

THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY SPRING NEWSLETTER 2004

REGISTERED CHARITY No. 1042838

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01865 735678 (Best before 7.00 pm or Saturdays)

FROM THE CHAIR

Reports from a War Zone

For security reasons participants are indicated by codes.

1. From agent T:

Nominally a republic, it is under complete control of the dictator K, a self-styled 'king' whose rule is enforced by his blackshirt paramilitary corps. This ruthless despot orders summary execution of all dissidents, including members of his own family. Any supposed slight to the dictator's dignity may lead to the torture or death of an innocent citizen. Central to the ruler's extravagant lifestyle is his vast palace which houses his Treasury and to which access is severely restricted.

2. From secret agent S:

The dictator permits a simulacrum of democracy when citizens' assemblies are held but the delegates are powerless. Exceptionally, a secret assembly has been convened by the dictator's son, the so-called 'crown prince'. There is only one agenda item for discussion, namely widely-circulating rumours of an impendingmorganatic union between the dictator and a society beauty widely regarded as an adventuress. All councillors were to attend in order to consider the legality of the dictator's plan. Its implementation would disrupt existing power structures, undermining the positions of the 'crown prince' and senior officials.

3. From intelligence officer P:

My scouts report heavy concentrations of rebel troops and civilians on our borders. Guarded by elite forces, foraging incursions into our territory are increasing but the rebels seem unaware that they are being watched. Our strategists are of opinion that an immediate surprise attack would overwhelm the rebels before they have time to muster their full strength.

4. From information source C:

There has been a skirmish in which a small party of our troops was routed by rebel forces. They are now so near, numerous and well led by the charismatic C H that they constitute a threat to the homelands of our republic. They are motivated by greed and revenge, for after former incursions dictator K had ordered mass slaughter of the rebels. Their resurgence now menaces our civilisation with avenging genocide, although their leader reiterates that he has no more territorial demands to make upon us.

5. From the spy M:

The dictator has presided over a council of war which I was able to record through my underground intercept. At first he convinced the assembly that immediate and direct attack would be the best course — what he called "the mother of all battles". F, a senior strategist, argued for attrition, knowing that a large invading force would be unable to sustain itself for long in hostile country and would be forced to

retreat if denied supplies without military engagement. F was outvoted but the intemperate debate alerted the dictator to his own unpopularity: he felt himself to be surrounded by traitors and relapsed into a mood of depression and despair.

6. From anon, a journalist:

Recovering from his depression, K sent messages to CH offering peace with power-sharing between the two leaders and equal division of territories. The rebel leader's courier bearing agreement to these terms was assassinated before he could contact K; the latter's decision to go to war was therefore made on the basis of inaccurate intelligence.

7. From C-in-C A K at military HQ:

At 0815 ordered by Leader K to attack in full strength. This change of plan delighted me and I rallied the troops for action. I called on a powerful ally to help us. He sent a Weapon of Mass Destruction which had lately been adapted to field use. The officer of ordnance in charge of it was aristocratic and extremely young but clearly competent. At a crucial stage of the resumed battle I gave an order to discharge the W.M.D. and the resulting explosions were shattering. The rebel forces disintegrated, leaving a demoralised remnant to flee in terror. Later, while K was planning to execute all traitors for crimes against the state he was in turn murdered by a disaffected citizen and by popular acclaim I was appointed to succeed him. As I told my new subjects — or should I say 'my electorate', this was their finest hour.

8. This record has been compiled by historian R J, to whose relevant study, *Wood Magic* the reader is referred for information about further developments.

Len Grugeon

PS You will see that I have been re-reading *Wood Magic*, noting its prophetic perceptions. Towards the end of the narrative I have so wickedly plundered above there is a sentence of rather obvious wisdom which in our day is unwisely neglected:

"The age does not know what it is doing; posterity alone can appreciate it." Well said, Sir Bevis!

COUNCIL MEMBERS 2004

President: Professor Jeremy Hooker (elected 1999 for 5 years)

Treasurer: Geoffrey Hirst (elected 2000 for 5 years) 91A Woodstock Road, Witney, Oxon. OX28 1ED (Tel. 01993 703958)

Secretary: Phyllis Treitel (re-elected 2000 for 5 years) Eidsvoll, Bedwells Heath, Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5JE

Vice Presidents: Brian Fullagar, Robert McCloy

Members of Council: (with duties)

Leonard Grugeon, Chairman (re-elected 2000 for 3 years) 31 Poplar Road, Shalford, Guildford GU4 SDH (Tel. 01483 535377)

Margaret Evans, Membership Secretary (re-elected for 3 years) 23 Hardwell Close, Grove, Nr. Wantage, Oxon OX12 OBN (Tel. 012357 65360)

John Price, Vice-Chairman (elected 2004 for 3 years) (Tel. 01672 515150)

Ray Morse, Meetings Secretary (re-elected 2000 for 3 years) 28 Tismeads Crescent, Swindon SN1 4DR (Tel. 01793 530520)

Margaret Gould, Librarian (re-elected 1999 for 3 years) (Tel. 01793 520431)

Patrick Dillon (re-elected 1999 for 3 years) Helen Newman (re-elected 2001 for 3 years) John Webb (elected 1999 for 3 years), John Savage, Richard Stewart (re-elected 2004 for 3 years), E.S. Jones (elected 3 years)
Co-opted A.S. Hickerton

REPORT ON THE AGM AND BIRTHDAY LECTURE 2003

This was another good AGM. Rather too many of our regulars could not come, for health reasons, but we were 25 even so. We were very pleased to see Howard Kensett.

We met in the Memorial Hall at Aldbourne; there is usually no problem about parking but, alas, the street outside the hall was being dug up for new mains, so those attending had to use their ingenuity. Fortunately, the weather was delightful, and in the lunch break most of us visited St. Michael's Church, which was looking glorious.

We re-elected Len Grugeon, John Price, Margaret Evans and Ray Morse. Professor Patrick Dillon has stepped down; in his place we elected Professor Eric Jones. We are always glad of suggestions for new Council members, and indeed offers of help with Society duties.

Discussion in the AGM turned on Council's search for a less onerous Public Liability Insurance premium; we also discussed the possible deposit of the Society's archives (mainly records of meetings and correspondence). The meeting was over at 12.00. More members and visitors arrived for the Birthday Lecture.

Birthday Lecture: 'Word Life in a Southern County' -Richard Coates, Professor of Linguistics, University of Sussex

The title of Professor Coates' lecture should have alerted us to expect something novel and intriguing though the word 'linguistics' sounded somewhat daunting. In the event, we were totally at ease (helped by the overhead projector) and yet fascinated by this introduction to the study of dialect.

Professor Coates began by explaining the difference between regionally-coloured writing (that is dialect which the writer cannot help), and direct writing, where dialect is a conscious choice. He then told us about historical differences, pre- and post- printing, leading to a gradual standardisation, coming earlier in written form, later in speech.

In the 18th century whole books (not read now) were written in local speech, but this was hard work for the reader. Scotland was special. In the 19th century writers usually used dialect only in quotations, but William Barnes confined his poetry to dialect, and Tennyson wrote some plays wholly in Lincolnshire speech. On the whole, dialect has been used for humour, and the re-telling of Bible stories.

Professor Coates found Richard Jefferies an acute observer of dialect, sensitive to social nuances, and peasant illogicality. Jefferies, himself, had shed his rural origins in his writing. The question no one seems able to answer is - How did Jefferies speak?

Not surprisingly, everyone had a suggestion or a comment to make, and the discussion might have run on but, because of a mix-up over bookings (not our fault), we were asked to vacate the hall early. This was a blow, but the solution is for us to have our own examination of Jefferies' use of dialect at a forthcoming

meeting. We are indebted to Professor Coates (recommended to us by Mark Daniel, whose student he was) for opening up for us a new avenue of study.



Professor Coates (right) talking to Eric Jones. Photo, by Len Grugeon

CQATE MUSEUM OPENING DATES (AND NEWS)

The Museum will be open on the following Sundays in 2004:

2 May, 16 May, 6 June, 20 June, 4 July, 18 July, 1 August, 15 August, 5 September, 19 September

The following members will, in turn, be there to show visitors round and sell souvenirs, leaflets and books: John and Sheila Povey, Ray and Sylvia Morse, Mark Daniel, John Price, John Webb, Jean Bone, Chris and Liz Bowles, Pam Smith, Margaret Gould and Phyllis Treitel.

The house and garden are open from 2.00 to 5.00 (no charge). There is parking in Coate Water Country Park (next door but one) and meals at the Sun Inn, next door.

Because of the illness of Nigel Gregory, Nigel and Ethelwyn, strong supporters of the Museum, can no longer serve. We should very much like offers of help; basic training will be given.

As we write, the cottage (the inhabited part of the house, the thatched part) is being spruced up for its new tenant. Once the tenant is in residence, we shall breathe a sigh of relief, and go ahead with the delayed installation of the bench in memory of Harold Adams. There may be a formal occasion for this event on a last minute date, or it may take place on one of the open Sundays. Enquiries to Ray Morse: 01793 530 520.

Footnote: The Museum is not idle during the winter. On 17 February, children aged 5-11 years can spend the day there (£4 per head) studying local animals, using the natural history collection - 'Furry Facts'.

STUDY DAY, CHURCH HALL. CH1SELDON
SATURDAY 24 JULY 2004 'JEFFERIES. A MANY-SIDED GENIUS'

PROGRAMME

10.30 Doors open and refreshments
11.00 Individual contributions by members (see below).
12.30-2.00 Lunch break
2.00 Two speakers - Len Grugeon and John Savage - will give an overview of Jefferies' many-sidedness, its range, its advantages and, perhaps, its drawbacks.
Members' contributions

Our aim is to draw attention to the great variety of Jefferies' interests, revealed in his books and essays. Please come with an example of one of his favourite themes, plus a typical quotation. The examples will be assembled on a chart to see what it reveals. Here are a few to choose from: books, birds, religion, the sea, the future, food, stars, the weather, agriculture, women, shooting, art, rural life, poaching, money, children, flowers, mysticism, archaeology, the poor, colour, conservation.

THE SAVE COATE CAMPAIGN

Does your county have a Structure Plan? Wiltshire does, and so does Swindon. Wiltshire has to accommodate a large number of new houses and wants to allocate most of them to Swindon. Swindon wants to allow them to be built on the land between Day House Lane and the new hospital at the Commonhead roundabout. Roy Burton was only just in time with his photo-survey.

Jean Saunders, of Friends of the Earth, has been organising the protest, with tough letters to the papers, and supplying top-class information. Stan Hickerton keeps the Hon. Sec. supplied with newspaper cuttings, Ray Morse goes to meetings and writes letters, the Hon. Sec. sends formal protests to Swindon and Wiltshire.

The developers, as usual, have a hostage behind whom/which they advance. The hostage is a projected branch/outpost of the University of Bath. The Vice-Chancellor claims that for Bath, it must be Coate or nothing. In return for being allowed to build 1,800 houses (facts are hard to come by) the developer will provide 60 hectares for the University. Why must it be Coate? Because it will contain a medical school which must be near the hospital. A medical school? Well - a place for training nurses. Facts are hard to come by.

And so we shudder, and form a group, like deer in a park, when the gamekeeper walks in. Protests take various lines. Mr. Frank Avenell (a surname familiar to Jefferies scholars) claims that the development will create impossible traffic problems and bring the infrastructure to the point of collapse. Our own argument is that the scheme is cynical (using the university as bait); that the people of Swindon, especially the young, need somewhere semi-wild like Coate Water; that if the new houses surround Coate Water, as planned, it will be emasculated, no longer attracting wildlife to its nature reserves; that there are brown field sites unused. Jefferies would perhaps refer the decision-makers to his pamphlet *Jack Brass*.

A major public meeting is planned for May; a Newsletter, to keep the people of Swindon informed, will be provided, to supplement the emails and websites.

[www. savecoate. org.uk](http://www.savecoate.org.uk)

With link to Richard Jefferies Society and petition form.

SCARCE JEFFERIES WORKS ON CD

On page 14 and 15 of the Annual Report and Autumn Newsletter 2002, we explained how our members (and anyone else) could have access to *The Scarlet Shawl* and *Jefferies Land* via a web page*. This initiative has now been expanded into a project called 'Scarce Jefferies Works on CD'. There are 4 CDs in the catalogue:

CD-01 *The Scarlet Shawl* - page images - searchable text.

CD-02 *Jefferies Land* - page images - searchable text.

CD-03 *Greene Ferne Farm* - page images - searchable text.

CD-04 *Restless Human Hearts* - page images - searchable text.

Page images are scans of the original books, so the reader has a facsimile of the original book, as with microfilm. The pages can be read on a computer screen, but are awkward to print out. By their very nature, they do not offer text that can be searched or edited.

Searchable text is made by Optical Character Recognition software (OCR). The resulting text can be searched and edited (by copy and paste, for example). However, there may be a few errors in the text. The results, for a section particularly important to a reader, can be readily verified by examining the page images. Searchable text can be read on a computer screen, and is easy to print in the form of a book.

A CD, for those who have the skill and the equipment, can be obtained on loan from the Hon. Sec. It can be sent by post; we suggest a fee of f 1.00 to cover cost of packing and postage. The CD must, of course, be returned within about two weeks. They may be copied for members and friends, but may not be sold. Richard Wright and Ray Evans hope to expand project 'Scarce Jefferies Works on CD'. Suggestions and offers of help can be directed to Richard Wright (richwrig@tig.com.au) and Ray Evans (evansra@ntlworld.com). They are also prepared to handle queries.

To Richard Wright and Ray Evans (husband of Margaret), we are deeply indebted, both for their initiative, and for hours spent on the job and money spent but not charged to the Society. In our next issue I hope to give details of Ray's project to make *Restless Human Hearts* available to the world, free, as part of the Gutenberg Project.

* <http://liomepages.ihug.com.au/~richwrig>

GOOD NEWS FROM THE RIDGEWAY

On 17 December 2003, Wiltshire County Council voted to impose a permanent Traffic Regulation Order (TRO) on the Smeathe's Ridge section of the Ridgeway National Trail. It is likely that this TRO will come into effect in February this year and from then it will be illegal to use a mechanically propelled vehicle on the Trail between Barbury Castle and Ogbourne St. George.

The Hon. Sec.'s letter, on RJS headed paper, was one of 323 in support of the ban. 74 were against. This section is only 3 miles, but with the help of Alun Michael MP and Julia Drown MP we hope to extend it. See DEFRA website: www.defra.gov.uk/wildlife-countryside/cl/pubh/crow.htm.

The Friends of the Ridgeway have issued a new and attractive leaflet; copies from the Hon. Sec. The RJS subscribes £10 per annum to the Friends. The 2004 Ridgeway Walk is scheduled for Saturday 8 May. Ring 01235 532207 (Mike Sandford) or see ridgeway40.org.uk.

SWINDON'S LITERARY TRAIL

Matt Holland, who presents the Swindon Festival* of Literature, has had a new idea: he is to organise a literary trail of Swindon.

We published one Jefferies Trail leaflet some years ago, and Matt is welcome to use it: we like the idea. It is time, as he points out, that Swindon show pride in its writers.

The project was announced in the *Evening Advertiser* for 14 February (pp 6-7) with a portrait of Jefferies and a fulsome account of his life and work by Barrie Hudson (www.thisiswiltshire.co.uk). Alfred Williams has a place too. We are sorry that Mr. Hudson headed his section on Jefferies with the words 'Run out of town for loving nature', which is not the case, and equally sorry that most of Jefferies' books are out of print. We shall let him, and Matt, know that the whole world can read 5 of Jefferies' works for nothing via the Gutenberg Project, viz. *Field and Hedgerow*, *The Life of the Fields*, *The Open Air*, *The Story of My Heart*, *Pageant of Summer*. Two more works, *The Scarlet Shawl*, and *Jefferies' Land* are already free, on the internet, and two more will be available shortly on CD, viz. *Restless Human Hearts* and *Greene Ferne Farm* virtually free (see item 'Scarce Jefferies Works on CD'). We don't wait for publishers; we go on and do it ourselves.

*This year's Festival will run for the first 2 weeks in May.

CHISELDON TIMBERLAND TRAIL

There are already two Timberland Trails near Swindon - at Wroughton, and Purton. Now there is a third one which links Coate Water with Chiseldon. It also links up with routes to Marlborough and eventually Salisbury, but the trail itself is 2.5 miles long and is accessible to walkers, cyclists, wheelchairs and pushchairs. It is marked with waymark discs, has no barriers, and the only steep bit is the bridge over the M4. Information from Great Western Community Forest 01793 466324.

BOOK NEWS

Hedge Sparrow Press. George Miller has started a little press of his own. The first title is *Message in a Space Bottle*, a poem by George about the future of our environment. There are 50 numbered copies for sale at £45 each. They are hand set and printed, with 11 wood engravings by Bob Guy, and signed by author and artist. For complete specifications of this luxurious book - apply to Hon Sec. or: George Miller 01691 658330, email george.miller@virgin.net, or 10 Upper Church Street, Oswestry, Shropshire SY11 2AE.

Miniature Cottages. John Constable has now established a website about his work which will enable members to see the cottages: www.miniaturecottages.co.uk

Laurel Books. The Newsletter has previously contained details of reprints of Edward Thomas's work - *Light and Twilight*, and *In Pursuit of Spring*. A third book has now been issued by Laurel Books: *Strange Meetings*, poems by Harold Monro, edited by Dominic Hibberd. The Hon. Sec. has order forms, or apply to Laurel Books, 282 The Common, Holt, Wiltshire BA14 6QJ. *Strange Meetings* is £7.99 plus £1 postage.

ELTHAM PALACE AND ELTHAM PEOPLE

The Eltham Society has published another book about Eltham. John Kennett has sent a review copy and thinks our members will be interested in the article entitled "The Eltham Palace Sculptures of Carleton Attwood", because Attwood was a keen member of the Richard Jefferies Society and lived in Swindon. The Eltham book can be obtained from J. Kennett, 26 Strongbow Road, Eltham, London SE9 1DT, price £2.50 + 75p p&p, cheques to The Eltham Society. We also have the latest Eltham Society Newsletter No. 154.

BOOK REVIEW

A new publication of interest to readers of Jefferies

Wessex Memories, a new volume of hitherto uncollected essays by Llewelyn Powys (1884-1939), has just been published by the Powys Press. It contains twenty-four essays, almost all written in the last decade of his life while he was fighting the consumption that eventually killed him in December 1939.

The collection is edited by Peter Foss, currently secretary of the Powys Society and an authority on Llewelyn, and in his introduction he places him firmly in the "rural tradition" (generously acknowledging my book on that topic), and emphasizes his particular links with Jefferies, which I had discussed briefly. The resemblances between the two writers are considerable. Both suffered from some form of tuberculosis, and wrote passionately about the joys of life while under the continuing shadow of death. Moreover, this particular volume makes it possible to extend the comparison still further. Like Jefferies, Llewelyn Powys was confined to his bed for long periods during the last years of his life (some of these late essays were written in a sanatorium in Switzerland), and was therefore unable to write about rural matters out of his *immediate* experience. As a result, like Jefferies, he was forced back upon memory, and most of these essays have a poignant, looking-back-to-a-vanished-past quality in which both rural places and country people are viewed through a vivid but often saddening glass of recollection, as in "My Old Village". Again and again, an initial memory leads naturally into more general thoughts about a way of life that has gone - at least for the writer - for ever.

Moreover *Wessex Memories* is pleasantly illustrated with engravings, by Foss himself, which recall the attractive reprints of Jefferies that appeared from Lutterworth Press in the late 1940s with illustrations by C.F. Tunnicliffe and Agnes Miller Parker. Any member of the Richard Jefferies Society who regrets that virtually all of Jefferies' work - certainly all of his best work - has now appeared, is recommended to sample Llewelyn Powys's essays, especially those collected in *Dorset Essays* (1935), *Somerset Essays* (1937), and now *Wessex Memories*. This new volume is available from The Powys Society, c/o 82 Linden Road, Gloucester GL1 5HD. The price per copy is £9.95 (UK) or £10.95 (abroad), inclusive of postage.

W. J. Keith

Note: The Society has a review copy of this book; apply to Hon. Sec.

CITINGS OF JEFFERIES

Country Origins. Sue King, who lives in St. Leonards uses quotations from Jefferies in her own writing and has spotted one in the magazine *Country Origins*. The cover picture showed a farmer hand-sowing his oat field. Inside, the editor explained that it was 'not what one saw in the countryside, but what one remembered to have seen' that gave it its beauty - attributing the quotation to Jefferies.

Call of the Wild. George Miller has sent a whole article from *Guardian Review* (6 Dec. '03) by Robert Macfarlane in which he assesses first the decline in nature writing, and now, signs of a renaissance. Richard Mabey, on 18 March '03, had expressed regret at the decline and Macfarlane develops the theme, noticing that in America, nature writing is flourishing. He lists our neglected nature writers, including Richard Jefferies - 'drastically under-read'.

Neopaganism. Brian Morris, from Lewes, has been reading Ronald Hutton's *Triumphs of the Moon*. Hutton, whose inaccuracies do not recommend him, blames Jeffries [sic] and others, such as Hardy, Hudson, Massingham, and Thomas, as serving the cult of rural nostalgia. This, in turn, has led to the neopagan or wicca movement. Thus Jefferies influences neopaganism. Brian's view is that a fuller reading of Jefferies suggests otherwise.

Jefferies and Conservation. The brisk trade in videos has brought John Webb the extra duty of receiving enquiries and comments about Jefferies. He passed on an extract from the Ferring Conservation Group's publication (Nr. Goring by Sea) containing an article by Wendy Ross entitled Richard Jefferies's Legacy.

It is too long to quote in full but it is clear that she knows her Jefferies, and finds his detailed accounts of what was happening in Sussex in the 1880s of great interest. She opens with a reference to Highdown Hill (NT) and ends: 'Perhaps we should have an annual Conservation Walk over or up Highdown, or perhaps better still, a Memorial Walk for people such as Richard Jefferies and W.H. Hudson whose writings remind us of the beauty of the world we live in ... by this we can all make our contribution to the continuance of an environment which, little over 120 years ago inspired a man in failing health, perhaps after a painful haul to the top of Highdown. to return and write from the heart about what he had seen, which when read today is as fresh and meaningful as the day he wrote it.'

OTHER SOCIETIES

Henry Williamson Society. The subject for this year's Study Day, which took place on 21 February, was 'Henry Williamson and the Influence of his Fellow Nature Writers'. Richard Stewart (who spoke at our study day) gave the first lecture: 'Henry Williamson's debt to Richard Jefferies'. This was followed by readings. After lunch there were lectures on W.H. Hudson and Edward Thomas, and on H.W. himself.

Journal No. 39 contains 6 articles, most dealing with H.W.'s early life, and many containing fascinating photographs.

Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society. Once again, we have tickets to enable our members to use the Museum at Devizes free. Do please make use of the Museum and the tickets. Lots of visits lead to lots of money, so please

go. Devizes is a delightful town and the Museum in Long Street is quite unique. The Hon. Sec. has the list of events for 2004; how about an archaeological walk on Salisbury Plain, 24 April, or a visit to Pompeii, 15-22 September, for starters?

William Morris Society. Their Newsletter, which has been edited since 1997 by Martin Haggerty, will be in the care of Diana Andrews from this year. We learn that the 50th anniversary conference will take place in July 2005 in Roehampton. Perhaps, now that Martin has more free time, he will come and give us a talk,

Surbiton & District Birdwatching Society. To celebrate their 50th anniversary, the members are to organise a birdwatch in Bushy Park, for members of the public, on 20 March in conjunction with Thames Water. The Society's email is now: hockley@sdbws.ndo.co.uk (It was founded by Hockley Clarke, a keen RJS member). The latest bulletin gives news of birds, as usual, but also an account of how birdwatchers, on an outing to Rye, helped save from drowning, a boy and a dog, thus missing a kingfisher.

Alliance of Literary Societies. The Winter Newsletter gave details of competitions: one is for those who have excelled in furthering interest in any author, poet, or illustrator of CHILDREN'S literature. *The Open Book* (the ALS has its own journal), improves in content and format. The Hon. Sec. has a copy to share. It contains an excellent article by Michael Taylor (RJS) about Alison Uttley - 'Alison in the Looking Glass'.

This year the AGM of the ALS is being hosted by the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust at Berkhamstead Collegiate School, Berkhamstead on 24 April with further events taking place on 25. It promises to be a full weekend of events marking the centenary of Graham Greene's birth. If anyone is interested in attending, please contact Helen Newman, Tel. 0121 423 2100.

Arts Council England, South West. Issue 6 of its publication mentions Swindon once - 'Swindon Dance Intensive'. If you are in the Arts world you can advertise here and get help. The massive reorganisation of the Arts Council, forced through by the government, to save money, is beginning to shake down. So far as this (literary) society is concerned the previous system was better (and seemed cheaper).

THE VIDEO - 'JEFFERIES LAND'

The video is selling very well - not only to members of the Society. Why not offer to give a talk, locally, about Richard Jefferies, and show the video? A school might be interested, or a public library. VHS cassettes of the film are still available from John Webb (the maker), at:

Padbrook, Bincknoll Lane, Wootton Bassett, Wilts. SN4 8QR Tel. 01793853171. Fax. 01793 848498
Email: wwwwebbrass@aol.com

The price is f 10 which includes post and packing. Cheques payable to John Webb. The Society gets a percentage.

SPREADING THE WORD

On 4 October 2003, the Wiltshire Local History Forum held a day of lectures in Devizes on the subject of Literary Figures in Wiltshire. Two members of the Society attended, to hear our vice-chairman, John Price, give the lecture on Richard Jefferies.

John Chandler gave the opening talk. He was followed by speakers on William Beckford and Francis Kilvert. John Price spoke after lunch, followed by a talk on Edith Olivier.

John Price is a popular speaker, and there was no doubt that he would please on this occasion, but it is not all that simple. People think they know about Jefferies, and so do not expect to hear anything new; many have been told much about the sadness of Jefferies' later days, without knowing about the happy times. John, while giving all the relevant details of Jefferies' life, was nevertheless able to anchor it firmly in Wiltshire; he spoke cheerfully and fluently; unlike most of us, he was able to wave rare early publications by Jefferies, and first editions. His lecture was well received, as purchases later proved. Members who live in parts of England where Jefferies lived might like to offer to give talks locally. Help with illustrations and exhibits is available. Please ask.

WALKING IN THE FOOTSTEPS OF WILTSHIRE WRITERS

On a course at Urchfont Manor during not quite the hottest five days in August 2003, Gordon Ottewell led ten keen participants, including myself as his assistant, hi the footsteps of writers who had lived in, or had connections with Wiltshire and had written about this county. The writers, spanning the seventeenth to the twentieth centuries were Celia Fiennes, Stephen Duck, Hannah More, Alfred Williams, Edward Thomas, Geoffrey Grigson, Nikolaus Pevsner. Percy Whitlock and, of course, Richard Jefferies.

On the day that Richard Jefferies featured with Alfred Williams, we had readings from their works at the memorial stone on Burderop Down followed by a walk along the Ridgeway with views for miles over the newly harvested landscape, where we alighted outside the cottage where keeper Haylock had lived. Had it not been for the traffic which sadly uses this road as a rat run and the distant noise of the M4, we could have been back in Jefferies' day.

A delightful bonus for us all was the knowledge we gained from Gordon of the wild flowers and butterflies and birds seen along the way. His relaxed style and humour was catching which helped the group to gel quickly. In the evenings after dinner Gordon gave talks with slides about the writers and their associations with Wiltshire. The Society's new video, "Jefferies' Land" was given a viewing and well received. It was pleasing to see members of the group borrowing books for bedtime reading from the selection of the writers' works we had both supplied.

On the final evening everyone had an opportunity to read extracts of their choice. Amongst these was an entry in Jefferies' notebook from August 1879, "August Night" - a chapter from *The Dewy Morn* and, hi contrast, the passage from "A Wet Night in London" about the problems of using an omnibus. These shared readings made a fitting ending to what one participant called, "the happiest course I have attended in thirteen years of coming here".

This should not detract from other courses run at Urchfont Manor. I have attended eight day, weekend or longer residential courses in the two years since

discovering this late seventeenth century house with its warm atmosphere. The staff make you feel welcome, the food is fantastic and many of the bedrooms have views over the extensive gardens, grounds and countryside.

Gordon, who some members may remember giving a walk to the Society about William Warde Fowler in April 1987, will be running another five day residential course at Urchfont Manor from 5th-9th July 2004 called "In the Footsteps of Wiltshire Nature Writers" when, again Richard Jefferies will be one of the subjects. The others are to be W.H. Hudson, Edward Thomas, H.W. Timperley and W. Keble Martin.

If you are interested you can contact Urchfont Manor near Devizes on (01380) 840495 or email urchfont@wccyouth.org.uk and ask for a brochure.

Norma Goodwin

SOCIETY PUBLICATIONS

This service is temporarily withdrawn as illness in the family means that Mrs. Gregory can no longer deal with it.

Any volunteers? Apply to Hon. Sec.

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Members' names and addresses are held on a computer data base. We are required by the Data Protection Act 1984 to inform members that they have the right to object to information being held in this way.

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