

THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2025



Felise, the heroine of *The Dewy Morn*, painted specially by Lance Cattermole, R.O.I., for the dust jacket and frontispiece of *Beauty is Immortal* (The Worthing Cavalcade, 1948).

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY

2025

Mon 3 November 2025, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. BIRTHDAY LECTURE
Sophie Yeo will be talking about her prize-winning book *Nature's Ghosts*.

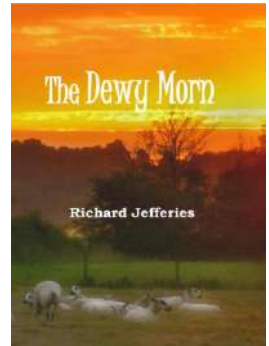
Mon 8 December 2025, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. STUDY DAY—*The Dewy Morn*

The Dewy Morn was listed among the top favourite Jefferies' novels by Members. The cover image of this newsletter reproduces the Cattermole illustration from *Beauty is Immortal* and is supported by the following text:

Felise walked up out of the water on the turf, and sat down at the edge of the shadow of the beech. She sat leaning on her left hand, her knees lying sideways, and her right hand on her ankle; the upper part of her form in shadow, her limbs in the brilliant light. The beams fell on her white rounded knees; the right knee being uppermost was entirely in light, but it cast a partial shadow on the left one. The rounded supple knee is where the form hinges; there all is poised. They are the centres from which beauty rises.

You might not agree that knees are the centre of beauty, but the Zoom meeting will be an opportunity to discuss this and many other matters arising from the novel. Do bring readings or topics from the book that you would like to focus on, or just come along and listen. Rebecca Welshman will host the meeting. She wrote the introduction to the Society's edition (published on 6 November 2009) and can be read in the *RJS Journal* No.40 (2025) pp.72–82 along with various reviews (pp.64–71) published in 1884 [good and bad!].

The Dewy Morn is available from the Hon. Sec. for a bargain price of £5 (incl. UK postage).

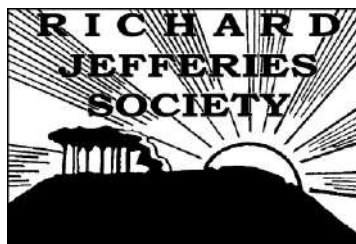


2026

Mon 5 January 2026, 7.30–9.00pm by Zoom. TALK by Patrick Dillon—**Richard Jefferies and environmental spirituality**

Many people are drawn to the work of Richard Jefferies because of its metaphysical qualities: his belief that all time is eternally present, and the past is a living reality that can be accessed through 'memory' embodied in the landscape. His intense consciousness of the world around him has resonance today as people again look to the land in search of deeper meanings. In this presentation, Prof. Dillon will make some connections between Jefferies' metaphysics and present day 'environmental spiritualities' as expressed in contemporary art and beliefs about 'sacred places', especially as they relate to ancient monuments.

Sat 18 April 2026, Annual General Meeting and Spring Lecture. Richard Jefferies Museum (1–4pm). Details will follow in the Spring 2026 newsletter.



THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848–1887).

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The Annual Membership is £15 for individuals/couples/organisations and £8 for UK students. Overseas members pay an extra supplement towards additional postal costs. Life Membership rates are under review in an attempt to counteract the long-term effects of Royal Mail's rapidly increasing postal charges. Subscriptions for 2026 are due on 1 January 2026.

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.

NEWSLETTER

The newsletters have been edited by Jean Saunders and Peter Robins, but the Autumn 2025 is their last. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Editors or the Society.

The deadline to submit material for the Spring Newsletter is 18 January 2026. Please send your contributions to Tim Walsh—contact as above.

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FROM THE CHAIR

Colin Corkerton

Welcome to the Autumn newsletter 2025. As you will see from reading 'From the Honorary Secretary' on page 4 Jean Saunders, after 20 years, is stepping down from her role as Honorary Secretary in October. Jean has been a very significant part of the Society during all this time and it is no exaggeration to say that the Society wouldn't exist in its current form without the vast input from Jean. Her contributions are too many to mention but suffice to say almost everything the Society has done during this time Jean has either led or been a major contributor to. It goes without saying it will be a hard act to follow but Jean is leaving us with a thriving Society. On behalf of the Executive Council and all members of the Society I would like to say a big thank you to Jean. As you might expect Jean will not be relaxing and will continue to be an active member of other groups she is involved with. Their gain is our loss. The good news is we have found a new Honorary Secretary, Tim Walsh, to take over from Jean and she introduces him.

At the same time Peter Robins, joint editor with Jean of our newsletters and the Journal, is also stepping down. Peter may not have been as visible to Society members as Jean, but as will be seen from this newsletter he has contributed numerous articles to our publications following up the many searches he has made to find items which have a connection to Richard Jefferies. Thank you, Peter, for all you have contributed.

As we say goodbye to Jean and Peter, we can take the opportunity to enjoy this last newsletter of theirs and as usual the content is wide ranging and continues to show the relevance of Richard Jefferies' writings. You will find items covering a possible film, music, people ranging from the garden designer Gertrude Jekyll to the suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst, newspapers, locations around the world, farming, poetry, religion and books by members. I'm sure I still haven't covered everything! In addition, you will find details of our online meetings during the autumn and winter. I look forward to seeing as many of you as possible at these meetings.

With the departure of Jean and Peter I'll finish by saying we are always looking for additional help in running the Society. If you feel you can contribute in any way, however small, we will be delighted to hear from you. Our contact details can be found on page 1 of this newsletter.

FROM THE HONORARY SECRETARY

Jean Saunders

Farewell to you all. I retire as Honorary Secretary on 18 October 2025 after 20 years in office. Thank you for your support.

I am absolutely delighted to inform you that Tim Walsh has volunteered to take over from me. He was co-opted onto the Richard Jefferies Society Executive Council on 24 June 2025 and appointed as assistant secretary. Tim will fill the role of Hon. Sec. until he can be formally elected by members at our next AGM planned for 18 April 2026. Tim is also a web designer—he is building a new website for the Society. Tim adds to a new team of Council members who bring refreshing and much-needed new blood to the Society.

In October 2005 I took over the Secretary's role from Phyllis Treitel—an amazingly dedicated and knowledgeable person—who followed in the footsteps of Cyril Wright. Both were experts on Jefferies' life and works. I knew nothing about either and hoped that my keenness and self-taught computer skills might add some value to the Society. Now virtually everything (including talks, articles, books, photographs, films, broadcasts, family history) is now on disc (25,000 files) and I have published over twenty titles alone for Petton books, the Society's imprint. I have enjoyed research and now I know far more about the Jefferies-Gyde-Baden ancestry than I do about my own!

I am particularly grateful to our Vice President, John Price, who was Chair for fourteen years during my time as a Society member living near Swindon, and to Andrew Rossabi, our President—both have helped and taught me so much. And thanks go to so many wonderful members who are now dead—Phyllis, George Miller, Mark Daniel, Hugoe Matthews, Eric Jones, Stan Hickerton, John Webb and Sheila Povey, to name but a few, who also undertook invaluable research and passed it on to me. Most of all I would like to thank Peter Robins—who has co-edited the newsletter and journal since I moved to Norfolk over 10 years ago. Peter's research work has been never-ending in seeking out long-lost and never-found articles by and about Jefferies and he is an eagle-eyed proof-reader too.

Please continue to send in your citations, articles and snippets of information—the newsletter is the richer for your contributions.



Tim Walsh (left) with Mike Pringle under the Mulberry Tree at the Richard Jefferies Museum in August 2022.

I leave a special note of farewell to Margaret Hunt albeit late in the day. It is with personal sadness that I only recently learnt about Margaret's death two years ago on 23 July 2023, aged 87. I had made several attempts to contact her and wondered why she had not responded.

Margaret was born to Cyril and Norma Wright on 1 April 1936. Cyril needs no introduction—as well as his very long association with the Richard Jefferies Society, he was a founder of the Peace Pledge Union. As a conscientious objector he worked on the land during the war, including a farm at Barn House in Brockweir, near Chepstow. The Wright family moved to Swindon around 1960 with Margaret's sister Marian and possibly her brothers Martin and John. Brockweir, however, was in Margaret's heart and there

she remained setting up home with her husband Robert at Spring Cottage. Margaret was a Life Member of the Society and she phoned me in 2008 to say that her husband had died. She was planning to move from her home in Brockweir to Cricklade and asked if we needed any help? So she became a regular guide on Wednesdays at the Richard Jefferies Museum and we had many conversations about her associations with the Avon Wildlife Trust and with Greyhound Rescue Wales. Margaret and Robert had adopted many rescued greyhounds that became their 'children'. She talked about her parents. My father was a conscientious objector too, so we shared a common bond in peace, but it was Margaret's mother Norma to whom she was most attached and who was in Cyril's down-trodden shadows, undeservedly so. Margaret expressed strong views on the welfare of animals and Nature. Margaret was also a Trustee for the Society. When I moved to Norfolk, she acted as the Swindon Secretary and took minutes for our Executive Council meetings from 2015 until the Covid lockdown when we started to use Zoom to meet instead—we still do.

In her Will Margaret gave instructions to be buried alongside her husband at St. Michaels' Church, Tintern Parva where a plot had been reserved. She joined Robert on 25 August 2023 which, I believe, was a warm sunny day. To those Society members who remember her, she will be missed as a friendly and helpful soul with a caring heart and a great volunteer.



Phyllis Treitel, Roy Burton and Margaret Hunt (right) outside the Gamekeeper's cottage in May 2009.

DOWN MEMORY LANE

As part of the contributions to the 75th anniversary of the Richard Jefferies Society, the following report is reprinted from the *Wiltshire Herald & Advertiser*, Friday, 16 June 1950. It took a further 10 years for Swindon Corporation to devote just one room as a Museum in the former Jefferies' farmhouse bought by them in 1926.

A RICHARD JEFFERIES MUSEUM? SUGGESTION AT SWINDON MEETING

The suggestion that Richard Jefferies' birthplace should be converted into a museum housing first editions of the author's works, photographs and other relics was advanced by Mr. S. George at the inaugural meeting of the Richard Jefferies Society, held at the Town Hall, on Tuesday [13 June 1950]. Through such a 'memorial' observed Mr. George, Swindon folk and other visitors could capture a more intimate knowledge of the author.

The Young People

To this museum, were it formed, added Mrs. F.J. Gay, children could make pilgrimages. It would not have to be a 'dry as dust museum, but a home for the spirit of Jefferies.' Young people would be catered for, either by a junior section or by allowing them to attend the Society's meetings, it was decided.

The constitution formulated by the sub-committee was read by Mr. Harold Adams, founder of the Society, who explained that its aims were to encourage and simulate 'admiration and love' for Jefferies' work. Other clauses were: 'To maintain careful observation on Coate Water and Coate Farmhouse, and to provide the means of meeting together in fellowship of those who sincerely love and admire his life and work.'

Hypocritical People

The Mayor, Ald. J. Bond, presided over the meeting. He was accompanied by the Mayoress. There was a strong tendency in Swindon for people to be hypocritical over Jefferies, said Miss K.M. Sewell, just as there was much hypocrisy at Stratford-on-Avon over Shakespeare's work. It should be the object of the society to promote a real understanding of Jefferies' books.

The sub-committee was congratulated on a 'splendid job of work' by Mr. H.E. Adams. Extracts from 'The Pageant of Summer' were read by Mrs. F.J. Gay.

Thanks to the Mayor and Mayoress and Mrs. Gay were moved by Mr. H.E. Adams. Officers elected were: President, Mr. Samuel J. Looker; vice-presidents, Mr. W. Bramwell Hill, Mr. P. King and Mr. F. Davenport; secretary, Mr. H.E. Adams; treasurer, Miss R. Vick; auditors, Mr. A. Norman and Mr. W.J. Rose. Executive committee: Mrs. F. Gay, Miss E. Manning, Miss Jean Day, Mr. H. Whiting, Mrs. Hiding and Mr. S. George.

RICHARD JEFFERIES MUSEUM (*RJS Annual Report*, 1960): The establishment of a Jefferies Museum in Coate Farm house has been one of the aims of the Society since it was founded ten years ago and we are pleased to report that Swindon Corporation has this year established such a museum in the parlour of the old house. It was officially opened by the Worshipful the Mayor, Councillor Miss E.M. Millin on 24th June [1960]. Among those present were two nieces of Richard Jefferies, Mrs. D.R. Herbert and Miss C.E. Billing, and a cousin, Miss K.M. Sewell all of whom are members of the Society. After the ceremony Miss Billing presented a miniature of Richard Jefferies' mother to the Museum. Previously she had sent also the table at which Jefferies did his writing and an old oak chest belonging to him. The Museum contains in addition First Editions, manuscripts and photographs.

A GIFT TO THE SOCIETY FOR THE JEFFERIES MUSEUM (*RJS Annual Report*, 1961): Miss A.M. Abbey of Southwold, Suffolk a short while ago gave her cousin, Miss K.M. Sewell, a tiny gold-plated locket as a gift to the Richard Jefferies Society who will loan it to the Jefferies Museum. It contains two coloured pictures of Jefferies as a young man, one of which has hitherto been unknown to most of his relatives and to the Society. Miss Abbey, who is in her early eighties, is the daughter of Jefferies' cousin Eliza (Lizzie) Cox of Little Snodshill Farm, near Coate now demolished. Before Jefferies married Jessie Baden he was engaged to Lizzie Cox but because



of the cousinship both families opposed the engagement which was broken off. She later married William Abbey, a widower, and lived quite happily but she always cherished this little locket, Richard's gift to her. Her daughter also has loved it but now wishes it to be safely in the care of the Society for preservation in the Jefferies Museum at Coate Farm from whence it came. Miss Abbey writes: 'Here is a long-ago memory of Snodshill told me by my cousin Miss Fan Hall (also Jefferies' cousin). Firelight and candles, and the Jefferies young people sitting round the fire with their Cox cousins. My mother sitting next to Richard Jefferies and bending to look at the pencil sketch he was making of one of the company. Suppressed laughter between the young couple and everyone except my mother very cross because they were sure he (Richard) was making a caricature of one of them! Dear Richard, Dear Mother.'

NEWS AND THOUGHTS

Michael Bully was inspired to read Jefferies' *After London* after listening to the CD made by the folk group Bird in the Belly in 2022 based on the novel. Bully now plans to read a lot more but in the meantime he has put his thoughts about *After London* in his blog.¹ He starts by outlining the plot, then looks at Jefferies' life and moves on to discussing Edward Thomas's and Henry Williamson's interest in him (along with quotes from Jefferies' writing). He also includes the words of two of the Bird in the Belly band's Jefferies-inspired songs. Another big thank you is due to Bird in the Belly for bringing Jefferies to a new audience of admirers through their music.

The Richard Jefferies Museum Trust came across an interesting find by the farm gate that leads onto Dayhouse Lane. Dug up by rabbits around February 2025, a small brass plaque (about 1.8 x 4.5 cm) was revealed bearing the inscription

P. HERRING
JEFFERIES
FARM
COATE



Does anyone know what it is? Our best guess is a tag for a cow.

The name Herring is closely connected with the early history of Swindon and the villages around. The Coate estate was in the hands of the Herring family for several generations although the original farmhouse was built no later than the early 18th Century. Richard Jefferies' great-grandfather (also Richard) purchased the farm at Coate in 1800 paying Thomas Herring, yeoman, £1,100 for a house, outbuildings and land. After several more owners came and went in 1922 the property was sold to Percy George Herring. He farmed there for some 4 years and in 1926 some of Jefferies Farm was bought by Swindon Corporation.

¹ <https://bleakchesneywold.blogspot.com/2025/02/after-london-or-wild-england-richard.html>.

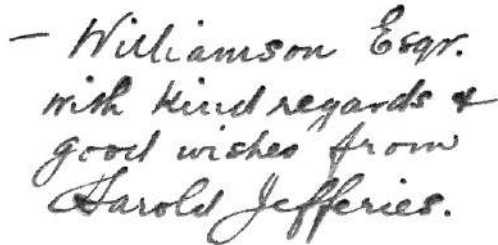
In March the Society was contacted by a film and environmental studies student at Emerson College, Boston, Massachusetts. She is working as a producer's assistant currently and her producer is interested in adapting *After London* into a screenplay. Initially they were seeking permission for the rights to do this. Given that Jefferies' writing is out of copyright, permission is not needed. We await to learn, with interest, about any progress on the project.

We now have a BlueSky page to replace the X account with a particular target of nature writers/readers and publishers to follow the Richard Jefferies Award. <https://bsky.app/profile/rjaward.bsky.social>

Evidently in this year's GCSE English exam Richard Jefferies was mentioned in connection to a historical lineage of nature writing with Jefferies' 19th century works influencing modern environmental literature.

Peter Faulkner has acquired an 1892 edition of *Red Deer* with a dedication from Richard Jefferies' son Harold. It is dated 25 November 1899 and it reads '—Williamson Esq./with kind regards &/good wishes from/Harold Jefferies.'

In 1899 the exact whereabouts of Harold is unknown. He was third mate on the *Tamar* from 1895-8 and was, presumably, on return from sea living with his mother and his sister Phyllis in 1899. By 1901 Jessie and Phyllis had moved to Ashford but Harold wasn't named on the 1901 census. The only known address previous to this was in Acton. It would be good to find out if Williamson might be a relation of Henry and why Harold sent him *Red Deer*.



— Williamson Esqr.
with kind regards &
good wishes from
Harold Jefferies.

Rev. Robin Stapleford never misses an opportunity to promote the words of Jefferies. In his latest contribution (July 2025) for his local parish magazine, he quoted a passage from 'Outside London' (first published on 17 January 1885 in *Chambers's Journal* and collected in *The Open Air*). Robin was extolling the delight gained over the last seventeen years of transforming his rectory garden to be in harmony with Nature, the pleasure that it had given him, and quoted: 'Those who really wish their gardens or grounds, or any place, [to be] beautiful,

must get that greatest of geniuses, Nature, to help them, and give their artist freedom to paint to fancy, for it is Nature's imagination which delights us.'

An album titled 'February Mountains' was released on 19 February 2025 and composed by Robinton Hobbs. It includes 'All Aglow'—an orchestral folk adventure, under 4-minutes long—that was put up on You Tube along with film shot at Coate Water and Coate Farm. The music is described as 'a luminous, string-driven piece that captures the wonder of childhood adventure' and inspired by the opening chapter of *Bevis* following the rise and fall of Bevis's handmade raft from eager launch to abrupt end. In private correspondence to the Society Ms. Hobbs wrote: 'It was a pleasure to put some music to the world of Bevis.' Described as: 'Playful violin and cello melodies dance like sunlight on water, building with joyful momentum before colliding with a mournful coda. A soundtrack for nostalgia, for boundless imagination—for the fleeting magic of a journey that ends too soon, but never truly fades'. The line-up of the musicians: on violin—Lisa Liu, viola—Marta Honer, cello—Ro Rowan, bass—Stephanie Payne, and guitar—Robinton Hobbs.²

Gazing out of the window of Hoar Oak Cottage (pictured right), the last remaining shepherd's dwelling on Exmoor, and the lonely path that leads to it, reminded John Shortland of Jefferies' *Red Deer* (1884), Ch. 1.

The farmhouses are now occupied by Scotch shepherds; if you knock on the door a Scotch face appears, and you are offered a glass of milk, to which you are 'varra' welcome.

John writes very fondly about his years visiting and working in Exmoor on his blog. He wonders if it was here, through this very window he photographed, that the lone figure of Jefferies—with notebook in hand—was watched as he made his way towards the farmhouses. John likes to think so.



² You can listen and watch 'All Aglow' here: https://youtu.be/_1CAZiAqbnA?si=a59gCdOLUXIbHb9c

Michael Malay gave a most thought-provoking Spring Lecture to the Richard Jefferies Society on Saturday 5 April 2025 that was held at the Richard Jefferies Museum and also broadcast to members via Zoom. The main title of the talk ‘**ONLY CONNECT**’, drawn from E.M. Forster’s *Howards End* [which, incidentally, mentions Jefferies and the spirit behind his writing] explored the broader issues of ‘Grammar, Ecology and Scale’ to demonstrate how everything is interconnected in Nature, that there are no edges and no separation between us and the land—we are the land and the land is part of us. Malay chose many names of species in different languages that were very precise words to illustrate a feature, a behaviour or their association with ecology—their closeness to the land; a symbolic way of speaking.

So many connections have been lost as a result of human greed and the profit motive to exploit land by ‘outsiders’. But for those with the emotional and spiritual connection to a place, for example, it has strengthened their resolve to protect and nurture it—hence, the protest movement has grown stronger.

Malay left with a quote from Raymond Williams: ‘We need different ideas [of the natural world] because we need different relationships.’



Michael Malay (third from left) with some of the audience under the mulberry tree.

On the theme of connectedness, this passage from ‘Trees About Town’ in *Nature Near London* came to Andrew Rossabi’s mind:

Besides the greater beauty of English trees, shrubs, and plants, they also attract the birds, without which the grandest plantation is a vacancy, and another interest, too, arises from watching the progress of their growth and the advance of the season. Our own trees and shrubs literally keep pace with the stars which shine in

our northern skies. An astronomical floral almanack might almost be constructed, showing how, as the constellations marched on by night, the buds and leaves and flowers appeared by day.

The lower that brilliant Sirius sinks in the western sky after ruling the winter heavens, and the higher that red Arcturus rises, so the buds thicken, open, and bloom. When the Pleiades begin to rise in the early evening, the leaves are turning colour, and the seed vessels of the flowers take the place of the petals. The coincidences of floral and bird life, and of these with the movements of the heavens, impart a sense of breadth to their observation.

It is not only the violet or the anemone, there are the birds coming from immense distances to enjoy the summer with us; there are the stars appearing in succession, so that the most distant of objects seems brought into connection with the nearest, and the world is made one. The sharp distinction, the line artificially drawn between things, quite disappears when they are thus associated.

And in discussion, after the Malay talk, Patrick Dillon shared many similar thoughts to Malay that are reflected in Dillon's latest book *Cultural Ecologies of the Land* (see p.41). A Swindonian contributor reminded us again [it was also mentioned in the *Downland* talk by Anna Dillon and Jonathan Davidson last November] of the importance of Liddington Hill to Swindonians. After a day's outing away from the town the prominent hill and its clump of trees greeted townsfolk back. It is a place of pilgrimage for many to lay ashes or tie ribbons or leave tokens in memory of a loved one—a special place.

And as an afterthought, bringing news up-to-date, the assault on the views from Jefferies' beloved Liddington Hill continue unabated with a planned new Bio Station on the Liddington side of the A417 next to Commonhead Roundabout that would open up new countryside to buildings. In an article in *Swindon Link* (4 July 2025), opposing the planned development in the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty—that is supposed to afford the land better protection including dark skies—Jefferies is quoted: 'Sweetly the summer air came up to the tumulus, the grass sighed softly, the butterflies went by, sometimes alighting on the green dome. Two thousand years! Stars, ruddy in the vapour of the southern horizon, beamed at midnight through the mystic summer night, which is dusky and yet full of light.' (*The Story of My Heart*)

Robin Stapleford wondered whether 'Jefferies can take credit as having made the earliest recorded comment on light pollution, the first stirrings of that phenomenon from the Victorian era. Presumably he wrote the following lines whilst living in Surbiton (1877–1882)':

Southwards, as I have said, there is a faint blue line of hills, with something of the mystery of hills. But northwards, over the furze, when it grows dark, there is a long, low arch of light. In summer, it might be mistaken for the glow which accompanies the progress of the midnight sun. If streamers shot up from it, it

would be recognized as the aurora borealis. As it is steady and does not flicker, it cannot be caused by a fire. This light is the reflection of London. When the sky is cloudless and the atmosphere clear, as after a dry north-east wind, the light is faint and low, and might be overlooked. Rain often blots it out altogether, and so does fog. But if there is a vapour in the air, not exactly cloud but a thickness, then it shines red and threatening. Once now and then it lifts itself higher and takes a dull orange tint. At intervals it assumes an alarming aspect. There then seem to be small fleecy clouds, possessed of great reflecting power, floating at a low altitude. These are lit up, sometimes with orange, and sometimes with crimson—a lurid glow as if London were burning. ('Seasons in Surrey', *The Old House at Coate*).

It is ironic to learn that Bath Spa University [who were behind the initial development proposals for Jefferies' Land to the east of Coate Water and the Museum] now runs a course that includes reference to Richard Jefferies, particularly drawing on *The Story of My Heart* and *After London*, as source material for students of design to understand elements of societal attitudes towards the climate and anxieties around the balance between rural/urban, people/nature and the concurrent Arts and Crafts Movement.

Worthing Heritage Alliance has produced a series of leaflets of Trails that include one about Richard Jefferies. The text was written by historian Chris Hare who also gave an online talk about Jefferies on 12 August 2025 to the Friends of the South Downs titled 'Richard Jefferies: A Man out of Time?' that focussed on Jefferies' Sussex years and, of course, his love of the South Downs. The leaflet³ provides a potted biography of Jefferies along with many quotes from his works. Well done to the Worthing Heritage Alliance for the initiative.

And whilst on the subject of Worthing, in June the Society was contacted by Paul Robards, a volunteer of the Friends of Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing. A wooden bench was broken that bore a small plaque with the inscription 'John Richard Jefferies 1848–1887'. Was it ours and, if so, did we want to replace it?

This mystery bench was totally unknown to the Society, it was certainly not ours, and its location was nowhere near Jefferies' grave or the Hudson-Jefferies Memorial Garden that was officially opened on 15 May 1991 by the Mayor of Worthing Borough as part of an Environment Week celebration.

³ The leaflet can be downloaded at <http://worthingheritagealliance.uk/wp-content/uploads/trails/WHT-09-JEFFERIES-TRAIL.PDF>



Further research by the Friends of Broadwater Cemetery revealed that Worthing Council had ordered the bench, along with a companion dedicated to W.H. Hudson, in August 2009. Both were placed in front of the Cross of Sacrifice (see picture above—Jefferies' bench on the right) amongst the war graves in this massive cemetery—a most odd and totally inappropriate place to locate memorial benches for both writers.

So, the answer was no, we did not want to replace it and suggested that the plaque might be used by Jefferies' grave or in the memorial garden.

The latest news (as of 9 August 2025) is that Worthing Borough Council has agreed to install three new benches—two by the Cross of Sacrifice and one in the middle of the cemetery—but there is no news as to where the dedication plaque for Richard Jefferies might be placed.

CITINGS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

Ruth Chambers recounted an article by Henry Williamson for the *Daily Mail*, 16 June 1928, titled 'A Fool in the Pyrenees'.¹ Williamson confesses to a foolhardy, near disastrous, event on a walking holiday in the French Pyrenees in May 1924 with Dominic Bevan Wyndham Lewis and Johnny B. Morton. There were late spring snows and Henry decided to take a solo expedition into the mountains. After a vertiginous climb to the snow-line, enjoying the sun, eagles and gentians on the way, Williamson followed a road etched into the side of a sloping precipice, when a rumbling above presaged a dreadful avalanche:

Many tons of snow and rock were hurtling down, each lump of ice or stone taking great spinning jumps as it preceded the avalanche. Terror made rigid my legs. I crept on somehow. I prayed, the first time since the war. I saw the face of Richard Jefferies and knew I should not be killed. Some unconscious force made with my left hand the sign of the cross on my chest. Immediately I stood unafraid. I saw a tunnel twenty yards away and ran along the loose parapet towards it. I fell on hands and knees in the shelter, while with a thunderous, rolling roar the avalanche came down and carried away the parapet of damp earth-bonded scree which my feet had trod moments before.

There is no further explanation in the article why such a specific vision of Jefferies had occurred to him *in extremis* some four years before. The incident is not mentioned again. Was it fact or a bit of fiction? But we all know that Williamson was a great admirer of Jefferies' writing and was the President of the Richard Jefferies Society from 1965–1974 and a hero-worshipper.

Colin Corkerton found this extract from an article in *The Bystander*, 14 June 1922.

Whirled into the Workhouse

How many people read Richard Jefferies these days? *There* was a man who knew how to handle the great summer problem. As you turned his pages you could hear the roses breaking into bloom and the bees humming. He was a bit of a sun-worshipper, too, and got very close to the mystery of things. He was one of those who could 'loose his soul for to out and run on hills that were old when the world begun.' I don't think that we are breeding that sort today. The world is moving at such a rate that unless you are hanging on to it by your teeth, you get whirled into the workhouse.

¹ The article can be read on the Henry Williamson Society website page that covers *The Innocent Moon*: <https://www.henrywilliamson.co.uk/bibliography/a-lifes-work/the-innocent-moon>.

The noted garden designer Gertrude Jekyll (1843–1932) wrote numerous books and magazine articles on the subject, but after Jekyll's death her nephew Francis Jekyll discovered among her papers an unpublished manuscript of another nature altogether. In *Gertrude Jekyll: A Memoir* by Francis Jekyll (London: Jonathan Cape, 1934) the author suggests the theme of the manuscript could have been influenced by Jefferies' *After London*:



This bias of her mind towards the idealisation of the past inspired her solitary excursion into the domain of romance. A manuscript story, entitled *The Death of Iron*, can be traced to the spring of 1903—a fantasy somewhat in the manner of Richard Jefferies' *After London*, in which she allows her imagination to picture a world suddenly deprived of iron and all its products—a de-industrialised England, compelled by the paralysis of machinery to return to elemental ways of living. As in Jefferies, the human interest, while not excluded, is centred in a somewhat conventional romance and kept subordinate to the main idea of the book. It is doubtful whether she intended it for publication, though the distinction of its style and outlook should assure it of a welcome.

Tony Hewitt cited *Rural Life in Victorian England* by G.E. Mingay (Book Club Associates, Swindon, 1976) as a source of half-a-dozen sizeable quotes from *Hodge and His Masters* that appear in Chapters 2 (Landowners), 3 (Farmers—Jefferies notes the plight of bankrupt farmers on the 1870s and the social inequalities suffered by the whole family), 7 (Professional People, i.e. solicitors), 8 (Trades people/inns/Saturday shopping). Mingay writes:

By 1880, as Richard Jefferies noted, the cottager bought almost everything and produced nothing for himself except vegetables—not even a home made loaf.

Prof. Gordon Edmund Mingay (1923–2006) was an agrarian historian and lecturer and a member of the British Agricultural History Society (President from 1986). He was the editor of *The Agricultural History Review* and the author of many titles that include *English Landed Society in the Eighteenth Century* (1963), *The Agricultural Revolution, 1750–1880* (with J.D. Chambers, 1966), and *The Gentry: Rise and Fall of a Ruling Class* (1976).

Tony Hewitt, F.R.G.S., B.Ed (History/Geography) points to Mingay's description of the 'hedge ale house' as opposed to the principal village inn in Jefferies' writing where the inn was the resort of farmers, dealers, carters, and skilled craftsmen rather than the agricultural labourers who supped in the fields. He wonders if Jefferies would get any enjoyment from describing a Weatherspoons or McDonald's today.

Brian Morris cited Rachel Holmes' widely acclaimed biography² of the radical suffragette Sylvia Pankhurst (pictured right around 1920³) who was deeply influenced by Jefferies' writings. Like Jefferies, Pankhurst was essentially a free spirit. She was a revolutionary socialist, anti-fascist and radical feminist. In common with William Morris Pankhurst was deeply engrossed by *After London* (1885) 'an apocalyptic vision of an environmental catastrophe caused by the degradations of antisocial capitalism' (p.95) and also interested in the works of Ruskin and Blake. A talented artist Pankhurst had helped to produce an illustrated edition of Jefferies' *The Open Air* but the book, unfortunately, was still in copyright and this never saw the light of day (p.200).



Valerie Haworth was delighted to read A.G. Street's *Country Calendar* (Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1935). He was a farmer, columnist and wonderful writer who wrote 'This afternoon I drove some eight miles to watch a combine harvester at work on a neighbour's farm and, that evening, while I was dipping into Richard Jefferies' *Wild Life in a Southern County* I came across this passage:

In the autumn after the harvest the gleaning is still an important time to the cottager, though nothing like it used to be. Reaping by machine has made rapid inroads, and there is not nearly so much left behind as in former days. Yet half the women and children of the place go out and glean, but very few now bake at home; they have their bread from the baker, who comes round in the smallest hamlets. Possibly they had a more wholesome article in the olden time, when the wheat from their gleanings was ground at the village mill, and the flour made into bread at home. But the coming of the mechanic has invaded the ancient customs; the very sheaves are now to be bound with wire by the same machine that reaps the corn. The next generation of country folk will hardly be able to understand the story of Ruth.

Sometime I feel like writing a similar paragraph, for the combine harvester has robbed the harvest field of as much charm for me as the self-binder did for Jefferies. He mourned the passing of the gleaners, and I feel tempted to mourn the passing of the sheaf and the stook. It is the same old story—each new method, while it may increase the efficiency of farming, robs my calling of some of its romance and charm.'

² *Sylvia Pankhurst: Natural Born Rebel* by Rachel Holmes [London: Bloomsbury, 2020].

³ Public Domain, <https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?curid=72196765>

Peter Robins found an article (see p.35), simply titled 'Richard Jefferies', that has never been catalogued before. Written by G.I. Bennett it appeared in *The Plain View* (Spring 1950) described as 'A Quarterly Journal concerned with human relations and with the quality of living'. Published by The Ethical Union, it was 'formed in 1896 as a union of existing Ethical Societies and for the public object of promoting the study and application of ethical principles. The regular work of the Union has been to arrange conferences and study and lecture courses, to initiate and finance social research, and to publish journals and pamphlets. In recent years [1950] this work has been specially concentrated on (1) the moral aspect of education, (2) human relations in industry, (3) the social content of the town and country planning movement, (4) the development of humanism as a coherent and stimulating philosophy.' The classicist Gilbert Murray and the philosopher Bertrand Russell were on the Editorial Advisory Panel of *The Plain View*. The Bennett article supports the belief that Jefferies was an atheist, not a pantheist.

Peter Faulkner came across a copy of *Memorials of Old Wiltshire*, edited by Alice Dryden (1866–1951) and first published by Bemrose and Sons Ltd in 1906. The book has never been cited before in bibliographical studies of Jefferies and is a collection of essays and illustrations covering notable buildings, people and places in the county. Under 'Literary Associations' (p.156), and written from the heart by Margaret Jourdain⁴ (pictured right in 1910), she opens with: 'It is curious that of all the men of letters born in the county, there is no one, if we except Richard Jefferies, who is strongly local, racy of the soil. Wiltshire is nothing to them, and they are nothing to Wiltshire; their connection with their native place was slight, its scenery never entered into their blood, to give a special colour to their lives and life-work.' But after dismissing others Jourdain goes on to discuss Richard Jefferies on pp.165–6 in the most glowing terms as follows:



⁴ Margaret Jourdain (1876–1951) was a writer on furniture and design but she collaborated with Alice Dryden on other book titles. Born in Ashbourne, Derbyshire—her father was a vicar and her mother was the daughter of Charles Clay, a surgeon and pioneer of ovariectomy. Margaret was one of ten children including the writer and academic Eleanor, the ornithologist Francis and mathematician Philip. She studied classics at Oxford. Her companion was the novelist Ivy Compton-Burnett with whom she set up house until her death in London in 1951.

With these more or less derivative and literary writers it is impossible to class Richard Jefferies, the peculiarity of whose genius was not derived from any school or race of literary men, Jefferies is the genius of the place, for *tout paysage est un état d'âme*; and the possessor of something that had never found expression before. It is the 'sublime sameness' of Coate that 'reminds you of the stars that rise and set regularly just as we go to bed down here,' that lives in his books, and let the nominal scene be where it may, it is of Coate and its surroundings that they tell. So much so, that 'those who know the locality as it was twenty or thirty years ago would probably identify every field, every mound, every tree, in these pages.' The short cut across the fields by which he was accustomed to walk from Coate to the office of the Swindon paper is still shown; and the cottage of *The Gamekeeper at Home*; and within sight of the farmhouse are the downs with their grassy mounds and trenches of ancient forts or 'castles,' 'a vast desert of hill and plain, silent save for the tinkle of a sheep-bell, or in the autumn the moaning hum of a distant threshing machine rising and falling in the wind,' where, lying on the turf, he watched the way of the hawk in the air, and the rabbits in their burrows. Within a walk from his home are the strongholds of Barbury Hill and Liddington Hill, Wayland's Smith's forge lies to the east of Coate, while in another direction are Avebury, Wansdyke, the Grey Wethers of Marlborough, and the ancient forest of 'shadeful' Savernake.

Richard Jefferies presently left Coate, but all through his life it was clear and distinct as if he had left it half-an-hour before. In the last paper he wrote, two months before his death, his memory goes back to the hamlet where he was born, abiding entire in his memory, with all its own accidents, its habits, its breath, its very name.

A very favourable review of *Jefferies' England*, (Constable, 1937), S.J. Looker's selection of Jefferies' essays, was published in the quarterly periodical *The Dublin Magazine*, April–June, 1938. The magazine offered fiction, poetry, drama and book reviews.

The reviewer, M.G. (unidentified), described the book as 'full of beautiful passages, and the reader, insensibly infected with Jefferies' mystical wonder and nobility of thought, draws from it a very real refurbishment of spirit.'

Andrew Rossabi came across a letter to David Garnett (1892–1981) dated 23 December 1904. With it Joseph Conrad had enclosed a gift of a pair of magnifying glasses and said, 'A man who makes maps—even in imaginary countries—should have a compass; a pocket-compass to show him the way of his exploring'. Garnett, aged twelve, had made a map of the 'New Sea and the Bevis Country' for the new edition of *Bevis* published by Duckworth earlier that year (see map in *RJS Journal* No.3 [1994], p.18). David's father was Edward Garnett (see article on p.22)—a friend and mentor to Joseph Conrad.

Frank W. Boreham (1871–1959), a preacher and writer (see more in *RJS Journal* No 39 [2024], p.72–73), had this to say about Jefferies’ passion for nature in his *Mountains in the Mist* (1914), p.133:

Everybody who has read Mr. Edward Thomas’s beautiful life of the young English naturalist knows how, in his brave fight with a cruel disease and with grinding poverty, Jefferies was comforted every day by the sight of the wild life around him and the sense of its complete and glorious possession. It was all his; and it was his just because he never tried to touch or tame it. Hear what he says: ‘Every blade of grass was mine,’ he cries exultingly, ‘as if I had myself planted it. All the grasses were my pets: I loved them all. Perhaps that was why I never had a pet, never cultivated a flower, never kept a caged bird. Why keep pets when every wild hawk that passed over my head was mine? I joyed in his swift, careless flight, in the throw of his pinions, in his rush over the elms and miles of woodland. What more beautiful than the sweep and curve of his going through the azure sky? I see the lark chase his mate over the low stone wall of the ploughed field, to battle with his high-crested rival, to balance himself on his trembling wings, outspread a few yards above the earth, and utter that sweet little loving kiss, as it were, of song. Oh, happy, happy days! So beautiful to watch; and all mine!’ It was just because the poor, frail young naturalist kept his feet off the flower-beds, never caged a bird or potted a plant, that all the birds of the forest, and the flowers of the field, seemed so thoroughly and gloriously his own.

Norma Goodwin is reading Paul Lamb’s *Of Thorn and Briar: A Year with the West Country Hedgelay* (Simon & Schuster, 2025). In his opening chapter he remarks upon his fondness for older countryside books and the wisdom in the writing with Jefferies as a ‘particular favourite’. Lamb quotes from the last sentence of ‘Outside London’ (*The Open Air*): ‘For the spirit of nature stays and will always be here, no matter how high a pinnacle of thought the human mind will attain; still the sweet air, and the hills, and the sun, will always be with us,’ to illustrate when Jefferies writing ‘seemed almost to speak to [him] directly’.

Andrew Rossabi spotted that W.B. Yeats, reviewing Edward Garnett’s volume of poems in prose *An Imaged World* in the *Speaker* (8 September 1894, 273–4), perceived ‘the shadow of Walt Whitman and Richard Jefferies hovering over its pages’, which suggests that Yeats knew Jefferies’ work.

A new signed Jefferies’ short story has come to light thanks to Colin Benford, a new Society member. Titled ‘A Woman Will Find a Way’ it was published in the *West London Observer* on 22 December 1877 in a special Christmas supplement. You will be learning more about this amusing, romantic and farcical tale that has some autobiographical detail, based on life at Coate and in Tolworth/Chessington.

LAND SALE

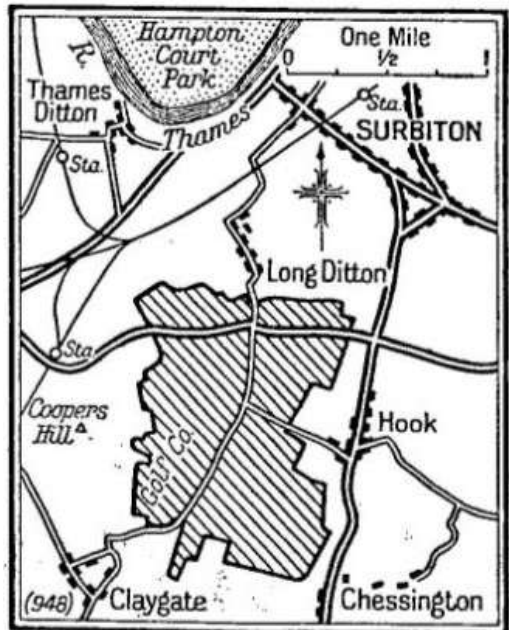
Sixty years after Jefferies moved from Swindon to Tolworth, his familiar Territory was put up for sale. Knight, Frank and Rutley offered 700 acres of prime Surrey land in the 5 March 1937 edition of *The Times* declaring:

The land lies about a mile from the southern point of Hampton Court Park and the Thames, less than two miles from the centre of Kingston-on-Thames, and four miles in a straight line from Caesar's Camp on Wimbledon Common. Esher, Hook and Long Ditton are on the boundaries of the estate, and the railway facilities, already good, are likely soon to be increased.

The advertisement drew a letter from an admirer of Jefferies, A.H. Anderson,¹ an authority on the history and topography of the South of England, which was published on 11 March. Anderson, a resident of Eastbourne, was a frequent letter-writer to *The Times* in the 1930s commenting on natural history.

The land has intimate associations with Richard Jefferies, who lived, from 1877 until 1882, in a small house on the Surbiton-Ewell road, and the essays in his book *Nature Near London* describe the scenery and the wild life of the tract now on the market. The first essay 'Woodland' refers to the old green lane from Long Ditton to Claygate, which crosses Cooper's

Hill and adjoins Surbiton golf course. The others all deal with the country of which this is part—with the Ewell road, Worcester Park, the Hogsmill stream and its water-splashes, Talworth, Hook and Chessington. Much of it has been already obscured by building and road-making, but if a similar fate awaits this 700 acres, the whole stretch of country thus absorbed will have the unusual distinction that its homely natural beauties have been lovingly observed and faithfully recorded in one of the works of a great Victorian writer.



¹ A.H. Anderson is the author of 'Richard Jefferies and Sussex' (*Sussex County Magazine*, 1937), No. 18 in the RJS Talks & Articles Library Service.

EDWARD GARNETT AND RICHARD JEFFERIES

Andrew Rossabi



Edward Garnett (1868–1937), pictured right as a young man by Marie Leon, is ‘principally remembered as one of literature’s great enablers.’¹ He worked as a publisher’s reader,² chiefly for Fisher Unwin, Duckworth, and Cape, and acted as mentor to Joseph Conrad and D.H. Lawrence among others. Garnett especially admired the work of Richard Jefferies. In 1888 he published a laudatory article in the *Universal Review*³ in which he said that Jefferies stood first as a nature writer because he combined the aspiration of a poet with the knowledge of the naturalist. The beginning and end of Jefferies’ creed was the Joyousness of Life. The return to Nature was central to Jefferies’ doctrine and allied him with Rousseau and Tolstoy. His faults included diffuseness, lack of humour, want of logic, and hasty generalisation, marks of a self-educated man.

Duckworth issued new editions of *Bevis* (1904), *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1904), and *After London* (1905), perhaps at the instigation of Garnett, who wrote a spirited introduction to *Amaryllis*,⁴ in which he answered the critics who had exclaimed, ‘What a pity Jefferies tried to write novels!’ Saying ‘We do not judge every novel by the same test’, Garnett argued that *Amaryllis* ‘as an artistic revelation of human life and character... is a living picture of life, a creative work of imagination of a high order’. He cited Laurence Sterne’s *Tristram Shandy* as an example of a successful novel that did not obey the conventional rules, to conclude ‘... it is therefore a pleasure for this critic to say that in his judgment *Amaryllis at the Fair* is one of the very few later-day novels of English country life that are worth putting on one’s shelf, and that to make room for it he would turn out certain highly-praised novels by Hardy which do not ring quite true, novels which the critics and the public, again with touching unanimity, have voted to be of high rank.’⁵

¹ Helen Smith, *The Uncommon Reader, A Life of Edward Garnett* (Cape, 2017), p.1.

² On the publisher’s reader, see Ch. VII in Royal A. Gettmann, *A Victorian Publisher, A Study of the Bentley Papers* (CUP, 1960).

³ Edward Garnett, ‘Richard Jefferies’, *Universal Review*, Vol. 2, Nov. 1888, 357–71. The short-lived *Universal Review* (1888–1890) was an illustrated monthly edited by the art critic Harry Quilter (1851–1907).

⁴ Q.D. Leavis praised Garnett’s introduction in *Scrutiny* (March 1938).

⁵ Edward Garnett, Introduction to Richard Jefferies, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, Readers’ Library Edition (London: Duckworth and Co., 1911), p.viii.

The spontaneity and naturalness of *Amaryllis* made it superior to *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, 'where the heaviness of the plotting made the reader too conscious of the author's controlling presence'.⁶

Garnett told his friend R.B. Cunningham Graham: 'I don't expect that this edition will receive any attention, but will fail as the original edition did.'⁷ Jefferies was 'a wonderful man and had a desperate struggle at the end. Absolutely isolated and dying by inches. That stupid old fool Walter Besant tried to do his memory and his family a good turn and wrote a humbugging and sentimental eulogy, with the tone of a kindly chandler addressing a guardian of genius.'⁷

Garnett sent a copy of the new Duckworth edition to Hardy, asking for his opinion on the respective merits of *Amaryllis* and *The Mayor of Casterbridge*, and arguing for the superiority of the former.⁸ Hardy replied 'in a tone of injured pride':⁹

I have finished reading the book [*Amaryllis at the Fair*] that you have been kind enough to send me. I had not seen it before, though I recollected the title, & I should probably have never read a line of it but for this presentation of yours. It is a very thorough study, on a large scale, of a farmer and his family, & would have made a good first book of a novel as long as Tom Jones or Clarissa. I like it exceedingly. The question that you raise in your preface, of the relative virtues, as fiction, of studies or sketches of character & scenery like the present, & the same when connected by a rounded plot, or drama, that (if perfectly constructed) is like an animal organism, & does not contain a line which fails to help on the development—is one of interest. I understand you to hold that it is greater to succeed in the first kind, without attempting the more subtle second, than to attempt the second & succeed but indifferently therein outside the qualities of the first, (assuming these to be equal in both cases.) Some might answer that this is despising in the story with a cohering plot all that you have valued in the other, & the higher aim in addition. Nevertheless, it is the attitude of the English critics in general not to value the artistic aspect of a composition as a whole, so that you are not singular in your doctrine. I should add that I have not looked for many years into the novel of mine that you name [*The Mayor of Casterbridge*] & have no opinion for or against it.

With thanks for the book, I am / Yours truly / Thomas Hardy.

⁶ Carolyn Clarke, 'Richard Jefferies and Thomas Hardy: Parallel Lives?', *RJSJ* No.11 (2002), p.15.

⁷ Letter from Edward Garnett to R.B. Cunningham Graham dated 25 November 1904. Letter held by the National Library of Scotland.

⁸ Garnett's letter is not extant.

⁹ Clarke, *ibid.* Letter from Thomas Hardy to Edward Garnett dated 21 November 1904, in *The Collected Letters of Thomas Hardy*, edited by Richard Little Purdy and Michael Millgate, Vol. III 1902–08 (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 147–8. The letter, written on mourning paper after the death of Hardy's mother Jemima in April, is cited in Clarke, pp.15–16.

HODGE'S HOME

Reynolds's Newspaper was the best-selling working-class Sunday broadsheet in the second half of the nineteenth century. Launched by the Chartist George Reynolds in 1850 it championed the cause of labour, appealing to Chartists, Republicans and other radicals. Political content was balanced with crime, train crashes, scandals and other subjects of mass audience appeal. By 1870 its circulation, mainly in manufacturing districts, was 200,000.

In the issue of 15 December 1899 a column headed 'Hodge's Home' appeared over the byline NORTHUMBRIAN who described Jefferies as 'the keenest observer and gentlest writer that ever adorned English literature', citing an extract from *Hodge and His Masters* as an authoritative source.

In addition to the regular NORTHUMBRIAN column, written by James Macintosh, another column bylined GRACCHUS was featured. This was by Edward Reynolds, the brother of the founder and editor at the time. His subject in the same issue was 'The Spread of Republicanism and Socialism'.

After a number of changes of title and ownership, including by the Co-operative Press in 1929, the paper was re-launched in 1962 as a tabloid as *Sunday Citizen* but folded five years later.

Sir—A very pleasant picture of what 'Hodge's' home should be was drawn by the Reverend William Tuckwell at the Liberal Federation meetings recently held at Manchester. This the state of affairs the speaker said he would like to see in every rural labourer's cottage throughout England—'A ton of coals in the shed, potatoes stored under the staircase and bed, sacks of flour heaped around the kitchen walls, four sides of bacon being smoked in the chimney corner, and four hams hanging from the rafters wrapped around with old copies of *Reynolds's Newspaper*.' This is what the home should be. What it very frequently is we know too well. I have always taken the liveliest interest in the affairs of the agricultural labourer, and in the company of Joseph Arch, and also Mr. Strange, of Leintwardine, attended many meetings when those earnest men first began to rouse the labourer from the dreadful lethargy into which he had been plunged by centuries of ill-treatment, and semi-starvation. It was therefore, with keen pleasure that I read the remarks quoted above, and learned that they were received with 'a tremendous burst of cheering which made the hall ring.' Equally was it to read that the name of a paper which has always stood by the poor labourer, should be received with a most enthusiastic greeting.

Owing to his isolated position and scattered ranks, the agricultural labourer is in a worse condition to keep himself than his fellow toilers in towns and large cities. Owing to the arbitrary hold his employer has upon him, he is a veritable

serf, ground beneath the tyranny of the farmer, the squire, and the parson, the latter frequently the worst tyrant of the three. He toils on the land from early morning until late at night, for a most miserable pittance. Then comes the end; and upon this point I would quote poor Richard Jefferies, the keenest observer and gentlest writer that ever adorned English literature. This is what the author of *Hodge and His Masters* has to say:—‘After all the ploughing and sowing, the hoeing and the harvest, comes the miserable end. Strong as the labourer may be, thick-set and capable of immense endurance, by slow degrees that strength must wear away. The limbs totter, the back is bowed, the dimmed sight can no longer guide the plough in a straight furrow, nor the weak hands wield the reaping hook. Hodge who, Atlas-like, supported on his shoulders the agricultural world, comes in old age under the dominion of his *last masters* at the workhouse.’ [Ch. XXVIII 1890 ed.]. What he meets there we all know by long experience of the beautiful English poor-law system.

By the agitation first raised on behalf of the poor agricultural labourer, his position for awhile was no doubt benefited; but the result has not raised him very much in the social scale. It was the means of correcting many abuses and abolishing the brutal and degrading truck system by which the poor labourer had to drink part of his pitiful pay in cider or beer. It is a fact that in Herefordshire and several West of England counties the regulation allowance for a day labourer (in lieu of wages, mind) was six quarts of cider or ten in harvest time! This custom was over and over again upheld in the county courts when questions of disputed wages arose. The men at the end of the week had to take home to their wives and big families the magnificent sum of seven or eight shillings; and in the case of the well-paid men (?) nine shillings per week. Out of this they had to pay one shilling, or one and six, for the rent of a cottage that would not keep out the rain. Even under the improved conditions, I read in your paper of Sunday last that a kind of census has been taken of North Hertfordshire, with the result that it has been found that the average wage of the labourer in full work is ten shillings a week. When he is *not* in full work, God help him! It would be instructive to work out a little sum and see how the labourer has to luxuriate upon his ten shillings, after paying one and sixpence for rent. Bread alone would cost a hearty family of eight or nine children at least four shillings. This would leave him with four and six to buy firing. Candles, tea or coffee, meat, clothes, boots, and pay for schooling. As a fact, meat is an unknown factor in the labourer’s domestic economy, and so is generally butter. If he is lucky, the labourer may manage to feed a pig by the roadside or upon whatever he can scrape together out of the refuse of the fields. Then, indeed, he gets a bit of pig meat and bacon. Nowhere is that useful gentleman, the pig, so thoroughly appreciated as in a labourer’s cottage. Not a particle of him is

wasted, and the children even revel in the reeking hoofs torn off when the animal has been singed. With a loaf of bread and a piece of fat bacon the labourer goes forth to his work in the morning, and upon that he feeds until he returns at night, washing the food down with cider, small beer, weak tea, or water, as the case may be. Where, however, is the ton of coals in the shed, the potatoes under the stairs and the bed, the flour round the walls, the bacon smoking in the chimney corner, the ham hanging in the racks, and where is *Reynolds's Newspaper*? Echo answers, where? The clothes the labourer puts on to-day he dons again to-morrow, and the day after that, and the week ensuing, and the following month, until they are patched and mended beyond recognition, so far as the original cloth is concerned. If they get wet through, he sits in them until they dry, and so, in course of time, his frame is bent, and his limbs wracked with rheumatism. He has no chance of mental improvement; nothing to look forward to but the rising of the sun and the setting thereof.

Why should these things be? Why should any section of men live lives of this kind in a rich and so-called Christian country? The reason is not far to seek. The secret is that the landowner grows fat and rich on the toil, poverty, and misery of the labourer. While the man whose ancestors have stolen the land lives in riotous luxury in his mansion or his town house the labourer has to toil on and endure, so that the farmer can raise and sell his crop, and so pay the landlord's impost. Again, the rich and ever-greedy Church has its hands on the land and the labour of the labourer. The idle autocrat who has what the law calls the 'cure of souls' in the parish is allowed by law to impoverish the land by sums of money amounting in many instances to hundreds. To keep this white-throated money-grubber in luxury and independence the labourer has to starve, to live the life of a serf, and to feed on food that the vicar would not give to his pet dogs. So long as the people allow these two arch thieves, the landlord and the Church, to retain their clutch on the land, and to suck out its fatness, so long will the rural labourer be poor, and wretched, and downtrodden. If the labourer dare but hint a desire or a determination to better himself he is subjected to acts of petty tyranny and persecutions from which the strongest would shrink.

As you have frequently said, the labourer requires a strong and powerful Union to protect him against this persecution, to raise him out of the slough of despond into which he has sunk, to give him a means of living more like a human being, to enable him to feed, clothe, and educate his children, and to enjoy a share of that prosperity and comfort which his hard industry and never-flinching endurance have entitled him, and which labour must receive before many years are added to the calendar of time. The wages of the rustic toiler should be raised to a scale more approximate with that earned by his brethren in town. He should in every case be allowed to secure a plot of land which he

could cultivate and raise food. At present on hundreds of estates the land which should be allotted to the labourers is left to breed the squire's game, so that he may indulge his brutal passion for slaughter, which is, by a polite fiction, called sport. The labourer requires rousing to action to help himself, but he is so poor and helpless and friendless, that he also requires the help of those who are more fortunately placed to champion his cause. I am glad to recognise the good work that is being done in this direction by that capital organisation the Allotments and Small Holdings Association, of which Sir Walter Foster is so useful a leader. This body is, however, hampered for want of funds, and it behoves those who have the cause of agriculture at heart to give a helping hand. The Queen has this week received over three hundred pounds in prizes at the Smithfield Cattle Show, besides being able to dispose of her fat stock at prices enormously above its value, owing to the crowd of sycophants who are only too anxious to pay a big price for a cut off a beast that came off a royal farm. I am sure that this money might have been better distributed in the true interests of agriculture had it been given to the help of labour.

NORTHUMBRIAN.

~ ~ ~

AT THE SIGHT OF SOME WILD FLOWERS IN THE SWATHE,
I THINK OF RICHARD JEFFERIES (January 2025)

Paul Russell Miller

Shaved from
the set-aside verge
by the tractor's turn,
one knapweed, scabious
and broad-faced daisy
of the armfuls
you could gather
in the scythe's wake
as a boy.

The man you became
would have much to say,
I'm sure, about
what else we've since
swept to the margins,
and what brought forth.

A RECITER AND HIS ART

Peter Robins

Recitation was a popular entertainment in Victorian and Edwardian times, perhaps surviving now as 'performance poetry'. In *The Times* of 22 April 1902 a review headed 'Mr. Clifford Harrison's Recital' gave fulsome praise to the programme at the Steinway Hall, London:

Every year Mr. Harrison widens his choice of pieces. His repertory now includes verse by nearly all the poets of the first rank during the last century, and for his prose he wanders over a large field, picking here rhapsody of Carlyle's, there a parody by Lewis Carroll, now a passage of rural moralizing from the works of Richard Jefferies, or, again, an excerpt from some novelist of the day.

Clifford Harrison was born in 1857 of actor parents and he started his career as an actor but soon developed his skills of pronunciation, enunciation and expression and began professional reciting in the 1880s. He attracted fashionable audiences for his performances at the Steinway Hall on Saturday afternoons. Here the platform would resemble a drawing-room with flowers, books and draperies as well as a grand piano. Some recitations were set to music but the accompaniment was always subordinate to his voice. At the stroke of three, Harrison, carrying two or three volumes, would make his appearance. A typical programme could include Rossetti, Longfellow, Whittier, Browning, Tennyson, Shakespeare, Dickens and Kipling.

Harrison suffered bouts of ill-health and he was never able to perform outside London and had declined offers to tour America and Australia. In winter he stayed in Switzerland or the South of France. When not performing



Pen and ink drawing of Clifford Harrison
by Harry Furniss. (NPG)

he wrote a number of books including *Stray Records*, *In Hours of Leisure* and *Lines in Pleasant Places*. Harrison died prematurely of consumption at Hastings in December 1903.

We have been unable to trace what extracts from Jefferies Harrison may have recited but shortly after Harrison's death an anthology of poetry and prose was published as *The Golden Reciter: Prose and Verse for Reciting and Recitation*, Cairns James (London: Seeley & Co. 1906). Clifford Harrison is praised as a late master of recitation in the Introduction by James;

The most perfect combination of the art of Music and Speech is only obtained when the reciter accompanies himself, and preferably, composes his own music. There has been in our time but one great artist in this respect: I refer to the late Clifford Harrison.

Authors collected in the 700-page book include Richard Jefferies, Austin Dobson, Conan Doyle, Thomas Hardy, Rudyard Kipling, Robert Louis Stevenson, Tennyson, Mark Twain and many others. The suitable extracts published for recitation from Jefferies were taken from 'Meadow Thoughts' and 'The Legend of a Gateway' (both collected in *The Life of the Fields*).

Given James's admiration for Harrison it seems likely that his selection of Jefferies' prose was what Harrison recited.

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THREE NATURE POEMS

Following in Jefferies' footsteps here are three short untitled poems by Jared Nisbet—his great-great-grandson who lives in Canada.

The sun glares down
Pavement melting in summer ray
No mercy for all below
Yet in the crack of life's path
The Ray of life touches soil
A single flower reaches towards its
single purpose to bloom
Unaware the world's harsh routine
It opens wide to accept Love

My trail forges forth
Scents carried in Autumn's wind
A new path full of wander
I will never be back

The Pines are marvellous
Green and full of softness
The walk I seek
Miles till I sleep
The Pines whisper time to weep

'A TRUE SUCCESSOR TO RICHARD JEFFERIES'

Peter Robins

At a dinner in the Midland Hotel to celebrate the twenty-first anniversary of the foundation of The National Union of Journalists in Manchester, C.P. Scott, Editor of the *Manchester Guardian*, gave a speech in which he praised Robert C. Spencer, *Guardian* journalist and founder and first President of the NUJ (*Manchester Guardian*, 2 April 1928).

Scott claimed credit for discovering Spencer some thirty years before when Spencer had sent him an article about the Isle of Wight where Spencer was a working journalist. So impressed was Scott that he offered him a job in Manchester enthusing that 'he had found in him a true successor to Richard Jefferies, that admirable writer of things of the country'. In Scott's opinion there never was a better journalist of his kind than Spencer, 'not only first rate in the technique of his profession and as a descriptive writer but admirable in every other way'.

Competition from rival newspapers prompted the *Guardian* to widen its scope and in 1904 it added a cycling column (Scott was a cyclist) and a daily Country Diary, written initially by Thomas Coward, a keen birder. Scott then invited other writers to contribute to the column to give a broader coverage of the natural world. Among these, Spencer, after his retirement to Streatham, London, and perhaps encouraged by Scott, began a series of pieces for Country Diary from March 1915 until the year he died, aged 70, in 1921. The first female contributor was Helena Swanwick in December 1915.

Three examples of Spencer's Country Diary follow from 1916, 1917, with a nod to Jefferies in a contribution from 1920:

8 January 1916

The earth is always disclosing small secrets on its face. We have not this winter as yet had much opportunity of noting the passage of common things in early morning over the hoar frost, such as the hare whom you can track to her seat by the marks of her fore-feet and the powdery dispersal where her hind claws have struck in a scrambling way, always leaving a straight surface furrow on the whitened meadow, in a lesser degree like that of the wake of a ship at sea. Nor has one been able to perceive in the same way where the rabbits have come out of the sandbank to nibble at the grass and play. On these milder mornings and particularly today, there are nearly everywhere on the grass little mounds of earth pushed up from below where the worms have been incessantly at work, twisted in curious, fanciful shapes as though hundreds of small machines had been set going. There must be warmth underneath surface as well as on the top of the ground. The birds know it; they were busy by the dozen before it was light, blackbirds and

thrushes, shaking their wings and tails as though the time of nesting was about to begin.

Only the great trees in the wood tell us as yet that it is actually winter. They are as bare as can be, and if you break a twig that shot out last summer from the trunk of the elm it is without sap; it has little of the internal moisture that by and by will cause it to bend lissomely before it breaks. The wood itself is very dark after sundown. The stars have a curious appearance when you look upwards between the thousand branches of the trees. It is not as though the floor of heaven was paved with them; they are, especially the planets, like lights hanging pendant by some invisible thread. You almost think they are about to fall; the dark firmament above so much higher than they.

R.C.S.

4 August 1917

SURREY.

The courses in the marshy water meadow are flooded, and this morning under a chilly dark sky a few lapwings had come together, flying backward and forward, their white feathers showing, while at intervals they make their short plaintive cry. Jackdaws went out with the rooks, calling sharply, but they must soon have returned, for a little later they could be heard in the near wood 'clacking,' as a ditcher said, among the swaying elms. He was himself busy among great weeds, thistles, nettles, overgrown docks matted with convolvulus, agrimony, wild vetches, borne down by the strong rain, and thick almost everywhere on and along the hedge banks. When work was done with the scythe the mower frequently would turn and slice some of these away where they were most luxuriant, now the horse machine leaves them as it keeps to its more regular way. The banks are thus rich in their own style and beautiful. While rain was still falling a stroke from a strong billhook brought out white butterflies flying in the showers, narrow-bodied beetles crawled among the shorn grass, others, their backs glistening, played on the surface water.

Where the oats are closest in field corners the persistent fall has laid some of them. There the sparrows congregate almost until they are driven out in a flying body. Other birds seek the hedges, and from the upper part of one covered with brambles now green in fruit a small flock of linnets flew together. Swifts were playing in the high air at noon; towards evening they came lower, and called shrilly just overhead in the open part of a lane bordered with ash trees.

R.C.S.

25 March 1920

IN A SOUTHERN COUNTY

From the top of the down, cornfields in the distance show as if hung round about with fleecy lawn, white in spring sun as newly-fallen snow. The blackthorn is in full bloom; every gust of wind scatters it along the lane; it lies thick at the hedge foot, where a wren plays and calls in two notes as he settles on a branch before flying a little way again. Here spikes have begun to shoot from the arum, soon lords and ladies will appear, while up in the wood bluebells are on the way and anemones in flower. The sheep lie often while they feed; pasture is abundant. Half-ripe clover

sinks under foot as you walk over the green. There is content in the low of the cattle; they come readily to a call at milking time, bringing with them the rich scent of the field.

Above the growing corn and the next seeded land a kestrel rises, but now not very high. The flutter of his wings is easily visible, then for a moment they are still; it is as if he sat on nothing but air before he drops straight down. Another rises silently a little higher, takes a flight in a course like the shape of a half-moon, hovers, then down to the field again. Warmth has brought out the beetles and other creeping things, but the farmer has a vigilant friend.

R.C.S.

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HARRY LANCELOT MOSSE CATTERMOLÉ

Lance Cattermole was born in Westgate-on-Sea, Kent on 19 July 1898. His father (Sydney), uncle (Leonardo) and grandfather (George) were artists in their own right.

According to Lorne Scots Regimental Museum in Ontario, Lance moved to Canada in 1914 to take up farming but, in August 1915, joined the Simcoe Foresters and later enlisted in the 76th Infantry Battalion. On arriving in France in May 1916, he was drafted into the 21st Battalion. He took part in the attack by the 2nd Canadian Division on Flers-Courcelette on 15–16 September 1916, and there is a twelve-page typescript copy of his account titled 'Attack on the Somme—15th and 16th September 1916'. With the addition of two maps, he outlines his experiences and details the actions to secure the Sugar Refinery, just outside the village of Courcelette. He served on the Western Front for six months until he was found to be under age and returned to England.



In 1922–3 Cattermole studied at the Central School of Arts and Crafts, and then the Slade School of Fine Art from 1923–6. He had exhibitions at the Royal Academy and the Royal Institute of Oil Painters (R.O.I.) of which he was made a member in 1938. He died in Worthing in 1992 and lived for many years at High Salvington, Sussex.

As well as illustrating the frontispiece and dust jacket of *Felise* for *Beauty is Immortal* (Worthing Cavalcade, 1948), Cattermole also illustrated the imaginary meeting of Jefferies and Hudson for the Worthing Cavalcade 1947 tribute to W.H. Hudson (see back cover of *RJS Spring Newsletter*, 2021).

EXPOSITORY WRITING

In *RJSJ* No.37 (2022) we published three essays on Jefferies written by students at the women's college Vassar, Poughkeepsie, New York, originally published in *Vassar Miscellany* in 1893, 1912 and 1914. At the time of writing we could not discover the curriculum for the college's English Department and why Jefferies was a subject of sustained study.

Now, the discovery of a book, *A Course in Expository Writing* by Gertrude Buck and Elizabeth Woodbridge (New York: H. Holt & Co., 1899), provides the answer. Expository writing is better known as explanatory writing in the UK and is a style for explaining and presenting information and defining a topic.

Gertrude Buck (1871-1922 and pictured right) and Elizabeth Woodbridge were both teachers of English at Vassar, with Buck as the major creative force who reformed the teaching methods of the English Department. She taught rhetorical theory, literary criticism, composition, English lyric poetry and drama as well as writing many books, plays, articles and poems. Buck embraced women's rights to persuade students to become leaders and extend themselves beyond the domestic sphere. Her remarkable career at Vassar came to an abrupt end after twenty-four years when she suffered premature death from a stroke aged fifty.



A Course in Expository Writing includes a chapter on Jefferies' *The Pageant of Summer* with fourteen assignments based on Jefferies' text.

Lesson XXIII.

Read Jefferies' *The Pageant of Summer*.¹ One or two weeks may be given to it; or longer, if it is made the basis of further study of words.

1. After a first reading, try to describe the impression left upon you. Is it a purely sensuous one? If not, what more? Do you get a picture of an individual scene or place? Is there any difference between this and the description of the cornfield, p.55?
2. Try to express a sentence, or a few sentences, the thought of the whole. Can you disassociate the 'thought' and the means of expression?
3. Treat with as delicate exactness as possible the theme: '*The Pageant of Summer* is not mere description, it is interpretation.' Or, write an appreciation of the passage which shall apply to it Arnold's dictum in regard to poetry, that it has the power 'to awaken in us a wonderfully full, new, and intimate sense' of things, to make us feel ourselves 'in contact with the essential nature' of things.

¹ Most likely Mosher edition of 1896, 1897 or 1898.

4. Study the appeal to the senses: to sight, in colour, form, movement; to touch; to the ear; to the sense of smell; to the temperature sense. Trace the appeal to its source in words possessing direct or indirect sensuous value.
5. Note the choice of verbs which suggest not merely being or activity, but specific phrases of being and of activity. Colourless verbs like 'be', 'do', 'have', appear relatively seldom. Note, for example, the number of specific verbs used where the generic one, 'flying', might have been allowed to stand.
6. Study Jefferies' use of other words and phrases, which are in their nature specific instead of general, e.g. 'shaken by a thrush,' in the first paragraph, instead of 'shaken by a bird,' or merely 'shaken'.
7. Does *The Pageant of Summer* give us 'fact' or 'sense of fact' in Pater's meaning? Answer in an essay that shall accurately determine the nature of Jefferies' writing.
8. Make a careful and discriminating comparison between the way in which Ruskin and Jefferies interpret nature, as seen in Ruskin's 'The Pine Tree' ² (pp.177-185).
9. Characterise Jefferies' style as compared with Pater's, Arnold's, Ruskin's, Newman's, Carlyle's.
10. Try to find the exact word or words for all sorts of out-of-door sensations, such as are suggested in the following: (1) Noonday in a clover field. (2) Early morning. (Look up Lanier's *Songs of the Marshes*). (3) Sunset in April. (4) A June thunder-storm. (5) Indian summer. (6) The ocean, in a calm. (7) A pine grove in June.
11. Try to find the adequate word or phrase for a particular flower. Note first. What is the word that spontaneously suggests itself when you see the flower; compare notes with your classmates, and try to find the final word or phrase.
12. Write an appreciation of Jefferies based on Pater's phrase, 'Beauty is only fineness of truth.' If you have already written on this phrase (Lesson XXII, 14, (4)), enrich and interpret your entire treatment by making it also a treatment of Jefferies.
13. Try to interpret the spirit of April, of May, of October, as Jefferies does the spirit of summer.
14. Characterise in a single word the style of Jefferies. If this cannot be done satisfactorily, use a sentence. Which type of sentence will be best adapted to this purpose?

² From Ruskin's *Modern Painters* Part VI, Ch. IX.

Richard Jefferies

G.I. Bennett

First published in *The Plain View* in Spring 1950 by The Ethical Union in the year that the Richard Jefferies Society was founded. See p.18 for more information about Bennett.

Though it was principally about country life, country things, and the countryside that Richard Jefferies wrote, he published a book in 1883 that has to this day a value and a significance for all who are interested in the sincere outpourings of the spirit, and who are in sympathy with an intensity of feeling, personal and humanitarian, elevated to a religion. That book, *The Story of My Heart*, a ‘remarkable spiritual autobiography’ as the Oxford Companion to English Literature calls it, was written when he was but 34 years old. It would be untrue to say that it has not had its critics, among whom can be placed such high-ranking literary figures as D.H. Lawrence and W.H. Hudson. Both these writers confessed that they did not like it, Hudson going so far as to describe it as ‘that strain of intense and unnatural feeling which he so strangely misinterprets, and which in *The Story of My Heart* touches the borders of insanity.’

My reaction to it is different. Despite the repetitions, the saying of the same thing in different ways, from which the book suffers, I think that anyone who takes the trouble to read it sympathetically will find in it much of intrinsic and abiding worth. Its prose style, though sometimes awkward, is always poetical and at times, as in the opening words of the book, is appealingly beautiful:

The story of my heart commences seventeen years ago. In the glow of youth there were times every now and then when I felt the necessity of a strong inspiration of soul-thought. My heart was dusty, parched for the want of the rain of deep feeling; my mind arid and dry, for there is a dust which settles on the heart as well as that which falls on a ledge. It is injurious to the mind as well as to the body to be always in one place and always surrounded by the same circumstances. A species of thick clothing slowly grows about the mind, the pores are choked, little habits become a part of existence, and by degrees the mind is inclosed in a husk. When this began to form I felt eager to escape from it, to throw it off like heavy clothing, to drink deeply once more at the fresh fountains of life. An inspiration—a long deep breath of the pure air of thought—could alone give health to the heart.

The book is not, as might be thought from its title, Richard Jefferies’ life story. The material circumstances of his life find oblique and scant mention. I would describe it as an attempt by a solitary and sensitive soul—a nature

mystic—to express himself; to express his innermost feelings, desires, hopes, thoughts, yearnings. It is a statement of personal philosophy, however incoherent and patchy it may seem in parts to be.

Jefferies has sometimes been called a Pantheist in religion; but I cannot help feeling that this is an inept and misleading description. He was in fact an Atheist, and any reference to his *Story of My Heart* can leave one in no doubt. It had been his wont from boy-hood to roam the quiet and solitary places of his native countryside, and his prolonged and intimate contemplation of nature leads him to exclaim, 'There is nothing human in the whole round of nature. All nature, all the universe that we can see, is absolutely indifferent to us, and except to us human life is of no more value than grass.' And elsewhere: 'Centuries of thought have failed to reconcile and fit the mind to the universe, which is designless and purposeless and without idea.' It is not therefore surprising that, thinking thus, he is led to conclude that 'no deity has anything to do with nature. There is no god in nature, nor in any matter anywhere, either in the clods on the earth or in the composition of the stars. For what we understand by the deity is the purest form of Idea, of Mind, and no mind is exhibited in these . . . That which controls them is distinct altogether from deity . . . a power quite different from anything yet imagined. I cease, therefore, to look for deity in nature or the cosmos at large, or to trace any marks of divine handiwork.'

In different ways Jefferies keeps on with such assertions throughout his book. That confession of disbelief does not, however, make him a rationalist. He was, as I have hinted, a mystic in a certain definite sense, and, like all mystics, is difficult at times to follow. He uses such words as 'soulthought'—that occurs in the first few lines of his book, which I have quoted—and 'prayer' very frequently; but as he himself explains, 'By prayer I do not mean a request preferred to a deity; I mean intense soul-emotion, intense aspiration.' When out in the open—in the fields, amongst the hills, close to the sea—he felt a great upsurge of spirit; he went into raptures; he hankered after an understanding that transcended the ordinary limitations of the human mind. In his ecstasy he sought a fuller 'soul-life': 'I know that there are ideas beyond the valley of my thought; I know that there is something infinitely higher than deity.' When a man talks thus, of course, he becomes incomprehensible, although one may follow him to a point.

Some argue³ that Jefferies was a learned man. I do not personally think he was. But, be that as it may, he had a self-confessed dislike of much of book

³ For instance, Mr. Samuel J. Looker in his Introduction to *The Old House at Coate, and other hitherto unpublished essays by Richard Jefferies* (Lutterworth Press, 1948).

knowledge. Hence his thought is almost everywhere in *The Story* rough-hewn and unrefined. He is contemptuous not only of the idea (beloved of theologians and Christian apologists) of design in nature, but of the concept of evolution itself. His dogmatism is a trifle disturbing. He carries it to lengths of absurdity:

This our earth this day produces sufficient for our existence. This our earth produces not only a sufficiency but a superabundance, and pours a cornucopia of good things down upon us. Further, it produces sufficient for stores and granaries to be filled to the roof-tree for years ahead . . .

We who live in a later and better informed age, when the science of Ecology is painting so grim a picture of our human kind in relation to our environment, know how fallacious is this statement. But perhaps Jefferies is in part to be excused; he was probably echoing some of the bland and confident, and often ill-founded, assertions that were not uncommon in his day.

A shy and lonely man, was Jefferies, a simple, nature-loving soul who hated, with all the fervour of his being, cant and hypocrisy, and all the misplaced sense of importance that so commonly goes with the possession of money, place, and power. 'The pageantry of power, the still more foolish pageantry of wealth, the senseless precedence of place: words fail me to express my utter contempt for such pleasure or such ambitions.'

Jefferies had known near-poverty in his early days in London and had felt some of its bitter pangs. Being an acutely sensitive soul, this had done much to give him an instinctive sympathy with the downtrodden; and in his *Story of My Heart* this reveals itself very clearly. 'Why do people die of starvation, or lead a miserable existence on the verge of it?' he asks with fierce indignation. 'Why have millions upon millions to toil from morning to evening just to gain a mere crust of bread?' And answers: 'Because of the absolute lack of organization by which such labour should produce its effect; the absolute lack of distribution; the absolute lack of the very idea that such things are possible.' And we must remember that when Jefferies wrote these words social and economic conditions in this country were far from what they are to-day, so much have we advanced.

We find Jefferies writing vehemently against the evil of hard and unmitigated toil; we find him exclaiming angrily against the idea that work is man's noblest pursuit, which was the expressed view of Thomas Carlyle before him. He saw work—or, at least, much of it—as a bondage of the unprivileged, perpetuating gross ignorance, crushing the spirit, robbing the all-too-few years of human life of its savour, its natural happiness and simple joy. For the well-to-do and leisured rich he had harsh words. They were the 'criminal classes,' presumably because of their smug complacency with the existing social order and its attendant evils, if not always because of their industrial exploitation of the

working classes. 'Food and drink, roof and clothes,' declares Jefferies in the same indignant vein, 'are the inalienable right of every child born into the light.'

He saw leisure as a great good, finding in it the means whereby the mind could be expanded and the soul enlarged, and the health and well-being of the physical body enhanced. He was essentially an idealist; he looked forward to the time when the common folk would have leisure enough, and the means, to 'enjoy their days, and the earth, and the beauty of this beautiful world.' And he makes an avowal, with a sincerity that we cannot doubt, that in order to achieve this he is willing to divide and share all he would ever have; while confessing, 'though I think that the end will rather be gained by organization than by sharing alone.' Whether he personally enjoyed a great degree of happiness in his own brief life is arguable; but he was in essence an advocate and a disciple of happiness. It was the outcome of all his experience and self-questioning and philosophy that happiness in this life and in this world is of supreme account. He saw with an anguish that is very real and touching that this life is so pitifully short, so full of natural and inescapable tragedy, with no promise of a redemption beyond the grave. The tombstones themselves, under which lie the silent dead, have a message for us, bidding us 'now know the extreme value of human life; reflect on this and strew human life with flowers; save every hour for the sunshine; let your labour be so ordered that in future times the loved ones may dwell longer with those who love them; open your minds; exalt your souls; widen the sympathies of your hearts; face the things that are now as you will face the reality of death; make joy real now to those who you love and help forward the joy of those yet to be born. Let these facts force the mind and the soul to an increase of thought . . . so that those whose time it is to die may have enjoyed all that is possible in life.' Four years or so after he penned those words he himself died at the tragically young age of 38.

Some will remember him for the signal contribution he made to our literature of the English countryside, on which his larger fame rests. But we, whose interests are humanitarian rather than literary, will, while acknowledging his undoubted merits as a writer and an observer of country life, prefer to know him as a man with a personal philosophy that is an inspiration still.

'THE GOSPEL IN RICHARD JEFFERIES'

Peter Robins

In a letter introducing himself to the publisher R. Bentley of 19 February 1873 Jefferies included among his credentials, 'At the moment I have a series of articles "Poetry of the Bible" appearing in the *Broad Churchman*.' Only three issues of the fifteen it ran to before folding have been traced but none carry Jefferies' contributions and his thoughts, perhaps on the Psalms or Gospels, remain a mystery.

Twenty years later, after Jefferies' literary reputation had been established, the congregation of the Free St. George's Church, Edinburgh, on the Sunday evening of 24 September 1893, heard a forty-minute sermon given by the Rev. S. R. Crockett titled 'The Gospel in Richard Jefferies'. It was published in full on the front page of *The Christian Leader* of 5 October.

Crockett's recurring theme was 'that the heart that depends wholly upon Nature for comfort shall surely be disappointed.' After a protracted review of nature writing and the merits of Wordsworth, White, Walton, Arnold, Morris and Ruskin, he turned to Richard Jefferies and, while praising his earlier books, of *The Story of My Heart* he asserted that it is

...a tale, wondrous strange and passing beautiful, of his struggles to attain what is not given to any son of man to reach without the revelation of Jesus Christ. It is, therefore, a story of failure, full and acknowledged.

....Here is a lad of twenty, palpitating to the finger-tips with the widest thoughts, trying to span the universe and grapple in tight grips with the Almighty; yet not in the way of scientific understanding, but in the endeavour to touch the inner soul of which all these are but the aura, the palpable envelope.

It was Jefferies trying to wring from God the shut mouth of His own eternity. The way was plain and open, but he passed it by, for he could not see the sublime simplicity of 'God so loved the world' because the Pharisees and the Scribe sat in the gate, crying aloud that they alone knew the way.

The denouement of Crockett's lecture was a repetition of the report in Besant's *Eulogy* that Jefferies experienced a death-bed reversion and died a Christian. The sermon ends mawkishly, Crockett rejoicing in God's unconditional love and forgiveness for the return of one who had strayed;

I have told of the search, of the disappointment, and the final home-coming. The wandering bairn that cried aloud for its Father—and then, when on the instant no Father came to it in the darkness of the gloomy wood, cried aloud again, that he had no Father at all, nor any other child that lived—at last turned his face homeward with yearning in his heart.

But when Besant's *Eulogy* was published in 1888, Jefferies' freethinking readers cast serious doubts on this account. The social reformer H.S. Salt vigorously challenged Besant's narrative and eventually received in 1891 an apology from Besant who wrote:

I stated in my Eulogy that he died a Christian. This was true in the sense of outward conformity. His wife read to him the Gospel of St. Luke, and he acquiesced. But, I have since been informed, he was weak, too weak not to acquiesce, and his views never changed from the time that he wrote *The Story of My Heart*. You are, I am convinced, quite right. When a man gets as far as Jefferies did—when he has shed and scattered to the winds all sacerdotalism and authority—he does not go back.⁴



Samuel Rutherford Crockett (see caricature of Samuel Rutherford Crockett, *Vanity Fair*,⁵ August 1897) was born in 1859 at Balmaghie, Galloway and was ordained as a minister in the Free Church of Scotland in 1886, appointed to the Free Church Penicuik, south of Edinburgh. Crockett had been a regular contributor to *The Christian Leader* and in 1893 T. Fisher Unwin published his collection of stories and sketches of Scottish life titled *The Stickit Minister*, which was a surprising best-seller, running through six editions in the first year. The Scots word 'stickit' is roughly translated in English as 'imperfect, unfinished or ruined'.



The success of *The Stickit Minister* encouraged Crockett to write *The Raiders* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1894) an action adventure romance set in 18th Scotland. Building on this theme after quitting the ministry in 1895 to write full-time, Crockett published the impressive output of more than sixty novels. He fell ill in France in 1913 but recovered only to die prematurely at fifty-four in April 1914, at Tarascon, near Avignon, and was interred at Balmaghie Kirk that month.

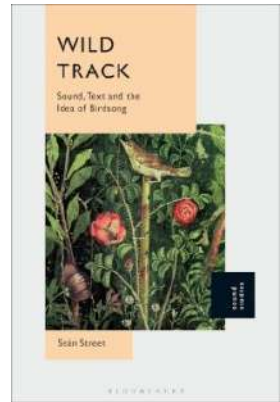
All his novels are available at gallowayraiders.co.uk, a website devoted to S.R. Crockett maintained by the writer and broadcaster Cally Phillips, to whom we thank for discovering in Crockett's archive the sermon in *The Christian Leader* (1882–1902, published in Glasgow) and for the many hours spent looking for it.

⁴ H.S. Salt, *Company I Have Kept* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1930), pp.106–7.

BOOKS BY MEMBERS

W*ild Track* by Prof. Seán Street came out in paperback on 20 February 2025. Published by Bloomsbury, the book was a finalist in the Prose Awards for Environmental Science, 2024. See more in the *RJS Newsletter* 2023, p.27.

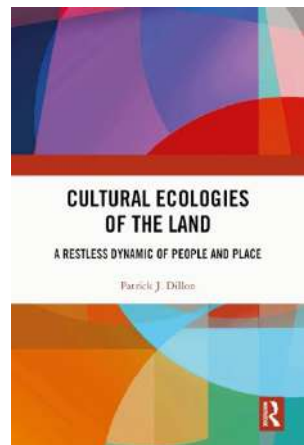
Seán's latest book of poetry will be published by Shoestring Press in November 2025. Titled *Creation Radio*, the cover (not available at the time of going to press) includes an image of Tirzah Garwood's 'Orchid Hunters of Brazil' (pictured below). She was the wife of Eric Ravilious and was the subject of a major exhibition at the Dulwich Picture Gallery earlier this year. Of the book, George Szirtes has written:



Seán Street is a poet who well understands both the power and the ephemerality of the spoken word, and how 'while it would be always unforgettable, it would be for-ever unrecoverable'. That is the narrow ledge of perception that not just we humans, but the natural world itself is perched on. *Creation Radio* condenses a lifetime of celebratory and acute listening. It is that which gives his quiet yet clear voice its bindingly melancholy yet joyful power.

Patrick Dillon's *Cultural Ecologies of the Land: A Restless dynamic of people and place* was published by Routledge in April 2025 (ISBN: 978-1032975610). (There will be a review in the *RJS Journal* 2026). The information reads:

Cultural Ecologies of the Land is a radical and challenging reassessment of the way we relate to the land and to infrastructure. There was a time when the land defined us. Now, with each passing year, we are increasingly detached from it. It was once the centre stage of humanity; now it is the setting for a technological drama. What has happened, and why does it matter?



Cultural Ecologies of the Land will be published in an affordable paperback edition in late 2026. Early in 2026, Routledge will also be publishing *Sacred Places in the Arctic and Beyond: Cultural and existential transitions*, a book that Patrick has jointly edited and which includes his chapter on the Uffington White Horse.

Robin Stapleford is working on an anthology of Richard Jefferies' spiritual writing that has never been the sole focus before in a collection. Set into 'found-poetry' style 'To the honoured memory of the Prose Poet of England's fields and woodlands', as it reads on Jefferies' footstone on his tomb at Broadwater Cemetery, the formatting couldn't be more appropriate. It is a book to look out for soon.

Earlier this year the Richard Jefferies Society awarded Honorary Life Membership to Jeremy Hooker for his lifelong dedication to Richard Jefferies and for all he has done to introduce Jefferies to a wider audience. A



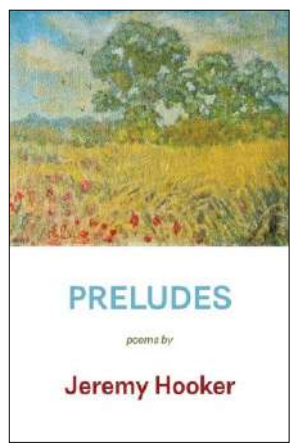
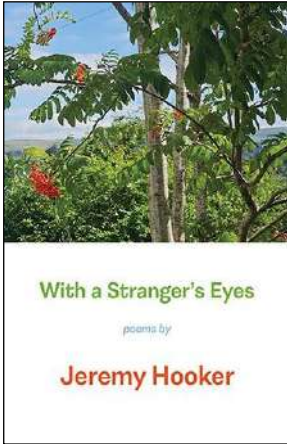
former President of the Society from 1994–2004, Professor Hooker has loved Jefferies' works, particularly his essays, since a boy and still keeps a copy of *Jefferies' England* by his bed that once belonged to his parents.

Many of you will own a copy of *At Home on the Earth: A new selection of the later writings of*

Richard Jefferies that was selected and introduced by Jeremy (Dartington: Green Books, 2001) and illustrated by Agnes Miller Parker. In a note about the selections he wrote: 'The refusal to stop thinking for himself in the face of adversity is one of the things I most admire about Jefferies'.

He was Professor of Literature at the University of Glamorgan and continues to write prose and poetry: two books last year, two this year. His poem 'Wessex Chalkland', originally published in the *Times Literary Supplement*, has a reference to Jefferies and was published last year in *Preludes* (reviewed below) along with other autobiographical poems set in his original homeland in the south of England between the Solent and the New Forest along with *Addiction: A Love Story* that is a tale of Jeremy's late wife's illness and their struggle to find

a cure. Twelve of Hooker's titles have been published by Shearsman Books alone. *With a Stranger's Eyes* (poems set in the Netherlands and Wales) was published this year along with *Presence and Place* in collaboration with artist and sculptor Lee Grandjean, exploring his work and places they had shared.



PRELUDES: POEMS BY JEREMY HOOKER

Shearsman Books: 79pp; ISBN 9781848619531

A review by Seán Street

This richly autobiographical collection begins with 'Ancestors', a defining poem: 'They come towards me,/ and I reach back towards them...' Near the end of the poem are these lines:

And in this place, there is a calling of flesh,
a common desire for earth itself,
and for life ensouled in the dailyness of time.

Jeremy Hooker has always been a poet of Place in whom terrain and human experience are deeply connected. Specifically in this book, the terrain is his birthplace and boyhood stamping ground beginning at Warsash on the Hamble River and spreading into a hinterland of wider Hampshire, Dorset and Wiltshire. These are landscapes with figures: human relationships and memories of family and friends departed, set against the places that grew them, painted with the care—in all senses of the word—of his father's artist's eye.

Hooker has long tussled with the concept of nostalgia; in a useful end note on autobiographical poetry, he explains: 'My early idea of nostalgia came with a

horror of being stuck in an idealized version of the past. Much later ... I realised that nostalgia, in releasing memory, can be an energy.' In his poem 'Wessex Chalkland' he confronts another formative struggle, in landscapes where the shades of Jefferies, Hardy and Thomas have left their literary footprints: 'What word could I add/to a land so loved, where the dead,/ it seemed, had breathed all the air?'

Interestingly it has long been a characteristic of Hooker's work that he writes vividly of Place from a distance, using as a vantage point his various homes over a long life—in the west of England, Holland, the USA and Wales—with a focus as through a telescopic lens, looking back often with astonishing clarity. For example, 'A Dreaming' is set on Pennington Common at Lymington in the New Forest, where the lens becomes a microscope exploring minutiae regained across 75 years with the sharpness of a magnifying glass:

A little white moth
blunders out of dark
into the sun

small brown butterflies
flutter by, grasshoppers
leap at a footfall

'Immersion' is the key to these poems: as he writes in his note, 'the conviction that every place is a centre of being has characterized my work from the beginning. In exploring the terrain of memory, I have sought to make it live as it does in me, but also as it lives beyond me, not as in the weak word *environment*, but in the one life we share with all beings in an animate universe.' Also central is the word 'quickness', drawn from Henry Vaughan, and adapted to Hooker's own sense of 'livingness, and the otherness of reality, that which words can only point to.' He himself animates a personal and shared past, and in 'Revenant', the penultimate poem in this poignant collection, there are lines that echo those at the start, celebrating the role of communicative recollection in the process, and in so doing, the making of a poet:

I feel for the latch in my mind.
But I do not need to open the door.
Memory leads me in.

RICHARD JEFFERIES AWARD FOR BEST NATURE WRITING PUBLISHED IN 2024

On 28 April 2025 *Nature's Ghosts: the world we lost and how to bring it back* by Sophie Yeo (HarperNorth) was announced as the winner of last year's Richard Jefferies Award.

Barry Sloan, Chair of the judging panel, praised the book for its appealing, thoughtful and impressively researched approach to the subject of environmental change and conservation. Sophie Yeo had invited fresh consideration of the long history of change, 'peering into the annals of the earth', to better understand how it has survived profound climate upheavals and the impact of human activity in the past, and to recognise the lessons these may have for



modern conservation strategies. 'I don't believe that we can, or should, attempt to rewind the world to a specific point in time', she writes. 'But that does not mean that we should treat the past as irrelevant.' While Yeo's interest in ancient human societies and her sense of the wildness still present in the human psyche were subjects of significant interest to her Victorian predecessor, Richard Jefferies, her own animated eloquence and persuasive approach will encourage a wide readership to engage in a nuanced way with current debates about the politics of land ownership, managing change, rewilding, and a host of related and pressing issues.

Sophie Yeo becomes the tenth winner of the Richard Jefferies Award which is jointly sponsored by the Richard Jefferies Society and The White Horse Bookshop in Marlborough, and is given for the most outstanding nature writing published in the past year. *Nature's Ghost* was chosen from a strong shortlist of titles consisting of *The Lost Paths* (Michael Joseph) by Jack Cornish, *Lost Wonders* (Picador) by Tom Lathan and *The Accidental Garden* (Profile Books) by Richard Mabey.

Nature's Ghosts

The world we lost and
how to bring it back

'Breathtaking'
Guy Shrubsole

'Wondrous'
Tristan Gooley



SOPHIE YEO