

THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY

SPRING NEWSLETTER 2018



John Constable's miniature model of a cottage at Hodson Bottom;
possibly the inspiration for the Witch's Cottage, *Bevis* – see pp.26-9.

THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY (Registered Charity No 1042838) was founded in 1950 to promote appreciation and study of the writings of Richard Jefferies (1848-1887).

Annual Membership runs from 1 July and is open to all on payment of the current subscription of £12 single or £14 couple (£8 students). Overseas Members incur additional postal charges of £5.

Members receive spring and autumn newsletters along with a *Journal*. The annual report is included in the autumn newsletter. The Society has a library of books by and about Richard Jefferies stored at Michael Sherwood's home in Devon. The Society's archives are placed in the Wiltshire & Swindon History Centre, Chippenham, or are on display at the Richard Jefferies Museum. Activities include a spring meeting, a study day in summer, special outings, a Birthday Lecture and an Annual General Meeting. The Society awards an annual literary award for excellence in nature writing and provides a research bursary for projects that promote a new understanding of Richard Jefferies.

Hon. Sec.

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NEWSLETTER: edited by Jean Saunders; and proof-read by Peter Robins. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Society. The deadline to submit material for the Autumn 2018 Newsletter is **25 August 2018**. Please send your contributions, preferably by email, to the Hon. Secretary as above.

The Society is most grateful to Janice Lingley for collecting and collating the 'Citings of Jefferies' section. Please email your contributions to citings@richardjefferiessociety.co.uk. Thanks also to Ray Morse who is maintaining the newspaper-cuttings album.

CONTENTS

Page

4	Contact details for Executive Council Members
5	From the Chair (cont. p.44)
7	From the Secretary
8	Report of the Birthday Lecture, 2017
8	How did you discover Richard Jefferies?
9	Jefferies Lodge
10	To those departed: Sheila Povey
12	Study Day, 2018. Samuel Looker and Richard Jefferies

Articles

13	The Lesser Known Samuel J. Looker
20	Obituary for Samuel Looker, Times
22	Jefferies' <i>History of Malmesbury</i> and Overboro'
26	The Witch's Cottage in <i>Bevis</i>

News

30	News in Brief
31	News from other Societies
32	Richard Jefferies Society Bursary

Books

32	Richard Jefferies Society & White Horse Bookshop Literary Prize
33	<i>A Peculiarly English Genius</i>
34	Mail Orders
36	Citings of Jefferies
43	Book Review
45	Books by Members
47	Meetings and Events Calendar: 2018

DATA PROTECTION ACT

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

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS 2017-2018

Mr. Peter Bainbridge	Member Re-elected 2016-19	95 Hamfield, Wantage, Oxon OX12 9EG
Mr. Simon Coleman	Member Re-elected 2016-19	Flat 4, 48 Southover, High Street, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1HX
Prof. Patrick Dillon	Member Elected 2015-2018	Lower Cooks, Woodbury Salterton, Exeter EX5 1PR
Prof. Roger Ebbatson	Member Re-elected 2016-19	157 Upper Welland Road, Malvern, Worcs WR14 4LB
Mrs. Margaret Hunt	Local Sec Elected 2015-2018	3 Vale Court, White Horse Road, Cricklade, Wilts. SN6 6EJ
Prof. Eric Jones	Vice Chairman Re-elected 2017-20	6 Leafield Road, Fairford, Glos GL7 4LL
Mr. Raymond Morse	Hon. Vice President (not a Trustee) Elected 2016	
Dr. Duncan Pepper	Librarian Re-elected 2014-17	Chew Cottage, Norton Lane, Chew Magna, N. Somerset BS40 8RW
Mr. John Price	Chairman Re-elected 2015-18	Granham West, Granham Hill, Marlborough, Wilts SN8 4DN
Dr. Mike Pringle	Member Elected 2016-19	34 Pleydell Road, Swindon SN1 4DH
Mr. Andrew Rossabi	President Re-elected 2015-2020	1 Bloomfield Court, Bloomfield Road, Highgate, N6 4ES
Mrs. Jean Saunders info@richardjefferiesociety.co.uk	Secretary Re-elected 2015-20	The Old Mill, Mill Drive, Foulsham, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 5RB
Mr. Tom Saunders	Treasurer Elected 2017-2022	The Old Mill, Foulsham, Norfolk NR20 5RB
Prof. Barry Sloan	Member Elected 2016-2019	The Capstone, Southampton Td., Whaddon, Wilts SP5 3EB
Mr. Richard Stewart 01473 216518	Member Re-elected 2015-18	Valezina, 112 Westerfield Road, Ipswich, Suffolk IP4 2XW
Lady Phyllis Treitel	Vice President Elected 2005	Eidsvoll, Bedwells Heath, Boars Hill, Oxford OX1 5JE
Dr. Rebecca Welshman	Member Re-elected 2016-2019	Weasdale Farm, Newbiggin-on-Lune, Kirby Stephen, Cumbria CA17 4LY

It is with deep regret that we record the death of Sheila Povey, Honorary Vice President. She was one of our most active Swindon-based members whose knowledge of Swindon history was second to none. See pp.10-11.

FROM THE CHAIR

John Price

This is the third year that our Literary Award for Nature Writing has been held, and the organisation of the process of selection has evolved significantly over that period of time. In the first year, we were dependent entirely on nominations from members of the Society, and the number of books to be read was in single figures. We also, naively, purchased a single copy of each of those books, that were then circulated in turn to the judges.

For the second year of the Award, Angus MacLennan of the White Horse Bookshop in Marlborough came on board. He both doubled the prize money to £1,000, and was able to offer much wise advice and help in contacting publishers, and asking them to put forward titles for consideration. As a result of this, the number of books to be considered increased considerable; and Richard Stewart, (who has most efficiently and competently managed the short-listing process), and I looked through all the titles – which this time were submitted gratis by the publishers – and then circulated the single copy of each short-listed title to the judging panel.

This year, we have advanced further along the learning curve concerning literary awards. In addition to the initial copies submitted by publishers, and suggested by members; when the short-list had been agreed, I requested another 6 complimentary copies from each publisher, so that a complete set could be given to each judge – and the publishers responded with delight and alacrity.

I felt bold enough to take this last step when I learned from one of our Council Members that any books short-listed for the Wainwright Prize (sponsored by the BBC and The National Trust) have to pay around £800 for the privilege; a requirement that in my view clearly discriminates against small publishers, and the increasing number of self-published books. I did not believe that asking for six free copies was likely to be nearly as off-putting to authors and publishers – and so it proved.

This year we had 27 nominations, which was a challenging task. Fortunately, when Richard and I looked at the books, some could be eliminated straight away. Some publishers are much better than others in deciding which books might reasonably qualify for our category of award, and others seem, almost in desperation, to submit any title that might seem relevant, irrespective of content.

Part of the reason for this increase in numbers is the ever-increasing number of 'nature' books published. Many of these can be categorised as follows:

'Escape to the Country' titles. These are written by people, who for very valid reasons, have decided to leave a large city (usually London) to take up residence

in a remote (to them) part of the British Isles. They struggle with the weather, the lack of facilities, and the locals; but often find solace in discovering 'wildlife'. Some of these are very good (e.g. *Common Ground* by Rob Cowen), but most are self-centred and superficial.

'Journey' titles. The authors of these books have decided to undertake a journey along some specific route. We have recently considered; an author walking North at the same pace as Spring moves north (which on the face of it sounds a very boring journey); an author following the complete route of the original Ridgeway from south coast to Norfolk (who cheated by frequently returning home for lengthy periods); and this year, an author who walked the route to be taken (and destroyed) by HS2. This latter was interesting, as it was time limited – and he did quote Richard Jefferies on several occasions – but did not make the short-list.

'Collection' titles. In these books, the author has set out to find and report on every species of a particular group in a limited geographical area; these have included butterflies, orchids, and bees.

All these categories may well inspire certain individuals to get out into the countryside and emulate the authors, but many of the books are rather self-satisfied and idiosyncratic, and therefore cannot truly be said to be real 'nature-writing'.

Occasionally, odd titles may be submitted, which are excellent in many ways, but cannot be considered for our Award. One such this year, which I really enjoyed was a book titled *The Plant Messiah*, and was the autobiography of a remarkable young Spaniard, brought up on his father's small holding in Northern Spain, who has developed a remarkable talent for plant propagation, and is now a vital member of the relevant team at Kew. He has now saved more species of water-lily from extinction than were known to exist 20 years ago. It was not short-listed because the literary style was somewhat clumsy, and the book was about very specific botanical fields – in which I happen to be interested, but the average reader might find tedious. It was, however, a much more worthy work than many of the journalistic titles now being churned out by established authors.

One very encouraging aspect of our reading-for-short-list activities, however, is the frequency with which Richard Jefferies is quoted. Although Jefferies' books can hardly be said to be popularly read, many authors do know his work, and do draw on relevant quotations in their publications – and I don't think that they are yet including these in the hope of making the short-list! The frequency of Jefferies references can be judged from the 'Citations' section of this Newsletter compiled by Janice Lingley.

... continued on p.44

FROM THE SECRETARY

Jean Saunders

Membership renewal forms for 2018-2019 will be sent out with the *Journal* in June that has already been printed as a 150pp. paperback with articles related to views of Jefferies as seen from abroad.

The Society has lost its storage facility for the fifth time in under five years. Stocks of some of our Jefferies' titles are very low but I encourage Members to take advantage of new books on offer that the Society has published under its Petton Books imprint.

I am reminded of a letter that Samuel Looker wrote to Frances Gay in 1963. Mr. Looker quotes figures for the sales of his editions of Richard Jefferies' works as follows:

1. Published by Lutterworth: *The Old House at Coate*, (6000 copies); *Richard Jefferies' London*, (10,000); *The Spring of the Year*, (7000); *The Open Air*, *The Life of the Fields*, and *Field and Hedgerow*, (6500 each); *Wild Life in a Southern County*, (7000).
2. Published by Constable: *Richard Jefferies' England*, (30,000. 7 impressions); *Richard Jefferies' Countryside*, (6000).
3. Published by Phoenix House: *Chronicles of the Hedges*, (6000); *Field and Farm*, (2000); *The Richard Jefferies Companion*, (5000).

A total of around 110,000 copies (including *The Worthing Cavalcade* publications) were in circulation.

These sales figures are very impressive. I hope that the Jefferies' family benefitted from the sales.

Given that the Society's publications are printed in very low numbers (usually no more than 100) and we have a membership of well over 200, it is sad that we struggle to sell our meagre stocks when so much time and effort has gone into publishing them.

Thanks to those of you who bought Volume I of *A Peculiarly English Genius*; Andrew Rossabi's magnificent biography of Richard Jefferies. Volume II is half-way complete and this book is likely to cover Jefferies' years of struggle from 1867-78. Volume I draws together information about Jefferies from diverse sources. As Janice Lingley remarked 'the overall structure is brilliant, and the writing style very readable with great quotes'.

Please support the Society by buying the biography and some of the back-issues listed on our Mail Order page (see pp.34-5) that are on special offer. There are still some surplus second-hand books from our library listed in the Spring 2017 newsletter (pp.29-33) that might still be available. Sales will not only help the Society's funds but will also relieve our storage problems. Thanks to those of you who have bought copies of all our publications – it is much appreciated.

BIRTHDAY LECTURE 2017

'Seeking the Beyond: Materiality versus Spirituality in Jefferies & Hardy' by Roger Ebbatson. 4 November 2017, Liddington Village Hall.

An audience of twenty seven people listened to Roger Ebbatson compare the concept of spiritual transcendence or 'the Beyond' in *The Dewy Morn* (1884) and *Tess of the D'Urbervilles* (1892). It was argued that in Hardy's novel *Tess's* deeply intuitive pantheistic vision takes the form of a species of sun-worship, her sense of projecting the soul out of the body which reaching its apotheosis in the sun-drenched ambience of Talbothays dairy, and climactically in the famous garden-scene. Subsequently, it was suggested, Angel's wedding-night rejection of the heroine leads to her subjugation as a labouring field-woman in the bleak winter environs of Flintcomb-Ash and the resultant extinguishing of her visionary perspective. It is ironically at the heathen temple of the sun, Stonehenge, that *Tess* falls victim to the agents of the modern state. Hardy's ultimately tragic depiction, it was suggested, stands in marked contrast to the buoyant spiritual afflatus experienced by the heroine of *The Dewy Morn*, Felise Goring. Whilst this novel, like *Tess*, powerfully renders the exigencies of land-tenure and the late-19C agricultural depression, here the note of joyful pantheism is maintained in a text which finely embodies what has been termed Jefferies' adoption of 'the mantle of transcendentalist nature priest'. Both novels potently combine late-19C Naturalist and Symbolist techniques, but whilst Hardy's immense literary success was carefully achieved through manipulation of linear narrative, plot and character, Jefferies' relative failure in the cultural market-place paradoxically offered him a greater expressive freedom to explore and propound his ecstatic sense of 'eternity now', through which 'the Beyond' would overcome the bonds of the 'administered society' of modernity.

Mr. Ebbatson circulated hand-outs of the readings he referred to and an interesting discussion continued regarding the merits of the two authors.

HOW DID YOU DISCOVER RICHARD JEFFERIES AND THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY?

Hector Weldon writes: 'My mother once found a copy of Richard Jefferies' writings in compilation at the White Cliffs of Dover, and the following Christmas I was given a copy of *Bevis*. My favourite books growing up were *Swallows and Amazons* and those of Enid Blyton and so *Bevis* appealed greatly to me. When I later became interested in *Watership Down* and *The Plague Dogs* by Richard Adams, I read *Wood Magic* and so it seemed that whatever my intellectual occupation, Jefferies could complement it somehow.

In the last year I visited Coate Water and it was there, where *Bevis* and Mark played, my interest in the author became more deeply felt and later, whilst

searching for a particular edition of *Amaryllis at the Fair*, I came into contact with Mr. John Price from whom I learnt about the society.'

Colin Corkerton has been a member since 1978. He said: 'I still have the original letter dated November 3rd, 1978, from Cyril Wright, Hon. Secretary at the time, in response to my enquiry about the society, and a follow up letter dated November 9th acknowledging receipt of my first subscription of 80p(!). I believe I have a complete set of newsletters, annual reports and journals since then, plus a few flyers for new publications and copies of some talks and articles produced by the society. Andrew Rossabi's biography sent me back to reread some of these and there are many delights contained in them, long forgotten.'

My interest in Richard Jefferies followed on from discovering Henry Williamson's books in a London library near where I worked. Reading Williamson inevitably led me to Richard Jefferies, a route I know common to many other members. I think I found out about the society through an advert in the *Countryman* magazine.'

JEFFERIES LODGE

John Kennett supplied details of a planned retirement home complex in Eltham that will be named 'Jefferies Lodge' (48-60 Footscray Road) and is being built by Churchill Retirement Living. The site is directly across the road from where Jefferies lived from 1884-5 – then known as 14 Victoria Road but now 59 Footscray Road. A blue plaque was erected on Jefferies' rented home in 1986 and he would still recognise the building, if not the setting. However the memory would not have been a happy one for it was here that Richard Oliver Launcelot, his son born in Brighton on 18 July 1883, died suddenly of meningitis.

Churchill was granted planning permission to build 38 one and two-bedroom apartments about a year ago and these are now advertised with an average price of £410,000 to £560,000!

John Kennett had previously written about the development site for *Senine* magazine in September 2016. He writes: 'Until 1965 [it was] the site of Woodford Lodge, a centuries old property standing on Crown land. It was enlarged in Victorian times and had a rear garden and a coach house and stable alongside the house. Until the area was developed in the mid-nineteenth century ... [it was] then known as Pitfield Cottage. ... Jefferies would have been familiar with the lodge particularly when he noted "six herons flying towards Chislehurst".'

Jefferies certainly wouldn't recognise it any longer and it went through many changes after the lodge was pulled down that include a motor repair garage, a coach garage and offices. During all this time a pillar box stood on the pavement. Jefferies, no doubt, posted many letters and manuscripts from this conveniently positioned facility across the road.

TO THOSE DEPARTED: SHEILA POVEY



John and Sheila Povey, outside Coate Farm circa 1998

Sheila Constance Povey, *née* Reeves, was born in Swindon in 1927. Sheila, who was related to Jefferies via the Baden family, was a schoolteacher by profession although started her working life in the Swindon Tax Office. An expert on the history of Swindon, she carried out much valuable research on both the town and the Jefferies family.

She and husband John were mainstays of the Society for many years. Both were key-holders to the Coate Museum and always ready to help, whether it was offering the use of their home for Council meetings, putting up members overnight or showing visitors around the Museum. Andrew Rossabi recounts:

Sheila was always most welcoming and hospitable, and used to ply me with sandwiches, cakes and tea after the meeting to fortify me for my journey back to London. It was she who pointed out an 'all-green' (i.e. all grass) route back from Farleigh Crescent to the coach-stop opposite the Museum. She was interested in the walks I had taken in the morning before the meeting and most informative about local history. She was a warm, open-hearted, friendly, and extremely generous person.

It is thanks to them that we have so many photographs of Jefferies-related material. For many years Sheila and John were Executive Council members and Sheila was the Society's membership secretary. The couple can be seen in the 'Jefferies Land' film made by John Webb in 2001 for the Society.

Sheila met John when, as a young plumber, he was working in her parent's house. Sheila was toiling over a needlework exercise in smocking stitch for her school homework. John offered help – his Aunt Mag had been making smock garments for years. Under John's tutelage Sheila became very adept at smocking – one of her beautiful farmer's smocks is displayed on a dummy at the Richard Jefferies Museum together with a dairymaid's bonnet she made.

Sheila and John married in 1948 and moved to a house in Edinburgh Street, where their sons Robert and Ian were born. The Swindon Ex-Servicemen's Housing Society, which the Poveys had joined, was short of a plumber for their project of self-build homes. John became their plumber; the Farleigh Crescent houses were soon built; and John and Sheila moved into Number 20, where they stayed.

When John died in February 2008, the Society planted a white damask rose in the Coate Farm back garden – not only a favourite rose of Richard Jefferies but as a thank-you to John and Sheila for all they had done for the Museum and Jefferies' memory. The rose is still thriving and has beautifully-scented blooms.

Sheila became housebound and was unable to get to meetings. At the last one she attended, she picked up a book for sale at the back of the room. It was *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists*, and she said that it sent shivers down her spine – it was one of the first (if not the first) book that John had suggested she might like to read. She said that she almost felt that John had put the book there for her. We missed her contributions and her knowledge. As an active member of the Friends of Alfred Williams, her absence was sorely missed there too. She was made an Honorary Vice President of the Society in recognition of her work.

After a sudden decline in her health, Sheila passed away peacefully at home on 20 December 2017.

Her funeral service was held at St Mary's church, Lydiard Tregoze on Wednesday 3 January 2018. John Price, Sheila and Ray Morse and Roy Burton of the Richard Jefferies Society were in attendance. John Price supplied a copy of the Order of Service that was beautifully illustrated by two of her grandchildren who had drawn butterflies, flowers and an owl whilst Jefferies' famous words: 'It is eternity now. I am in the midst of it. It is about me in the sunshine; I am in it as the butterfly in the light-laden air...' appeared on the inside cover. The service included dedications from her family, prayers and readings from *The Story of My Heart*. Her sons composed and read out a Eulogy that is available to members (email the Hon. Sec). The committal took place in a private service at Kingsdown Crematorium. Family and friends were then invited to the Tawny Owl, Taw Hill, to celebrate her life.

We shall miss her.

STUDY DAY
SATURDAY 23 June 2018
Samuel Looker and Richard Jefferies
At the Richard Jefferies Museum, Coate

PROGRAMME

- 10.30 Doors open and refreshments.
- 11.00 Welcome.
- John Price will give a background to Looker and an introduction to the publication of the latter's work. Attendees will be able to make contributions from these writings by reading extracts chosen in advance. (Main books listed on p.7 of this newsletter.)
- 1.00-2.00 Lunch break. Bring a packed lunch.
- 2.00 Readings continue and discussion.
- 3.15 Refreshments.
- 3.45 Depart.

For those unable to attend but would like to make a written contribution for the Chairman to read out, please send it to John Price. An article about Looker's previously unrecorded life follows on p.13 along with his obituary in *The Times*. The Society produced a Tribute to Looker in 1980 that can be downloaded at http://richardjefferiessociety.co.uk/articles/39_Tribute_Looker.pdf



Samuel Looker

THE LESSER-KNOWN SAMUEL J. LOOKER

John Rudge

Sometimes one learns things in a most unexpected way. In this short note I will tell of some lesser-known details of the early life of Samuel J. Looker and how this information first came to light. It seems that eight handwritten lines of unknown verse in an obscure book, the signature of an unknown person and a date can take you a long way.

Some Background

Of course, Looker's role in bringing to public attention the works of Richard Jefferies is well known and well documented. All members of the Richard Jefferies Society will be very aware of this, but, even so, I am told that, 'I don't think that we know that much about Looker, the young man. We know him from about the 1940s onwards' (Jean Saunders, pers. comms.).

So, what do we know about Looker, the young man?

He was born in Hornsey, North London in February 1888, the only son of Samuel and Eliza Looker. Samuel senior was a grocer's assistant who later became a coal agent.

His love of nature in general and of Richard Jefferies work in particular was awoken at an early age as his maternal grandparents lived in 'a very beautiful rustic unspoilt spot' near Danbury, in Essex. He was just over 13 when he first read Jefferies' *The Story of My Heart* and resolved to 'devote all my energies to making his creative and consoling work more widely known and appreciated' (Looker, 1948).

Looker married Caroline Finney in Hackney in 1910 and in 1911 he was working as a Cycle Merchant's Salesman. The family lived in Stoke Newington, North London. So far, so well known.

Some New Insights

The years 1911-1914 were times of enormous political and industrial ferment in Britain and North London was one of the 'hotspots'. Suffragettes, anarchists, socialists, syndicalists and peace activists were all active in the area. From 1913 the North London Herald League (commonly known as the Northern Division Herald League) acted as a home for many of the disparate groups. As one of its leading activists wrote in his autobiography, 'The League had thrown its net wide and we had a membership of active militant people – not all militant about the same things, but in sympathy with all rebel causes, all movements of the oppressed and downtrodden' (Fox, 1937).

The First World War was approaching, an episode so horrific that it would change the lives of millions – and Samuel Looker was no exception. And this is where my personal introduction to Samuel J. Looker came in.

I had been researching and collecting literature from the various left-wing groups that went on to form the Communist Party of Great Britain in 1920. One of the books I purchased was a poetry book titled *The Red Dawn: A Book of Verse for Revolutionaries and Others*. The author is the revolutionary socialist Albert Young and the publisher is 'The Northern Division Herald League'. At the time of its publication in 1915 this book sold well '...we found that everywhere – especially in the militant centres of South Wales and in Glasgow – the book was in demand. They were ordered by the hundred. It was, indeed, an authentic expression of revolt' (Fox, 1937).

One of the purchasers of the book was Samuel J. Looker – I know because it is his personal copy that I now own! What is more interesting is that Looker has handwritten his own poetic tribute to the book's author on the verso of my copy as follows:

To Albert Young

O Rebel poet singing in the night
With scorn of bloated greed and iron might.
Hater of shams, prophet of high desire
and noble purpose lit at Freedom's fire.
At last shall dawn the day whereof you dream.
A hideous nightmare shall the old time seem.
Brother and comrade, blithely to the fight.
First in the conflict, waiting for the light.

The poem is signed by Samuel Looker in his distinctive handwriting and dated by him 24th December 1915. It was this poem that set me on this quest to discover more about him and, given the tenor of his poem, to try and define his political viewpoint.

The avowedly revolutionary British Socialist Party (BSP) was formed at a Socialist Unity Conference in Salford in 1911. It held its first Annual Conference in Manchester in May 1912. My first political surprise was to discover that Looker was the Stoke Newington branch delegate to this first conference. Not only that, but he put himself up for election to the BSP Executive Committee, albeit unsuccessfully.

It cannot be proved, but it seems highly likely that Looker knew Albert Young – they both lived in the same part of London, they both were (or had been) members of the BSP, they were both acquainted with the North London Herald League (NLHL), they were both poets and I personally feel that his poetic tribute displays a certain familiarity.

The year 1916 was to be a testing one for Looker – it was the year that conscription was introduced. By this time Samuel and Caroline had a young family and he was working as a Correspondence Clerk in an export warehouse.

The socialist movement had split, both in Britain and abroad in 1914 at the start of the war, between a small minority opposed to war and the majority (including the Labour Party in Britain) that sided with their own government. The NLHL was staunchly anti-war and many of its members became Conscientious Objectors (COs). The main organisation for COs was the No-Conscription Fellowship (NCF) and it had branches in North London, including one based on the NLHL. Looker was a member of the Hackney branch of the NCF and became a CO in 1916. He was one of over 16000 men to claim exemption from military service under the ‘Conscience of Clause’ of the 1916 Conscription Act and will have successfully fought his claim at the required Military Service Tribunal.

There were three categories of CO:

1. Absolutist – unwilling to take part in any aspect of the war
2. Alternativist – prepared to undertake alternative civilian work not under any military control. Tribunals had power to exempt them from military service on condition that they actually did this work
3. Non-combatants – prepared to accept call-up into the army, but not to be trained to use weapons, or indeed have anything to do with weapons at all. Tribunals had power to put these men on the military register on this basis.

Looker was in the second category, stating that he was prepared to do ‘Work of National Importance’ in forestry. His entry as a CO on the Pearce Register at the Imperial War Museum can be viewed here:

<https://search.livesofthefirstworldwar.org/record?id=GBM/CONSOBJ/8939>

Looker’s entry in the Peace Pledge Union’s ‘Men Who Said No Project’ database is here: http://menwhosaidno.org/men/men_files/l/looker_samuel.html

One of those who pushed strongly for the inclusion of the ‘Conscience of Clause’ in the 1916 Conscription Act was the Quaker and Liberal M.P. for West Leeds Thomas Edmund Harvey (1875-1955).

Samuel Looker wrote to T.E. Harvey on the 1st March 1916 and the letter is held with T.E. Harvey’s Conscientious Objectors correspondence at the Society of Friends Library in London. The letter is important for its description of Looker’s feelings as conscription was being introduced.

Looker commenced his letter by thanking Harvey for his stand in ‘The House’ and saying that no matter how it seems now, he will be proved right in the end.

Looker then turns to his own position and writes:

I do not desire to become a martyr. I am not good enough or brave enough, but I am determined come what may, punishment, prison or firing squad, that I will not take part in the war under military authority, nor will I take a military oath of any

description. I feel in my heart that war is wrong whatever its pretext, I believe that all men are brothers apart from any question of nationality. I try to carry out the commands of Christ when He gave a new law to the world, the law of love. How can I then take the life of another man at the bidding of a government? And would that not be the real cowardice, to put my conviction on one-side because of any punishment I may have to undergo if I refuse the bidding of the military machine (Looker, 1916a).

For those wishing to know more about the political milieu in which Looker lived and worked I recommend Ken Weller's book *Don't be a Soldier! The Radical Anti-War Movement in North London 1914-1918* (Weller, 1985).

Samuel Looker published four volumes of poetry during the war years 1914-1918. *Songs of the Wayside* (1916), *Slaves of the Sword and other Verses* (1917), *A Lover's Rosary: Love and Nature Lyrics* (1917) and *Thorns and Sweet Briar: Love and Nature Lyrics with Satires* (1917).

It is revealing that *Songs of the Wayside* was advertised in George Lansbury's left-wing *The Herald* newspaper of 25th November 1916 and with the strap-line 'Poems of a Conscientious Objector'. The volume was published by the 'National Labour Press, Ltd' – the publishing arm of the Independent Labour Party. It contains 47 poems written between 1913 and 1916.

Freedom, these ravening wolves now bay thy name,
That range o'er Europe's bloodstained battlefield,
Making thy fame and heritage their shield
To 'scape the harvest dire of War's cruel bane.

(Extract from the poem 'Freedom as a Cloak')

Whoso with bloodshed plays under the cloak
That he is serving Freedom's sacred cause,
Soon finds himself under as stern a yoke
As any slave fast bound to Mammon's laws.
'Tis time all folks this moral wise had learnt
Who plays with fire is certain to be burnt.

(Extract from the poem 'Not in the Trench')

Looker will have been well acquainted with absolutist COs. The longest poem in *Songs of the Wayside* is titled 'To My Friend Frank Bertoli'. Frank (Frederico) Bertoli was an absolutist who served four prison sentences and more than two years in Winchester and Wormwood Scrubs.

It is well known that Looker was an inveterate letter writer and the Peace Pledge Union website mentioned above records that he kept up a correspondence with the Hackney No-Conscription Fellowship throughout the war. This, and the fact that there was probably not much forestry in Stoke Newington, suggests that Looker will have been removed from the family home for at least a part of the war period. Interestingly, my personal copy of *Songs of*

the Wayside shows that it was presented to West Hartlepool Public Library by Looker. He gives his address as 16 Alderson Street, West Hartlepool.

Slaves of the Sword is a slim volume published in London by C.W. Daniel, Ltd:

O brothers: shall war always rule
The hearts and passions of mankind?

(Extract from the poem 'Slaves of the Sword')

A Lover's Rosary is a longer work at 47 pages, also published in London. It may have had some success as my copy is a second edition:

I have not bowed to Wealth or Power,
Or cared a groat for Mammon's lure,
A simple trust in Life my dower,
Perchance these songs may yet endure

(Extract from the poem 'My Apology')

Mud on the road—
Mud on the pavement—
The passers-by bedraggled and wet
Move along wretchedly:
Horses plod in the mire,
Plash, plash, in puddles,
Trams bespattered with mud
Clang past noisily.
The sky is the colour of putty,
Hung with dark clouds,
The rain falls unceasingly,
Penetrating hats, overcoats,
Boots and everything,
It is a city of dark shadows,
Of misery, of aching hearts,
And the wind moans drearily
Over this harvest of mud.

(The poem 'An Impression')

Thorns and Sweet Briar is noteworthy not just for Looker's poetry but also for its extended 'Introduction'. In it Looker muses on poets, poetry and literary criticism. Written on 20th June 1917, in the midst of the War and his own difficult circumstances, it is perhaps not surprising that his thoughts range from hope through to a certain morbid acceptance of a person's fate on earth.

He ends his section on poets and poetry with the upbeat:

Three thoughts haunt the poetic mind continually, the frailty of life, the vanity of human wishes and man's inhumanity to man. Yet the greatest poets have faith in life and do not despair, believing that the spirit of man will yet triumph over greed, selfishness and fear.

But, he ends the whole 'Introduction' with:

The pursuit of happiness upon the earth is unending and unsuccessful; and not less so is the search for that ideal beauty seen in dreams which fades in the light of common day. Birth and death is but a watch in the night. In that brief span we must do our work resting content with our reward.

(Both extracts from 'Introduction' of 'Thorns and Sweet Briar')

As for the poems, then these two printed together on page 42 are politically revealing – and in line with the views of the radical movements of the time:

To Certain Tory Friends

'Twas not very long ago
That dear Lloyd George was quite your foe,
But now before his shrine you bow,
While High Priest Northcliffe says "bow-wow".

To A Labour Member of Parliament

O labour leader basking in the sun,
And smiles of those whom once you hated much,
You now to be statesman have begun,
And lean with pride upon official crutch,
All your disdain is for the wicked Hun;
You fat tame rabbit in a gilded hutch.

(NB: Lord (later Viscount) Northcliffe was the ultimate newspaper magnate of the day – Rupert Murdoch on steroids).

None of the four poetry books contain the poem to Albert Young that is handwritten by Samuel Looker into my copy of *The Red Dawn*. It is therefore a new discovery!

On the subject of war and poetry I will add that Looker published a volume of poems during the Second World War, titled *Green Branches*. Politics, and indeed, social comment, are in short supply, but two things are of note. Firstly, the introduction makes clear that Looker is still concerned to see a fairer and more just world:

With Richard Jefferies, I would not wish the past back again, but would sooner fight in the foremost ranks of Time. Much cant is talked by members of the escapist school. I know that our present civilization is false and hollow, partly based upon graft, class and privilege, money and power, injustice and hypocrisy. I am of those 'to whom the miseries of the world are miseries, and will not let them rest'.

Secondly, his views on war seem to have changed somewhat. His poem 'The Great Cause' is replete with patriotic sentiment, a regard for Churchill and a need to defeat the foe:

The "Guilty Men" have gone, who sought to palter,
With Nazi and with Fascist tyranny,
No longer led by men who cringe and falter,

England sweeps on to final victory.

(Extract from the poem 'The Great Cause')

Some Conclusions

Despite his background it would be wrong to describe Looker as an overly political poet, still less a socialist poet. I doubt he was regarded as such. In early 1920 there was a discussion in the pages of *The Plebs* journal on the subject of 'Proletarian Poets'. Amongst the poets mentioned were two associated with the NLHL – our good friend Albert Young and A.B. Elbury – but no sign of Samuel Looker. As one might assume from the titles of his wartime works, his primary thoughts are on the subjects of love and nature. Religious sentiment also percolates, sometimes above, sometimes below the surface.

The politics of later life are not always a good guide to the politics of youth. As Looker himself once wrote, 'fortunate it is if the thoughts of youth with their freshness and charm endure as the years go' (Looker, 1917c). In the 1920's and 1930's he was a tutor with the Workers' Educational Association, in 1944 he described himself 'as an Independent Radical' (letter to the *Chelmsford Chronicle*, 9 April 1944), he was a Labour Councillor on Staffordshire County Council from 1949 to 1954 and a member of the Fabian Society.

The politics of Richard Jefferies have been the subject of differing interpretations and of debate both within the Society (see e.g. Morrow, 1999), and without (see e.g. Rignall, 2012), so perhaps it is fitting that the life and politics of the younger Samuel J. Looker are equally shrouded.

What does seem evident is that 'Samuel Looker was a man of deep convictions and sympathies, and his concern for the oppressed and wretched of the world, the victims of famine, neglect and war, weighed heavily upon him.' (Cyril Wright, 1980).

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## MR. SAMUEL LOOKER EDITOR OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

Obituary in *The Times*, Tuesday January 12, 1965.  
Unsigned but known to be written by Frances Gay.

**M**r. Samuel Joseph Looker, a life-long champion of the works of Richard Jefferies, died yesterday at the age of 76.

He was born in 1888 in north London, but after early manhood lived in Sussex, Staffordshire, and Leicestershire. His was an active and dedicated life. After early commercial work he became a writer, lecturer journalist and publishers' reader, in this last capacity he worked for Constable and Co. from 1923 until his death. Between 1921 and 1935 he lectured on English Literature to L.C.C. evening institutes and for W.E.A. classes. He also reviewed books for *The Times Literary Supplement* under the editorship of Sir Bruce Richmond, wrote on George Crabbe for the *Nineteenth Century* and contributed articles on W.H. Hudson, Shelley, Trelawney and Henley. He contributed to *John O'London's Weekly*, then edited by his friend, Wilson Midgley and edited anthologies on travel, hunting, shooting, and fishing. He contributed to *The Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature* the section on nineteenth-century fiction in volume three and wrote or edited some 50 books, including nine volumes of poetry.

He came to know and love the writings of Richard Jefferies early in life: he was 13 when he read *The Story of My Heart*. He wrote in his introduction to *The Old House at Coate* which he edited and published in 1948 'I read every one of his (Jefferies') books on which I could lay my hands. It was then, many years ago, that I first made the resolve that, if I lived, I would one day edit this great writer and devote all my

energies to making his creative and consoling work more widely known and appreciated.'

He described also how he sought out not only every book and every bit of information but also every scrap of Jefferies' manuscript which either came into the market or was to be had by private treaty. He pursued a long and finally successful search for the field note books and occasional nature notes of the writer and for any hitherto unpublished papers including letters and essays hidden away, often unsigned, in old magazines until he was able to claim that he owned most of the material of any importance relating to Richard Jefferies.

Much of this research was done in the British Museum Newspaper Room at Colindale where Looker spent many hours poring over old periodicals, nosing out long forgotten contributions which he recognized as the work of Jefferies. As a result of all this he was able to publish two new volumes of essays, *The Chronicles of the Hedges* in 1948 and *Field and Farm* in 1957.

Previously he had edited and published a number of anthologies after the copyrights had expired in 1937 and later edited with introductions and notes nine of Jefferies' books to mark the centenary of the writer's birth. He caused Worthing, where Jefferies is buried, to become intimately conscious of its association with the writer by publishing under the Worthing Art Development Scheme several handsomely illustrated volumes containing a wealth of information about the life and work of Jefferies.

It was known that Jefferies had left 24 notebooks containing his day to day comments, descriptions and observations but of these only 16 were ever found which Looker transcribed and published in 1948 under the title of *The Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*.

This work entailed the closest application and infinite patience, since many of the notes were hurriedly written in pencil and often in the writer's peculiar shorthand, most difficult to decipher, but Looker, in persevering thus to interpret and preserve them, has left a valuable legacy for students and readers of Jefferies.

Looker had been working for some years on what he hoped would be the definitive life of Jefferies, to be called *Richard Jefferies, Man of the Fields*. Latterly he had had the help of Mr. Crichton Porteous in preparing the book, which is due to be published in the spring.

In the midst of all this literary work Looker found time to serve from 1949 to 1954 on the Staffordshire County Council while Living at Cheadle. he was chairman of the Records Committee and served on the Trent River Board until he left the Midlands.

He was a conversationalist of charm and had a capacity for making and keeping friends, among whom he included during their lifetime the son and daughter of Jefferies.

He was president of the Richard Jefferies Society since it was founded in 1950.

Looker married Caroline Finney, and they had three children, a son and two daughters.

# JEFFERIES' *HISTORY OF MALMESBURY AND OVERBORO'*

Janice Lingley

Jefferies' *History of Malmesbury* (published in the *North Wilts Herald*, 1867-1868) can perhaps be understood to contribute to the pseudohistory accruing to Overboro' in *Round About a Great Estate* (1880). It is the traditional yeoman farmer, Hilary Luckett, who first suggests the narrator's visit to Overboro', in connection with the ancient archaeology to be seen in the environs of Luckett's Place:

There was a meadow where deep trenches could be traced, green now, but clearly once a moat, but there was not even a tradition about it. On the Downs overlooking the Idovers was an earthwork or entrenchment, of which no one knew anything. Hilary believed there was an old book – a history of Overboro' town – which might perhaps contain some information, but where it could be found he did not know. After some consideration, however, he thought there might be a copy at the Crown, once an old posting-inn, at Overboro': that was about the only place where I should be likely to find it. So one warm summer day I walked into Overboro', following a path over the Downs, whose short sward affords the best walking in the world.<sup>1</sup>

The route from the area of Coate and the Burderop estate across the Downs to 'Overboro' immediately suggests Marlborough. But no view of the town is given as the visitor draws near, and the 'best walking in the world' is, without any preliminary, followed by the scene at 'the Crown', vividly described in some detail.

At the Crown, now no more an inn but an hotel, the archway was blocked up with two hand-trucks piled with trunks and portmanteaus, the property of commercial gentlemen and just about to be conveyed to the station. What with the ostler and the 'boots' and the errand-boys, all hanging about for their fees, it was a push to enter; and the waiters within seemed to equally occupy the passage, fetching the dust-coats and walking-sticks and flourishing coat-brushes. Seeing a door marked 'Coffee-room,' I took refuge, and having ordered luncheon began to consider how I should open my subject with the landlord, who was clearly as much up to the requirements of modern life as if his house had been by a London terminus. Time-tables in gilt-stamped covers strewed the tables; wine lists stood on edge; a card of the local omnibus to the station was stuck up where all could see it; the daily papers hung over the arm of a cosy chair; the furniture was new; the whole place, it must be owned, extremely comfortable and the service good.

But it was town and not country – to-day and not the olden time; and I did not feel courage enough to ask for the book. I believe I should have left the place

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<sup>1</sup> Richard Jefferies *Round About a Great Estate* (1880), introduction by John Fowles, illustrated by Graham Arnold (Bradford on Avon: Ex Libris Press, 1987), ch.IX, p.102.

without mentioning it, but, fortunately looking round the room while the lunch was prepared, I found it in the bookcase, where there was a strange mixture of the modern and antique. I took down the history from between Rich's thin grey 'Ruins of Babylon'<sup>2</sup> and a yellow-bound railway novel.

There are several allusions to the railway in *Round About a Great Estate*. Though an independent branch line connected Marlborough via Savernake Station with the Berks and Hants Extension Railway in 1864, Marlborough was not connected to Swindon via the Great Western Railway system until 1881.<sup>3</sup> Malmesbury's erstwhile GWR railway station opened in 1877.<sup>4</sup> The inference of the 'Ruins of Babylon', with the suggestion of a debased literary culture drawing upon industrialised and commercialised travel, provides stimulus for thought, for in the person of St. Aldhelm Malmesbury harboured an author who is regarded as the first English man of letters; Jefferies devotes three chapters in his *History* to a discussion of his life and works.

Jefferies' account of Overboro' continues:

Towards the close of the eighteenth century a learned gentleman had taken much pains to gather together this account of the town. He began with the story of Brutus, and showed that one of the monarchs descended from the illustrious Trojan founded a city here. . . .

There was an air of precision in the exact sentences, and the writer garnished his tale with frequent quotations from Latin writers. In the midst was a wood-cut of a plant having no sort of relevancy to the subject-matter, but for which he returned thanks for the loan of the block.

The local source of Overboro's foundation myth may have been an article, dated 1862 and entitled 'Who First Founded Malmesbury?', by 'Britannicus' of Charlton (a village very near to Malmesbury), that appeared in the 1864 edition of the *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society Magazine*.<sup>5</sup> Jefferies'

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<sup>2</sup> Claudius James Rich (1788/7-1821), *Memoir on the Ruins of Babylon* (London, 1815); Rich, a largely self-taught master of the languages of the East, traveller and antiquarian collector, was for a time a resident for the East India Company at the court of the Pasha of Baghdad; parts of his large collections were purchased on his death by the British Museum; source *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>3</sup> Source Wikipedia.

<sup>4</sup> Charles Vernon, *An Historical Guide to Malmesbury* (Malmesbury Civic Trust, 2005), pp.1-2. The earliest notebook entries relating to *RGE* are dated 1-8 May 1878; Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies, A Chronological Study* (Boars Hill: Petton Books, 1994), p.128.

<sup>5</sup> Vol. VIII of the *Magazine*; this issue opens with a report of the Society's AGM held at Malmesbury in August 1862 and includes articles on various aspects of the town's past, including the architecture of the abbey church and the life of St. Aldhelm. The article by 'Britannicus' (pp.51-61) subsequently formed the basis, in a revised format, of the first chapter of James T. Bird's *The History of the Town of Malmesbury and of Its Ancient Abbey*, printed and published by the author in Malmesbury in 1876. 'Britannicus' and Bird assert that Malmesbury was founded by a paramount British king

primary source is almost certainly Geoffrey of Monmouth's (c. 1095 – c. 1155) twelfth-century pseudohistorical *Historia Regum Britanniae*, 'History of the Kings of Britain', and the legend of the civilisation established on Albion (Britain) by descendants of the Trojan Brutus.<sup>6</sup> The apparently *ad hoc* reference to the wood-cut of a plant is a most interesting detail, since it would appear to be an allusion to a member of Jefferies' family, his maternal uncle Fred Gyde, a wood-engraver who worked on a freelance basis for the London firm, R. Taylor & Co. Alere Flamma in *Amaryllis at the Fair* (1887) is based on Gyde. The excellent printing of the voluminous *Flora Graeca*, work of the Oxford botanist John Sibthorp, established the firm's reputation.<sup>7</sup>

That the identity of Overboro', as Marlborough, is associated with Malmesbury, and the series that Jefferies wrote for the *North Wilts Herald*, is also suggested by the description of the George Commercial Hotel in the first of the three concluding chapters (XIX-XXI), which are devoted to 'Modern Malmesbury', as it was in Jefferies' day, in the form of a leisurely stroll through the town 'taking in all that is worth seeing on the way':

High Street is the principal street of the place. Here are two large inns. The first is the George Commercial Hotel, where good accommodation can be obtained for man and horse at moderate charges, and where the antiquary may congratulate himself upon residing in a house that has been established nearly two centuries.

Charles Vernon includes this passage in his book on Malmesbury, and notes: 'The George Hotel was a coaching inn with origins in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and the present building dates from 1788.' This building, though no longer an inn, still stands. Vernon adds, 'The main doorway was originally an open archway allowing coaches through the building and wheel ruts can still be seen.'<sup>8</sup>

The apparent conflation of the two towns, Malmesbury, with its ancient past as a multivallate interfluvial hill-fort of some significance, and Marlborough, distinguished by its prehistoric tumulus, reputed in ancient legend to be the

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named Dunvallo Molmutius.

<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth's *History of the Kings of Britain* is available in a modern annotated translation by Lewis Thorpe, (London: Penguin Classics, 1966); see Book I, Ch.1. Jefferies refers to and quotes Geoffrey's chronicle in the opening chapters of his *History of Malmesbury*, and was evidently familiar with the work.

<sup>7</sup> Andrew Rossabi, *A Peculiarly English Genius, A Biography of Richard Jefferies. Volume I: The Early Years 1848-1867* (Foulsham: Petton Books, 2017), pp.140-142.

<sup>8</sup> Vernon, *op. cit.*, p.64. For a list of Marlborough's inns, past and present, see J. E. Chandler, *A History of the Town of Marlborough, The Gateway to Ancient Britain* (The White Horse Bookshop, 1977), pp. 68-72. John Price, via Jean Saunders has kindly provided the following comment: 'There is still a Crown Inn in Marlborough, but it is in the Parade, and was certainly never a Coaching Inn. The most likely contender is the Castle and Ball, which is an old Coaching Inn and current Hotel on the A4 (High Street), and has a coach archway. It is quite likely that RJ changed the name of the Inn as he did the town [i.e Overboro' for Marlborough].'; email communication 11 December 2017.

burial place of Merlin<sup>9</sup> (a prominent figure in Geoffrey's *History*, also associated with the founding of Stonehenge)<sup>10</sup> recalls J. B. Jones' article on 'The Man in the Tumulus',<sup>11</sup> which discusses the 'grass-grown tumuli on the hills to which of old' Jefferies used to walk (*The Story of My Heart*, Chapter III), and the merging in his thought of Barbury Castle with Liddington Hill. The article concludes that Jefferies' iconic warrior lord rests in neither hill, but is to be regarded as 'a figment of genius'. It would seem that Overboro' comes within this category. The seconding of the scene within what appears to have been a Malmesbury inn and, more particularly, its 'strange mixture' of a library, to inform and extend Overboro's ancient associations, has something of the nature of a dream transition. The conclusion of *Round About a Great Estate* is set in the garden of Luckett's Place. The scene is idyllic and, says the narrator, 'That evening was one of the most beautiful I remember.' He sits dreaming under a sycamore tree with honeysuckle over his shoulder and the summer star Antares overhead, as Hilary talks about his wheat and the weather – 'nothing so thoroughly associated with the traditions of English farming as wheat,' is Hilary's previously expressed opinion<sup>12</sup> – but what the narrator dreams is seemingly left unsaid.



Castle and Ball, High Street, Marlborough

<sup>9</sup> 'As early as the 13<sup>th</sup> century it was thought that Merlin was buried beneath the Mound; and the motto on the Borough Arms is *Ubi nunc sapientis ossa Merlini* meaning "Where now are the bones of wise Merlin".'; Chandler, *ibid.*, p.1.

<sup>10</sup> Thorpe, *Geoffrey of Monmouth*, *op cit.*, pp. 194-198 (Book VIII, Ch.10-13), and the Introduction, p.19. Jefferies refers to the legend in Chapter II of his *History of Malmesbury*.

<sup>11</sup> *RJSJ* No 26 (Summer 2014), pp.34-36.

<sup>12</sup> Jefferies, *Round About a Great Estate*, *op. cit.*, ch.VI, p.67.

## WITCH'S COTTAGE IN BEVIS

Jean Saunders

Has anyone given any thought to the possible location of the fictional Witch's cottage in *Bevis*? Kate Tryon believed that Jefferies had the Gamekeeper's Cottage, Hodson in mind<sup>1</sup>; Mark Daniel thought the same<sup>2</sup>. Cyril Wright was not so certain. Addressing the WEA in Swindon on 19 June 1975, he said 'in Hodson Bottom, you may decide which is the cottage where Bevis and Mark met the old lady, whom they took to be a witch, and who let them feast, without magical results, upon her delicious gooseberries.' John Constable had another candidate in mind – the tiny thatched cottage opposite the keeper's cottage at Hodson Bottom. His hobby was miniature model-making and he built several scaled-down models of this cottage (see front cover photograph).

On a visit to The Model Village at Bourton-on-the-Water, Gloucestershire in December 2017, the daughter of Eric Jones (our Vice Chairman) came across one of the models of the Hodson Cottage. The supporting information board reads:

Located opposite the cottage immortalised by the author Richard Jefferies (1848-1887) as the Gamekeepers cottages in his 1878 book *The Gamekeeper at Home*, Hodson Cottage is believed to be the witches (sic) cottage featured in his later *Bevis* book. Locals and visitors alike have been heard to describe this fairy tale cottage as belonging to Snow White or Hansel and Gretel.

This news has never been noted before by the Society and came as a surprise. Further research showed that John Constable was the author of *Landscapes in Miniature*<sup>3</sup> and *Understanding Cottages*<sup>4</sup>. The Hodson Cottage was Constable's first model and he used it to illustrate the cover of *Landscapes in Miniature*, a volume that details how to make tiny reproduction buildings and set them in a living landscape.

John was born in Swindon in 1934 and lived in the Coate area. He spent much of his time with his friends roaming the same fields and woods as Bevis. Hodson Cottage mesmerised him as a boy on his cycle rides out to visit the bluebells in Hodson Woods. It seemed to him then that the little Hodson Cottage (see back cover photograph) best fitted the description of the witch's cottage in *Bevis*.

In 2014, seven of Constable's models of historic English cottages were given a new home in the Gloucestershire model village. Constable, who now lives in Somerset, used traditional materials and building methods. The miniatures

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<sup>1</sup> *Walks in Jefferies-Land*, 1912 by Kate Tryon (Richard Jefferies Society, Sep. 2012), p.42.

<sup>2</sup> Talk on *Bevis: The Story of a Boy* by Mark Daniel to the Richard Jefferies Society dated 3 February 1975.

<sup>3</sup> *Landscapes in Miniature* by John Constable (Lutterworth Press, 1 July 1984).

<sup>4</sup> *Understanding Cottages: The Dream and the Reality* by John Constable (Capall Bann Publishing, 1 Nov. 2002).

include perfect replicas of Willy Lott's Cottage featured in 'The Hay Wain' and Thomas Hardy's birthplace. Each cottage took at least a year to build. Thousands of miniature bricks and stones, tiny rafters, windows and doors for the buildings were crafted individually by him. All the cottages are set in appropriate surroundings with carefully chosen small trees and bushes to add greenery. In photographs it is difficult to distinguish between the real cottage and one of Constable's models (see the front and back cover of the newsletter).

Mr. Constable was a member of the Richard Jefferies Society from 1997 to 2012, so we had his contact details on file along with the opportunity to question him further. In an email to the Hon. Sec., dated 7 January 2018, Mr. Constable<sup>5</sup> wrote:

In my second book(*Understanding Cottages*) I have devoted a chapter to Hodson Cottage. It was long before I was a member of the Society that I built my Hodson cottage. I spent a happy day with the then resident of the cottage (Mrs. Elizabeth Rose) measuring and photographing. From *Bevis*: "Look!" said Mark, pointing to a chimney just under them.' This led me to believe that [this was] the only cottage that could be the witch cottage; it was the only one that had a bank on which the boys could stand and look down on the chimney, and which fitted the description. I built a large landscape in which all my cottages were in their own wooded world ... I always built two of each cottage so still have one of each to set in a raised bed with a garden and some old trees in its four foot square compass.

The 'Hodson Cottages' section of *Understanding Cottages* (Ch.6) reiterates Constable's belief that this was the cottage in question.

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Bevis and Mark came across the cottage when they are lost after exploring the New Sea (Coate Water). Chapter VIII of *Bevis* is titled 'The Witch':

Round a curve of the lane they emerged on the brow of a green hill, very steep; they had left the wood behind them. The trees from here hid the New Sea, and in front, not far off, rose the Downs... They went along the brow. It was delicious walking there, for the sun was now much lower, and the breeze cool, and beneath them were meadows, and a brook winding through. But suddenly they came to a deep coombe — a nullah.

"Look!" said Mark, pointing to a chimney just under them. The square top, blackened by soot, stood in the midst of apple-trees, on whose boughs the young green apples showed. The thatch of the cottage was concealed by the trees.

"A hut!" said Bevis.

⁵ We are grateful to John Constable for supplying photographs and further information about his passion. There is a review by Phyllis Treitel of *Understanding Cottages* in the Society's Spring Newsletter 2003 although the link to Bevis's witch's cottage is not identified.

“Savages!” said Mark, “I know, I’ll pitch a stone down the chimney, and you get your bow ready, and shoot them as they rush out.”

“Capital!” said Bevis. Mark picked up a flint, and “chucked” it—it fell very near the chimney, they heard it strike the thatch and roll down. Mark got another, and most likely, having found the range, would have dropped it into the chimney this time, when Bevis stopped him.

“It may be a witch,” he said. “Don’t you know what John told us? if you pitch a stone down a witch’s chimney it goes off bang! and the stone shoots up into the air like a cannon-ball.”

“I remember,” said Mark. “But John is a dreadful story. I don’t believe it.”

“No, no more do I. Still we ought to be careful. Let’s creep down and look first.”

They got down the hillside with difficulty, it was so steep and slippery—the grass being dried by the sun. At the bottom there was a streamlet running along deep in a gully, a little pool of the clearest water to dip from, and a green sparred wicket-gate in a hawthorn hedge about the garden. Peering cautiously through the gate they saw an old woman sitting under the porch beside the open door, with a black teapot on the window-ledge close by, and a blue teacup, in which she was soaking a piece of bread, in one hand.

“It’s a witch,” whispered Mark. “There’s a black cat by the wall-flowers—that’s a certain sign.”

The Hodson Cottage does appear to be a better candidate for the Bevis and Mark episode. Apart from the chimney and the steep bank mentioned by Constable, the cottage is very small (Bevis described it as a hut), standing in a deep coombe along which a streamlet flows. The 1950s photograph below of the little cottage, on the left, shows its proximity to the hillside. It stands next to a larger cottage very similar in design to the keeper’s cottage across the road.



Cottages at Hodson Bottom, 1950s

The only attempt to illustrate the old woman's cottage in *Bevis* can be found in the Jonathan Cape edition (1932) with drawings by E.H. Shepard. Shepard depicts a thatched cottage with the old lady sitting in the porch with a cup of tea, but this matches neither the design of the keeper's cottage nor the Hodson Cottage. It is documented that Shepard visited the Coate Water area in 1932 to draw from life and there are cottages in Hodson village itself that resemble Shepard's illustration, but none in the deep coombe of Hodson Bottom.

As usual we are left with the quandary as to whether Jefferies was describing a real cottage, a composite one or simply using his imagination when he wrote 'The Witch' chapter in *Bevis*. However, Constable's choice does appear to be the most fitting. Looking at the photos, it is perhaps easy to picture it as the home of the dear old lady who let Bevis and Mark feast on the gooseberries from her garden.



'MRS. OLD WOMAN, ARE YOU A WITCH?'

Illustration by E.H. Shepard, *Bevis*(Jonathan Cape, 1932), p.93.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Man on the Hill

On 3 November 2017, Society Member Peter Faulkner organised a local gathering in Leintwardine, Shropshire to watch the HTV production of 'Man on the Hill,' the 1987 centenary tribute to Richard Jefferies.

Broadwater Cemetery, Worthing

Michael Parrott provided the following information at the AGM. The Friends of Broadwater and Worthing Cemetery's summer themed tours have been very popular again this year with between 50 and 90 visitors each month. Wild flowers are still blooming in the memorial garden dedicated to Richard Jefferies and W.H. Hudson and the seat therein still looks smart – a worthwhile purchase by the Richard Jefferies Society. Unfortunately the mulberry tree's leaves were very dry and mottled during the summer months, although the tree bore plenty of fruit. Permission is being sought from Worthing Council to plant shrubs or trees in the memorial garden. The planting might not take place until spring and the money generously donated by Janice Lingley will be used. Michael's wife, Pat, has given the Jefferies' gravestones a scrub with soap and water.

Annual General Meetings

This year's AGM and Birthday Lecture will take place before the clocks go back to take advantage of British summer-time hours and give members an extra hour of daylight on their homeward-bound journeys. Meetings will start an hour later (11.30am) to accommodate a yoga class that now meets every Saturday at Liddington Village Hall until 11.15am. Lunch-time will be reduced by an hour but the Birthday Lecture will commence at the usual time.

Wilts and Glos Standard

Eric Jones reports that the *Wilts and Glos Standard* has closed its office in Dyer Street, Cirencester, and moved its staff to Stroud. The entrance to the building displays a plaque to Jefferies. In the hope that this is not discarded along with Jefferies' memory, Mr. Jones has written to the Cirencester Civic Society who erected the dedication. They have agreed to do their utmost to ensure that the plaque is not removed by the new owner of the premises.



NEWS FROM OTHER SOCIETIES

Devizes and Salisbury Museums

The Richard Jefferies Society is a long-standing member of the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society. We have a free ticket that will admit just one member to the Wiltshire Heritage Museum, 41 Long Street, Devizes and to the Salisbury Museum. Please contact our Chairman should you wish to borrow it (see p.4).

Henry Williamson Society

The Henry Williamson Society is organising a Spring meeting at Coate on 11/12/13 May to examine the links between Henry Williamson and Richard Jefferies.

There will be a talk by Robert Walker of the HWS on Friday evening. Saturday will be spent exploring Coate Water, the Museum and Barbury Castle along with the monument on Burderop Down. John Price will be giving the evening lecture on Richard Jefferies. Other trips are planned for Sunday. Accommodation is being booked at the Holiday Inn at Coate.

The HWS has kindly extended an invitation to RJS members to take part. A provisional programme is available on request from the Hon. Sec. **Should any members wish to attend any of the events, please contact the Hon. Sec. (p.2) by the end of March.**

The Alliance of Literary Societies

The Alliance of Literary Societies' Literary Weekend will take place 18-20 May 2018 in Birmingham and will celebrate their 45th birthday. It will include talks by local societies. More information at:

<https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/agm-weekend/2018-agm-weekend/>

Richard Jefferies Museum Trust

To keep up-to-date on news about activities at the Richard Jefferies Museum, please go to the Trust's website: <http://richardjefferies.org/>. There is also a Facebook page and Twitter page. If you don't have access to the Internet, telephone: 07768 917466.

From 6 May to 30 September 2018 the museum is open to the public on Sundays from 1.30-5.00pm (closed August Bank Holiday weekend).

Throughout the year, the museum is open on the second Wednesday of the month from 10.30am to 4pm as follows: 10 January, 14 February, 14 March, 11 April, 9 May, 13 June, 11 July, 8 Aug, 12 September, 10 October, 14 November, 12 December.

JEFFERIES SOCIETY RESEARCH BURSARY

The bursary is a sum of up to £2000 p.a. offered by the Richard Jefferies Society to support costs associated with ongoing, high-quality research projects which serve to promote new understanding of the writings of Richard Jefferies, or of the issues which relate to or arise from his work. This could, for example, take the form of new approaches to his life or his work, or a wider consideration of his place in late-19C agrarian and nature writing.

The bursary will be restricted to one award per project, and applications are invited from postgraduate students, and also from tenured and independent scholars and researchers.

Typically the bursary might assist with costs incurred to:

- secure permissions to reproduce copyright material
- create an index
- visit an archive or other location to study key resources
- support the development of an output in print or other media (e.g. film, digital resource)

In all cases the applicant must provide a breakdown of how the sum requested is to be used. Other kinds of request will be considered, but will not include a bursary to provide IT equipment, to meet tuition fees or to cover conference costs.

The application may be made at any time of the year, and would be considered at the subsequent meeting of the Richard Jefferies Society Executive Council. An application form is available from the Hon. Sec. or can be downloaded at <http://richardjefferiessociety.blogspot.co.uk/p/bursary.html>

Thanks to Eric Jones and Roger Ebbatson there is a notice about the award on the British Agricultural History Society website and details have been published in the December 2017 newsletter of the British Association for Victorian Studies. There is also mention of the award in an article by Mr. Jones titled 'A Wiltshire Lad: Richard Jefferies & Victorian Farming' published in *Rural History Today*, Issue 34, Feb. 2018, p.3.

THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY AND WHITE HORSE BOOKSHOP LITERARY PRIZE 2017

27 books were nominated last year. The final shortlist for the 2017 prize is:

- *A Sweet Wild Note: what we hear when birds sing* by Richard Smyth (Elliott & Thompson)
- *Beyond Spring: Wanderings through nature* by Matthew Oates (Fair Acre Press)

- *The January Man* by Christopher Somerville (Transworld Publishers, Penguin)
- *Waiting for the Albino Dunnock* by Rosamund Richardson, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson)
- *The Seabird's Cry* by Adam Nicholson, (Collins)

The winner will be announced by the end of June 2018.

The 2018 prize

Please send nominations for the 2018 award to Richard Stewart (see p.4). Any length or format of writing on themes or topics broadly consistent with the work of Richard Jefferies can be suggested but must be published for the first time in 2018. E-books are excluded from the competition. Nominations may be made by anyone. Society Members are eligible for the award (excluding Members of the Executive Council). Decisions about the annual prize will be made by the Society's Executive Council and will be final. Nominations must be proposed before 31 December 2018. Please give as much notice as possible should you find a suitable candidate. Do not assume that someone else has nominated the work.

A PECULIARLY ENGLISH GENIUS: OR A WILTSHIRE TAOIST

A biography of Richard Jefferies Volume I, the Early Years 1848-1867.

In case you missed the flyer in the last newsletter, the Society is delighted to announce the publication of Volume I of the new biography of Richard Jefferies by Andrew Rossabi. As John Price reminded us, at last year's AGM, the idea was conceived about ten years ago in the car park at a former AGM held at Liddington Village Hall when Hugoe Matthews, John Webb and John Price agreed to commission Andrew Rossabi to undertake the project.

Since Thomas's now classic *Richard Jefferies, His Life and Works* was published in 1909, a vast amount of material has come to light, and a new biography of Jefferies has been long overdue.

On the 169th anniversary of Jefferies' birth, Volume I of the grand opus was launched. The 800pp. hardback book is on special offer to members at £30 (list price £40).

Three Members have enquired whether a dust jacket might be provided for the book. It was suggested that one cover could be created for all three volumes to bring down the unit cost. This will be considered when Volume II is ready for printing.

So far there has been a review of the book in the *Spectator* by Mark Cocker and a mention of the biography in the *Times Literary Supplement* and *Rural History Today*.

MAIL ORDER BOOKS & AUDIO CDS

Postal sales of the Society's publications are managed by the Hon. Secretary (see p.3 for contact details). All books listed below are offered at **reduced prices** as well as **free postage in the UK**. Overseas members should enquire about postal rates. Cheques should be made payable to The Richard Jefferies Society and orders sent to the Hon. Sec.

There is also an extensive stock of second-hand books held by John Price (see Spring 2017 newsletter). Please ask if there is a book that you need.

<i>A Peculiarly English Genius: a biography of Richard Jefferies, Volume I, The Early Years</i> 2017, by Andrew Rossabi (hardback 800pp)	£30.00
<i>Richard Jefferies: A Spirit Illumined.</i> Various writers, 1987 (pamphlet)	£1.50
<i>The Jefferies Canon</i> – W.J. Keith, 1995 (pamphlet)	£1.50
'Essay on Instinct' – Richard Jefferies, 2012 (pamphlet)	£1.50
'A Natural System of National Defence' – Richard Jefferies, 2014 (pamphlet)	£1.50
<i>Richard Jefferies' Letters to Aunt Ellen</i> , 2009 (soft-back)	£ 3.00
<i>Amaryllis at the Fair</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2009. Introduction by Carolyn Clarke (soft-back)	£ 3.00
<i>Ben Tubbs Adventures</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2016. Introduction by Andrew Rossabi (soft-back)	£3.00
<i>Greene Ferne Farm</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2009 Introduction by George Miller (soft-back)	£ 3.00
<i>The Interpreter: A Biography of Richard Jefferies</i> – Audrey Smith, 2008. Introduction by Eric Jones (soft-back)	£ 3.00
<i>The Scarlet Shawl</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2009. Introduction by Andrew Rossabi (soft-back)	£ 3.00
<i>The Dewy Morn</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2009.	£ 5.00

Introduction by Rebecca Welshman (soft-back)	
<i>The Farmer's World: Richard Jefferies' Agricultural Journalism in the late 1870s</i> , 2016. Introduction by Eric Jones (soft-back)	£7.00
<i>Adventures in the Vale of the White Horse: Jefferies Land</i> – Kate Tryon, 2010 (limited edition soft-back) + free pamphlet 'Walks in Jefferies-Land' by Kate Tryon*	£10.00
<i>Restless Human Hearts</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2008. Introduction by Andrew Rossabi, 2008 (hardback; £10) (Soft-back version £5)	£10.00 ----- £ 5.00
<i>Richard Jefferies: An Index</i> – Matthews & Treitel, 2008 (hardback)	£10.00
<i>The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies</i> – Matthews & Treitel, 1994 (hardback)	£8.00
<i>World's End</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2008. Introduction by Andrew Rossabi (soft-back)	£5.00
<i>Richard Jefferies: An Anthology</i> – Matthews & Welshman, 2010 (hardback)	£10.00
<i>The Rise of Maximin</i> – Richard Jefferies, 2012. Introduction by Rebecca Welshman (hardback – limited edition of 60 copies)	£10.00

* There is an exhibition of Kate Tryon's oil paintings and contemporary photographs by Ian Hampson that depict the same scenes today at the Richard Jefferies Museum from 3-31 March. Admission is free.

The following audio CDs are available at £1.50 each, unless otherwise stated, with free postage. The complete set is on offer for £8.00.

A Song of Summer. Paul Scofield reads 'Nature and Eternity' (*Hills and the Vale*).

The Man on the Hill with Paul Scofield.

The Story of My Heart. Extracts read by Paul Scofield.

After London. Extracts read by Paul Scofield.

Bevis. Extracts read by Michael Williams in 12 episodes (3 CDs). £4.50.

A Drift of Time. A play with Robert Stephens as Richard Jefferies.

CITINGS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

Janice Lingley

An article by Eric Jones titled ‘A Wiltshire Lad, Richard Jefferies and Victorian Farming’ has been published in the February 2018 issue of *Rural History Today*, the magazine of the British Agricultural History Society, founded in 1952. After giving a brief but illuminating account of the Jefferies oeuvre, the article discusses Jefferies’ work as a resource for the agricultural historian, referring initially to *Hodge and His Masters* (1880) – ‘full of country characters and astute sociological observations’ – then going on to discuss the general import of the articles now available in the collection *The Farmer’s World: Richard Jefferies’ Agricultural Journalism in the Late 1870s* (Petton Books, 2016). Eric Jones comments: ‘Jefferies documents one of the major agricultural transitions in recent centuries and his work echoes perennial problems of the type expected to arise with Brexit.’; thus providing a link to the magazine’s front cover article on historical perspectives on Brexit and the future of British agricultural policy. The *RHT*’s stylish presentation of Professor Jones’ article features a portrait photograph of its subject, and a fine nature quote from *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879); it also includes mention of Andrew Rossabi’s new biography. The article is available on line at the website of the BAHS, whose Home Page provides a direct link to the *Rural History Today* magazine.

John Price forwarded a copy of an article by Giles Wood, ‘Save Me from a Seven-Year Old Molestor’, published in the October 2017 edition of *The Oldie* magazine. Giles writes humorously of his exasperation with a persistent young invader of his garden, attracted by a mini-digger as if it is a new toy for him to play with. Confessing to ‘urchinphobia’, and a sense of powerlessness regarding his unruly young village neighbour, Giles Wood recalls Jefferies describing how nineteenth-century agricultural labourers’ children were strictly disciplined, and adapts a quote from ‘The Farmer at Home’, collected in *The Toilers of the Field* (1892):

He who spares the rod spoils the child, is the practical rule of their conduct. They seem to look upon their offspring as merely slaves. They are fond of them in their way, no doubt, but the law of implicit obedience is maintained by dint of blows and stripes. The children are kicked, punched, and thrashed perpetually. A good ground-stick is the gospel of the labouring man.

Mr. Wood would not, of course, wish for a return to such severity, but observes that Victorian children at least played ‘a useful part in the British rural economy’, employed, for example, in bird-scaring and whisking flies from the farm horses. An extract from *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879) (Ch. 6) illustrates the point:

The horses in the wagons have at this season to be watched by a boy armed with a sprig of ash, with which he flicks off the stoats [horse-flies] that would otherwise drive the animals frantic.

– a task, Giles wryly observes, which would be beyond the limited attention-span of his modern-age juvenile ‘Molestor’. The article ends with a jocular plea ‘in this age of indiscipline’ for an ‘Adultline, for the victims of cruelty to adults’.

Andrew Rossabi has advised of an article by Dr. Nick Freeman, Reader in Late Victorian Literature at Loughborough University, titled ‘Edward Thomas, Swinburne and Richard Jefferies: ‘The Dead Oak Tree Bough’, published in *English Literature in Transition, 1880-1920*, Vol.51, No.2, 2008, pp.164-183. Dr. Freeman questions Thomas’ categorisation as a ‘war poet’, and his poem ‘The Gallows’ as a comment on war. Noting the poem’s relationship with folk song and children’s fable, he compares it with the episode in *Wood Magic*, Ch.X, in which a hawk is caught in a trap set in a dead oak tree, and a poem by Swinburne, ‘Epitaph in the Form of a Ballad’. The *Wood Magic* episode, considered to be a source of Thomas’ poem, is regarded as evidence of the ‘pitilessly unsentimental’, sometimes violent, account of the natural world and man’s relationship with it, that is to be found in Jefferies’ writings. There is much interesting comment on Jefferies’ work generally and Thomas’ enduring, though sometimes uneasy, relationship with him as his first biographer, and himself a country writer.

Professor Roger Ebbatson sent a copy of an article on Jefferies, which appeared in the *Times Literary Supplement* on 24 November last year. Violet Hudson, a young Oxford-educated journalist living and working in London, provides a new-generation take on the Jefferies oeuvre. Titled ‘Waterfall in the Sky; The floridly beautiful world of a Victorian writer and journalist’. The discussion focuses, by way of review, on the texts of Mark Frost’s new edition of *After London*, and Rebecca Welshman’s compilation, *Sport in the Field and Woods*, and surprisingly ignores the editorial work involved, despite the citation of these publications as sub-headings. However, the comments on *After London* and the sporting essays are of considerable interest, and the article is thoughtful and perceptive in its empathy with the nature essays and *The Story of My Heart*.

Roger Ebbatson’s review of the Frost edition will appear in the 2018 issue of the *Journal*. The review of the Welshman selection will be published in the Society’s autumn 2018 newsletter.

Thanks to Jean Saunders for two citations of Jefferies’ *After London* in journalistic contexts. In an article dated 24 October 2017, on the subject of post-apocalyptic fiction, Sam Jordison of *The Guardian* newspaper’s Reading Group, ranks Jefferies’ 1885 novel with the work of other distinguished writers

who have focused on the capital as a disaster area, beginning with Mary Shelley's futuristic vision of a world depopulated by the plague, *The Last Man* (1826). Jordison comments that 'England's capital could almost have a genre to itself, and cites Jefferies' *After London* (1885), H. G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), and modern novelists John Christopher's *The Death of Grass* (1956) and J.G. Ballard's *The Drowned World* (1962), as notable for 'variously submerging, exploding, emptying and then again submerging the city'.

Jefferies' *After London* is one of the books on view at an exhibition, 'A Conversation Larger than the Universe: Science Fiction and the Literature of the Fantastic', held at The Grolier Club in Manhattan, New York, from January to March. The exhibition focuses on the origins of the genre in the 18th century Gothic novel. *After London* is featured alongside Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and H.G. Wells' *The Island of Dr. Moreau* (1896). The stated aim of The Grolier Club, founded in 1884, and named after the 16th century French bibliophile Jean Grolier, is 'to foster the study, collecting and appreciation of books and works on paper, their art history, production and commerce.' Again, thanks to Jean Saunders, who found news of the exhibition in an article in the 21 December 2017 issue of the *Fine Books & Collections Magazine*.

Travel writer and *Times* Correspondent Christopher Somerville quotes from Jefferies' *Round About a Great Estate* (1880) in his book *The January Man, a Year of Walking Britain*, shortlisted for the Wainwright Prize 2017, as well as the RJS Literary Award. Thanks to Tom Saunders for this citation from the conclusion to Ch. III, in which Jefferies comments on the autumnal feeding habits of birds, and the berries that nourish them. It occurs in the account of the November walk through Wiltshire, along the ancient Harroway, beginning at Stonehenge and travelling westwards. Tom comments that the book is 'beautifully written', and 'might have been written by Jefferies if he were alive today.'

Author Anthony Gibson refers to Jefferies in an article 'Bringing our literary Landscapes to life', published in the February 2018 edition of the county magazine *Wiltshire Life*, whose front cover includes among its captions 'Swindon Landscapes of Writer Richard Jefferies'. Gibson's article is based on his recently published book, *The Coloured Counties: Literary Landscapes of the Heart of England*, which opens with a chapter on Jefferies' Wiltshire. Professor Ebbatson's review of this new title, appears on p.43 of this *Newsletter*. An adapted version, mentioning Jefferies, has been published in the *Friends of the Dymock Poets Newsletter* (December 2017, No.69).

We are grateful to Michael Sherwood for an entertaining quotation from a book by the journalist and author, Sir William Beach Thomas (1868-1957), whose love of the English countryside developed while growing up in the village of Hamerton, Cambridgeshire. Michael writes: ‘In one of the essays from Sir William Beach Thomas’ *A Countryman’s Creed* (1946), Beach Thomas is most lavish in his praise of Richard Jefferies. But I was especially amused at a passage where the author holds a conversation with a bishop:

I persuaded [the bishop] to read a few pages of Jefferies’ ‘Pageant of Summer’, one of the best essays he ever wrote ... He [the bishop] had one comment only: “How desperately badly written!”

What he would have said of *The Story of My Heart* I tremble to think.’

In a column in the *Swindon Advertiser* devoted to news items from the past. In the 6 September 1961 edition, the newspaper reported the following:

Because of malicious damage to the Richard Jefferies’ memorial seat at the top of Liddington Hill, the recommendation by the Richard Jefferies Society that it be moved to Coate was approved by the old Swindon Borough Council. The seat had been used since 1951 and had until recently been undamaged other than by a decade of weathering. Lately, however, vandals had carved pieces from the woodwork, removed planks and loosened screws.

A new book by Richard Smyth entitled *A Sweet, Wild Note: What we hear when the birds sing*, published in April 2017 and puffed as ‘a celebration of the complex relationships between birds, people and the land’, includes, on pages 117-118, unattributed descriptions of bird song which Jefferies heard in the spring of 1881 in the countryside of Thames Ditton, near south-west London. In his essay ‘A London Trout’, in *Nature Near London* (1883), Jefferies comments on the sedge warbler’s ‘chatter’: ‘After listening a while the ear finds a scale in it – an arrangement and composition – so that, though still a chatter, it is a tasteful one. At intervals he intersperses a chirp, exactly the same as that of the sparrow, a chirp with a tang in it. Strike a piece of metal, and besides the noise of the blow, there is a second note or tang.’ Smyth’s version reads: ‘the chirp has a tang in it, a sound within a sound, just as a piece of metal rings’. In ‘The Spring of the Year’ (collected in *The Hills and the Vale* (1909)), Jefferies observes: ‘The wryneck’s ‘kie-kie-kie,’ the last syllable plaintively prolonged, is not like the call or songs of other birds; it reminds one of the peacock’s strange scream, not in its actual sound, but its singularity.’ Smyth’s adaptation reads: ‘the wryneck’s kie-kie-kie reminds one of the peacock’s strange scream’.

Michael Sherwood has also commented on a reference to Jefferies in the TV adaptation of E.M. Forster's novel *Howards End* (1910). In a recent (end of November 2017) episode of the TV series, the character Leonard Bast asks the Schlegel sisters if they are aware of the work of the Wiltshire-born writer; Michael comments, 'Going by their blank looks, it is evident neither Margaret nor Helen Schlegel has ever heard of Jefferies!'

The text of Forster's novel (Chapter 14) gives a rather different impression. RJS members will recall that Professor Roger Ebbatson discusses Forster's knowledge of Jefferies' books, especially the autobiography, in his *RJSJ* article 'The Marabar Echo: Forster and Jefferies' (No.28, Summer 2015, pp.26-29).

A new book by Tom Jeffreys titled *Signal Failure*, provides an account of the author's attempt to trek the proposed route of the new High Speed rail connection (HS2) from London Euston to Birmingham, a distance of 119 miles. Margaret Hunt kindly supplied details of quotations from three Jefferies' titles: *Nature Near London* (1883), *The Open Air* (1885), and *Field and Hedgerow* (1889).

Jefferies' description of Roger the reaper's lifestyle in 'One of the New Voters' (1883) (OA) is invoked in Jeffreys' discussion of social class. In the chapter titled 'The Sounds of the Suburbs'; he notes that it is 'the magnetism of company and conversation' that draws the rural worker to the public house and expands upon the distinction that Jefferies makes between 'Their conversation, not your conversation.' In his chapter, 'A Premature End', the author refers to what he perceives to be a general tendency in past times to compare villagers with animals; he cites Richard Hillyer's memoir *Country Boy* (1966) and Karl Marx's *Das Kapital*, 'Capital' (1867-1883) by way of illustration. In denying this notion, Jeffreys has recourse again to 'One of the New Voters': 'Roger the reaper is not a horse.' In the chapter entitled 'Not Quite Suburbia / Home County Blues', Jeffreys contends that tidy open spaces are not in the best interests of nature conservation, and cites Jefferies' essay 'Trees About Town' (1881) (NNL):

Do not clear away the fallen branches and brown leaves, sweeping the plantation as if it were the floor of a ball-room, for it is just the tangle and the wilderness that bring the birds, and they like the disarray.

The book's final chapter, 'The Train Home' includes brief quotations from Jefferies' 'Walks in the Wheatfield, I' (1887) (FH), in which the appearance of a winter field is described as a 'flat and uninteresting surface'.

The Wiltshire folklorist, Katy Jorden, author of *The Haunted Landscape, Folklore, Ghosts and Legends of Wiltshire* (2000), drew Janice Lingley's attention to an article by John Freeman entitled 'Folklore Collection and Social Investigation in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century England'. Published in the journal *Folklore* in 2005, and available online (<http://eprints.gla.ac.uk/6307>),

the article refers to Jefferies' writings as a resource for the folklorist. Describing him as 'one of the most popular country authors of the late nineteenth century', Freeman ranks Jefferies with two other notable writers, Henry Moule (1801-1880) and Augustus Jessopp (1823-1914), who 'conveyed information and analysis of both folkloric interest and sociological value'. After many long years of hardship and obscurity, the late-Victorian and Edwardian 'Hodge' found himself suddenly of intense interest to investigators of various kinds, some governmental, wanting information about his work, his living conditions and his recreation. But obtaining Hodge's co-operation in the process of collecting 'primary source' material was found to be problematic, even inappropriate. Some urban, middle-class investigators made no attempt at communication, relying instead on 'informants'. Freeman observes: 'Richard Jefferies pointed out that one needed not only to live in a village, but also to enjoy the right kind of relationship with the other inhabitants' in order to obtain dialectal information and stories, and quotes from *Round About a Great Estate* (1880), Chapter IV:

It would be possible for any one to dwell a long time in the midst of a village, and yet . . . obtain no idea whatever of the curious mixture of the grotesque, the ignorance and yet cleverness, which go to make up hamlet life. But so many labourers and labouring women were continually in and out of the kitchen at Lockett's Place that I had an opportunity of gathering these items from Mrs. Lockett and Cicely.

By way of a contrast, Freeman also finds it useful to his discussion to cite Jefferies concerning his visit to Exmoor (*Red Deer* (1884), Chapter X):

Not one word of superstition, or ancient tradition, or curious folk-lore, can a stranger extract. The past seems dead . . . But . . . this silence is not change: it is a reticence purposely adhered to. By mutual consent they steadfastly refrain from speaking in their own tongue and of their own views to strangers or others not of the countryside. They speak to strangers in the voice of the nineteenth century, the voice of newspaper, book, and current ideas. They reserve for themselves their own ancient tongue and ancient ideas, their traditions, and belief in the occult. Perhaps this very reservation tends to keep up the past among them. There is thus a double life—the superficial and the real.

Jefferies' great grand-daughter, Lucille Kelleher, resident in Canada, has advised of citations of Jefferies' autobiography *The Story of My Heart* (1883) in a book by an American journalist Michael Finkel, titled *The Stranger in the Woods: the Extraordinary Story of the Last True Hermit*, published last year. The book is a biography of a Christopher Knight, who at the age of 20 left his family home and camped out in the woods of the North Pond area of Maine for twenty-seven years, surviving by thieving from a nearby summer camp. Asserting that Jefferies spent 'much of his short life walking alone in the woods of England', Finkel goes on to quote brief extracts from Jefferies' autobiography,

a work which is manifestly based on the transcendental experience of downland.

The *Times Higher Education* (23 November 2017) included an interview with Kint Flint, Provost Professor of Art History and English at the University of Southern California, who revealed she is currently preparing a book about the Victorians' ecological awareness of their everyday world, and contemporary artists who refer to 19th century culture to question the modern world's environmental concerns; Jefferies' books are at the top of her reading list.

In an interview posted on 13 October 2017 on the teenage *M Magazine* website, the Sheffield folk artist Jon Boden, a singer, song-writer and musician, reveals the thinking behind a new album called *Afterglow*, and refers to Jefferies' *After London* as one of its diverse literary inspirations. Boden describes Jefferies' novel as 'a touchstone', along with the post-apocalyptic novels of John Christopher.

An article by Richard Williamson in the 29 September 2017 edition of the *Chichester Observer* reported on an annual summer event 'Harvesting in the Old Way', last year held on a farm in Sussex. Visitors could view, among other nostalgic items of the mechanical and obsolete, a working corn binder hauled by heavy horses. Williamson reports that Richard Jefferies' books were among the items for sale on the stalls selling country produce.

We are grateful to Andrew Rossabi for details of a current exhibition at the V&A in London (9 December 2017 - 8 April 2018), about the collaboration between A.A. Milne (author) and E.H. Shepard (illustrator) on the *Winnie-the-Pooh* books. The exhibition catalogue by Annemarie Bilclough and Emma Laws (V&A Publishing, 2017) lists Jefferies' (misspelt 'Jeffries') *Bevis, the Story of a Boy* among the favourite adventure stories of the young A.A. Milne. Others include R.L. Stevenson's *Treasure Island* (1882), Frederick Marryat's *Masterman Ready* (1841) and Johann David Wyss's *The Swiss Family Robinson* (1812). Shepard, of course, illustrated the 1932 Jonathan Cape edition of *Bevis*.

Peter Robins came across a short obituary of Jefferies in the December 1887 issue of the US publication, *The Bookmark*, which claims he died in the Thames-side village of Goring! The same issue mentions a report of Jefferies' death in a French newspaper *Le Siècle* referring to *The Gamekeeper at Home*. Instead of *Le Garde-chasse Chez Lui* the translation reads *Le Patron de Jeu Chez Lui*, 'The Boss of the Game at Home'.

BOOK REVIEW

Anthony Gibson: *The Coloured Counties: Literary Landscapes of the Heart of England* (Bath: Fairfield Books, 2017). ISBN: 978-0-956851185. £20.

Roger Ebbatson

In this handsomely produced study Anthony Gibson aims to explore the ways in which ‘the landscapes of the heart of England have inspired great literature’, and offers a guide as to how we can bring the links between writers and landscapes alive for ourselves on the ground’. In this Gibson succeeds with insight and panache, producing a series of scrupulously researched accounts of literary landscape, ranging from Jefferies’ Wiltshire up to the ‘blue remembered hills’ of Shropshire. Gibson is indeed notably alert to the resonance of place, and he writes with clarity and elegance on a whole range of writers as diverse as the Dymock poets, Ivor Gurney, and Mary Webb, his commentary illuminated by his depth of knowledge and insights into the art and practice of writing.

Whilst this review will focus on the section devoted to Richard Jefferies, the book in its entirety can be heartily recommended to the literary-minded reader with an interest in the cultural phenomenon of literary Englishness. It is in his opening chapter that Gibson addresses the Wiltshire landscape of Richard Jefferies in what is a generally judicious and sympathetic account. He justly characterises Jefferies as ‘a strange and rather lonely young man’, and argues that ‘what sets him apart is his mysticism’ – that discernment and avowal of ‘soul life’ which particularly marks *The Story of My Heart* and some of the late essays (to which Gibson could have given more attention). The significance of Jefferies’ early agricultural work is duly noted, but Gibson judges most of the fiction ‘embarrassingly bad’, though he exempts *Wood Magic*, *Bevis* and *Amaryllis at the Fair* from this too sweeping dismissal, which might surely have taken cognisance of the poetic depth and quality of *Greene Ferne Farm* and *The Dewy Morn*. Gibson is perhaps understandably equivocal about *The Story of My Heart*, ‘a remarkable but curiously unsatisfying book’, and he also pays some attention to *After London*. In terms of place, Gibson writes perceptively about modern-day Coate Farm and Coate Water, observing

One is conscious of car parks and people and traffic noise as one makes one’s way – as Richard Jefferies would have done on countless occasions – from the gate at the back of the house, across a field of pasture and so to the path around Coate Water. But what a fine sight is then revealed: a dark lake, stretching into the distance, fringed by alder, poplar and some magnificent oaks.

Gibson helpfully advises the reader how to negotiate the footpath up to Liddington Hill, Burderop Park and other notable features of the Jefferies landscape, despite the onset of an intrusive modernity in the environs of Swindon.

Whilst no doubt much of this will be familiar to members of the Jefferies Society, the book does an estimable service in alerting a wider reading public to the resonance and implications of Richard Jefferies' still neglected literary oeuvre.

The ensuing chapter looks at the adjacent landscape of the Vale of the White Horse (Hughes, Betjeman et al), then he goes on to literary Oxfordshire (Arnold, Flora Thompson), and inevitably to Warwickshire (Shakespeare, George Eliot).

When he gets to Shropshire Gibson most usefully, before coming to the inevitable Housman, gives a full and sympathetic account of the novels of Mary Webb, unforgettably parodied in the Stella Gibbon's *Cold Comfort Farm*. Gibson displays genuine sensitivity here, and in his readings of Housman and Owen. A subsequent chapter is inventively responsive to the cultural significance of the Welsh border country (Chatwin, Masefield, Langland, Auden), and he devotes an illuminating section to the pre-Great War gathering of Dymock Poets before moving on to Bredon Hill, the Cotswolds and finally to Gloucestershire, where he argues that Ivor Gurney and Will Harvey 'were both at their best as poets down by the river rather than high on the hills'.

The Coloured Counties is very far from a mere coffee-table production. To the contrary, its cunningly plotted mixture of narrative, landscape evocation and literary analysis, together with the fine accompanying illustrations, makes this a most satisfying volume which can be warmly recommended as a guide to the cultural implications and resonance of the English literary landscape.

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From the Chair – continued from p.6.

Finally, a plea to all members. Richard Jefferies died at the age of 38 – but the average age of our Council Members is about twice that (I will not be more specific); and the average age of our membership is also high. We do need to recruit more younger members, and to persuade some of these to join Council. So if you know of anyone who might join us, please encourage them, and perhaps bring them along to a Study Day, or the Birthday Lecture and AGM.

John Price  
27 February 2018

## BOOKS BY MEMBERS

**B**orn and bred in the Vale of Evesham, Robert Woodrooffe's *Pick of the Crop* (Greenwood Press, 1 October 2017 – ISBN 978-0-9957290-1-8 76pp.) is his hardback poetry collection inspired by the natural world, the countryside and its history. Bob's poetry brings the magic of nature and its restorative and healing qualities to a wider audience. It is available from Greenwood Press, Amazon or you can buy direct from Bob, 38 Birch Avenue, Evesham, Worcs. WR11 1YJ Tel 01386 446477 email bob.woodrooffe@outlook.com for £8.99. + £1.75 p&p.

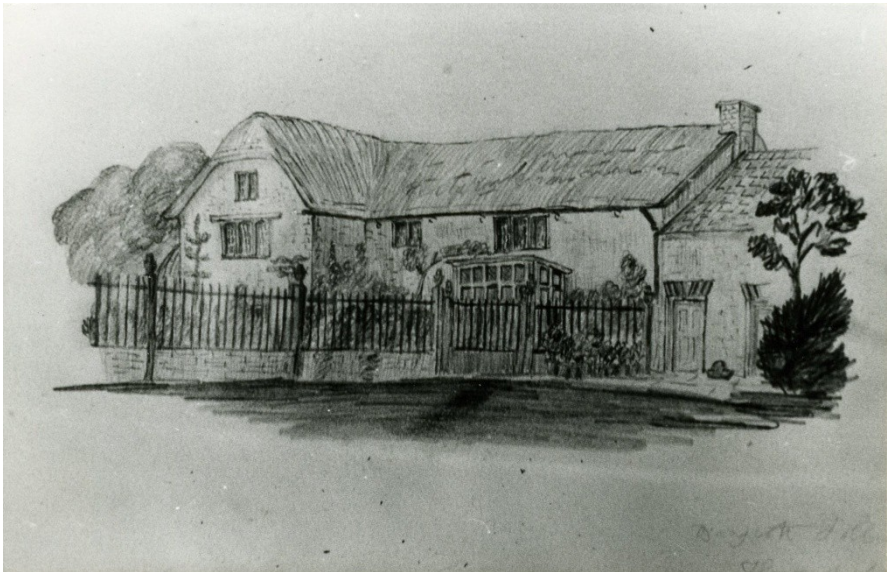
**S**mall *Earthquake in Wiltshire: Seventeenth-century Conflict and its Resolution* is Eric L. Jones' latest book (Hobnob Press, October, 2017), 140 pp., illustrated paperback, £9.95, ISBN 978-1-906978-47-1. The Penruddock Rising against Cromwell in 1655 captured Salisbury but was soon put down. This episode – scarcely remembered despite giving rise to rule by the Major-Generals – provides insights into political plotting and hence the nature of the Interregnum. A narrative opening is followed by a survey of material evidence remaining from the period and by a deeply-researched family history of one of the three principals – a sort of 'who-done-it?' – explaining how he alone avoided execution (he proves to have been related to Cromwell). This is seventeenth-century history centred on Wiltshire and in unfamiliar close-up. Chapters follow on the shocks of war and defeat, and the book concludes with an evaluation of subsequent economic developments in the light of a simple scheme derived from development economics.

**B**rian Morris's *Visions of Freedom: Critical Writings on Ecology and Anarchism* was published in June 2017 (Black Rose Books - ISBN 978-1551646442). The paperback book (252 pp.) brings together all of Morris's concise yet diverse essays on politics, history, and ecology written since 1989. It includes book reviews, letters, and articles in the engaging and accessible style for which Morris is known. The thinkers he deals with are as diverse as Thomas Paine to C.L.R. James, from Karl Marx to Krishnamurti, from Max Weber to Naomi Klein. He also delves into the canon of classic anarchist thinkers like Kropotkin, Bakunin, Reclus, Proudhon, and Flores Magdon.

**J**eremy Hooker's *Ditch Vision: Essays on Poetry, Nature, and Place* was published by Awen Publications in paperback on 1 November 2017 – 232pp., ISBN: 978-1906900519. The writers he considers include Edward Thomas, Robert Frost, Robinson Jeffers, Richard Jefferies, John Cowper Powys, Mary Butts, and Frances Bellerby. Through sensitive readings of these and other writers, he discusses differences between British and American writers

concerned with nature and spirit of place. The book also includes essays in which he reflects upon the making of his own work as a lyric poet. Written throughout with a poet's feeling for language, *Ditch Vision* is the work of an exploratory writer who seeks to understand the writings he discusses in depth, and to illuminate them for other readers. Hooker explores the 'ground' of poetic vision with reference to its historical and mythological contexts, and in this connection *Ditch Vision* constitutes also a spiritual quest.

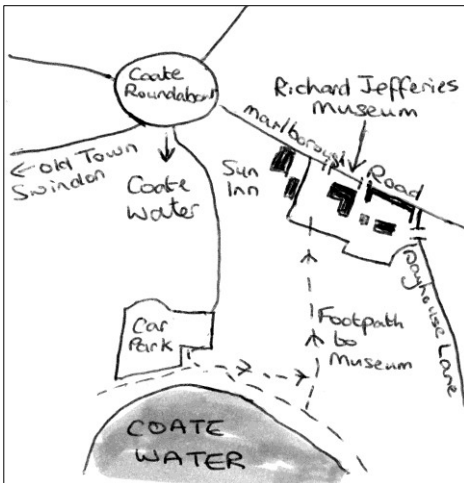
Giles Wood has a new book out titled *Diary of Two Nobodies* (Virgin Books) written with his wife Mary Killen. The blurb states: 'Giles is a countryman who relishes solitude. .. Mary thrives in company and enjoys frequent escapes to London. After thirty years in a marriage of opposites, Giles and Mary have adapted to a life of domestic misunderstandings within comical misadventures. In *The Diary of Two Nobodies*, you will have the unique opportunity to discover, first hand, what occurs when a man who sees himself as a cross between Mr. Bean and Basil Fawlty shares his life with a woman who identifies closely with the Queen.' The book features illustrations by Giles, and, of course, references to Jefferies.



The Jefferies farm at Draycot Foliat. From a sketch by John Luckett Jefferies.

## PROGRAMME OF MEETINGS 2018

- Sat 7 April      Joint meeting with the Friends of Alfred Williams.  
Venue: Richard Jefferies Museum, Marlborough Road, Coate,  
Swindon SN3 6AA.  
Time: 2.00-4.30pm  
This year it is the Friends' turn to host the gathering. Select a short extract to read to others by or about Richard Jefferies or Alfred Williams or just come along to listen.
- 11-13 May      Henry Williamson and Richard Jefferies event. Organised by the Henry Williamson Society. See p.31 for more information.
- Sat 23 June      A Study Day.  
Venue: Richard Jefferies Museum  
Time: 10.30am-3.45pm.  
Theme: Samuel Looker and Richard Jefferies.  
See p.12 for more information.
- Sat 27 Oct      AGM and Birthday Lecture.  
Venue: Liddington Village Hall  
Time: 11.30am-4.30pm  
Birthday Lecture: Speaker – TBA  
Title – TBA  
More information in the Autumn 2018 newsletter



RJS events are open to the public and free to attend.

The 2018 *Journal* will be despatched in May 2018. The autumn newsletter and the Annual Report for 2017-18 will be sent out in September 2018.

The Society's Executive Council will be meeting on 2 June and 22 September 2018 at the Richard Jefferies Museum to discuss business matters.



Hodson Cottage, Hodson Bottom – opposite the Keeper's Cottage  
 Photograph courtesy of Brian Robert Marshall, 12 November 2007



The Keeper's Cottage, Hodson Bottom  
 Photograph courtesy of Duncan Pepper, 18 May 2008  
 See pp.26-9 for more information.