online when Matthew began his lecture titled 'Butterflying: Towards Some Meaning'. Matthew outlined to the audience that butterflies have a massive presence in society, and that we humans are hardwired to enjoy beauty with the butterfly encapsulating both the aesthetics and mysticism within our soul. Mention was made that an exotic migrant, the Long-tailed Blue butterfly, had been observed flying over Jefferies' grave in the summer of 2023, Matthew commented Jefferies would have fully appreciated the delight and wonder experienced by the observer upon encountering that rarity. With a quote from W.H. Hudson's book *Nature in Downland*, '...what we see we feel...' Matthew expanded his philosophy that we are rooted to a place or landscape and as we observe butterflies we can feel a belonging that lasts in our memory long after the physical event. A still point in a turning world as he sees it. For him butterflies are intriguing and bring with them freedom, hope, joy, consistency and change.

Taking a look back to classical Greek times, Matthew mentioned butterflies were deemed to have a connection other than a pure existence, with the souls of those slain in battle believed to depart the battlefield on the wings of butterflies. And Matthew reminded us that psyche in the Greek language represents the word for butterfly, with the goddess Psyche herself representing the human soul adorned with wings of a butterfly.

Moving to the Romantic movement Matthew outlined that they deeply understood this and looked upon nature foremost with beauty and wonder. He suggested that butterflies, seen on the wing for a few precious days each year, are undergoing ecstatic experiences, and that as we observe them we share that connection in our soul. Later this other romantic definition of nature was explored through meaning within William Wordsworth's 'Lines Composed a Few Miles above Tintern Abbey' and the opening lines of Edward Thomas's poem 'Home'. They contain something rooted to a place, less tangible but altogether more intense.

The Victorian age through to the early 20th century could arguably be seen as the zenith of butterfly interest in Britain. Whole areas like the New Forest were descended upon by butterfly collectors for a few short weeks in summer. It was big business and trade in butterflies was alongside with the rise of tourism. Obsessive butterfly collecting in the 19th century was possibly only as butterfly abundance was higher than it is today. Great collections were amassed such as that by Sir Vauncey Harpur Crewe, 10th Baronet of Calke Abbey who collected butterflies on an enormous scale.

Today, with fewer butterflies in the landscape, photography is popular and thankfully has replaced collecting. But photography, while satisfying the hunting instinct within us, worries Matthew. He suggests that the taking of the image stops short of where it could go, in collecting that image this only allows the observer to have the encounter experience but miss the higher meaning. That higher meaning was something Jefferies deeply understood and wrote about Matthew said.

Today butterflies remain a strong image within marketing and advertising, but it is science and ecology that are driving our knowledge of the butterfly life-cycle. But, as Matthew outlined, knowledge doesn't last long in a changing world, a changing climate or changing society. Human emotional connections however remain deep rooted well after the physical connection has passed and that memory never diminish as time passes. Matthew outlined the Welsh language is very much more in tune with this idea of deep connection, rootedness, a spirit of place with their word *Cynefin*, roughly translating as a personal relationship to a place.

Matthew brought his lecture to a conclusion posing his thoughts that Nature with, as he sees it, having a capital N, could be considered the cathedral to which we attend and worship. The lecture was brought to a close with a final thought, 'there is a better reality than the material world we subsist within'.

And with that thought a lively question and answer session took place before Matthew informally mingled with those at the Museum for the rest of the afternoon including non-Society members and a young couple who had driven over from Cambridge just to hear Matthew speak. All in all this was a very enjoyable and thought-provoking lecture on the deeper meaning of those butterflies we see, butterflies who may only be on the wing for a few short days but which enrich the spirit of place in which they inhabit in a deeper and longer sense.

A recording of the talk can be viewed on YouTube at
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xpofzgtRMo

RICHARD JEFFERIES AWARD FOR BEST NATURE WRITING PUBLISHED IN 2023

On 3 May 2024 *Late Light* by Michael Malay (Manilla Press) was announced as the winner of the best nature writing nominated in 2023. The book stems from Malay's experience as a young Indonesian-Australian newcomer to England faced with discovering how to be at home in an unfamiliar culture and landscape. Malay eloquently brings this personal narrative together with an account of his increasingly close engagement with the natural world around Bristol where he lives. Through this engagement and research, Malay confronts his own feelings of estrangement. He reflects on the crisis facing wildlife and the far-reaching consequences of every loss of species. 'It is a book about lost and vanishing things, as well as a book about the wonder and strangeness of being alive at this time,' he writes.

The focus on a group of what he calls 'edge species'—eels, moths, freshwater mussels, crickets—as opposed to those with more popular appeal, is a deliberate attempt to challenge 'inequalities of recognition, which in turn have influenced what we try to conserve, and what we neglect', and 'to show how, with a slightly different way of looking, we might discover enigmatic worlds in the familiar places where we live'. The result of this masterful weaving together of human and non-human perspectives, and the organic journey narrative that is shaped by the pull of the creatures themselves, is a distinguished literary achievement.

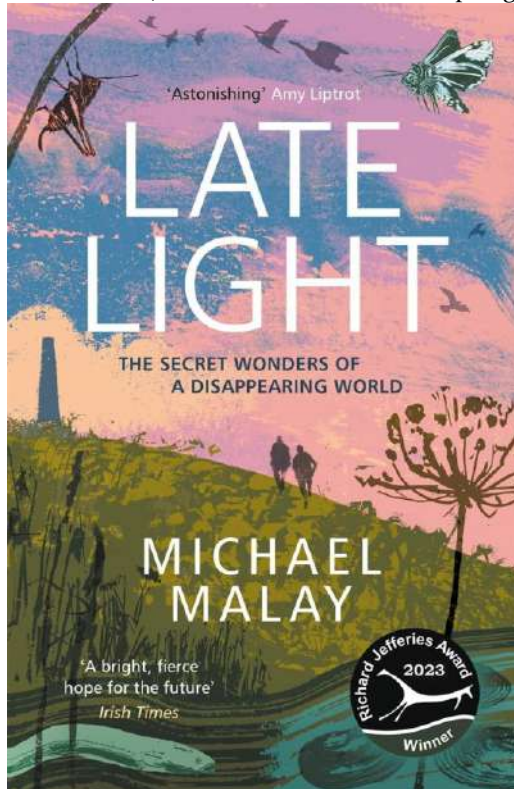
Malay's keen eye for detail and superb descriptive powers enrich *Late Light* throughout, and are reminiscent of some of Richard Jefferies' finest nature writing.

Barry Sloan, Chair of the Judges' panel said 'Against the background of a strong shortlist, this enquiring, thoughtful and moving work, strongly grounded in the writer's awareness of the interconnections between human life, culture and politics, and the natural world around us, impressed the judges as a highly enjoyable book which deserves a wide audience.'

Dr. Michael Malay is a lecturer in English literature and the environmental humanities at the University of Bristol. He has published articles on poetry, critical theory and animal studies, as well as creative non-fiction on eels, migration and climate change. *Late Light* is also on the Wainwright Prize shortlist (15 August 2024).



Dr. Malay will be talking about his book at the White Horse Bookshop, Marlborough on 28 September 2024 at 5.30pm as part of the Marlborough Literary Festival. Book at <https://www.marlboroughlitfest.org/tickets/> Michael will deliver the RJS Spring Lecture after our AGM on Saturday 5 April 2025 at the Richard Jefferies Museum (more information in the Spring 2025 newsletter).



Michael Malay said: ‘I’m delighted to be given this award, and especially honoured to be associated with the name of Richard Jefferies. I first encountered Jefferies’ work in 2009, not long after I arrived in England, and the experience of reading *Nature Near London*, alongside other ‘nature’ books pressed into my hands by university teachers, opened my eyes to a whole new way of seeing, relating and *belonging* to the landscape. That year, I also had the fortune of falling in with a group of amateur naturalists—birders, botanists, mycologists—and I mention this because, at the heart of *Late Light*, is a concern with gifts and gift-giving, as well as the vast networks of care, both human and non-human, that sustain and nourish us. It’s therefore a pleasure to look back at some of the roads that have led to this book, and to realise how lucky I’ve been with the company that I’ve had; and a joy to realise, too, that Jefferies has been a small part of that journey, a ghostly yet perennially up-to-date guide to that outdoors realm of “sunlight and pure wind”.’