

THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY

AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2020



'Rain, Steam and Speed — the Great Western Railway' by J.M.W. Turner. See p.8.

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 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 £6.

Members receive spring and autumn newsletters along with a *Journal*. The annual report is included in the spring 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. 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. The Society has both Facebook and Twitter accounts.

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NEWSLETTER: edited by Jean Saunders and Peter Robins. Views expressed are not necessarily those of the Society. The deadline to submit material for the Spring 2021 Newsletter is **1 March 2021**. Please send your contributions, preferably by email, to the Hon. Secretary as above. The newsletter is also made available on the Society's website as a free download.

DATES FOR YOUR DIARY, 2021, Covid-19 permitting

Sat 3 April, 2.00-4.00pm. Joint meeting with the Friends of Alfred Williams. Richard Jefferies Museum, Marlborough Road, Coate, Swindon SN3 6AA. Select a short extract to read to others by or about Richard Jefferies or Alfred Williams or just come along to listen. Please telephone Margaret Hunt nearer the time to check final arrangements (01793 752455).

Sat 8 May, RJS Annual General Meeting and Spring Lecture. Liddington Village Hall, Church Road, Liddington (10.30am to 4.30pm). Conor Jameson will be delivering the Spring Lecture for 2021 and will be exploring the influence of Richard Jefferies on the life and work of W.H. Hudson. More information in the Spring 2021 Newsletter and Annual Report for 2020.

CONTENTS

Page

- 2 Dates for your Diary, 2021
- 4 Executive Council Members
- 4 2021 Membership Subscriptions
- 5 From the Chair
- 7 To Those Departed: Norman Chaney

Articles

- 8 'Rain, Steam and Speed'
- 10 Action for Slander in Acton
- 12 Jefferies' Letter to Rev. F. Goddard
- 13 70th Anniversary of the Richard Jefferies Society
- 16 Shall We Use an Algorithm, Minister?
- 17 Walking: Foot as Conduit
- 19 Warnings to the Over-Zealous
- 21 Jefferies and T.S. Eliot
- 22 Claude Debussy
- 23 Featuring Phyllis Treitel
- 26 After the Apocalypse* continued on p. 47
- 28 Wild Life

News

- 29 News in Brief
- 31 Richard Jefferies Society Bursary

Books

- 32 Richard Jefferies Society & White Horse Bookshop
Literary Prize. Review of *Rebirding*.
- 35 Books by Members
- 37 *A Peculiarly English Genius* Vol II: Review
- 42 Citings of Jefferies

- 46 News from other Societies
- 46 Richard Jefferies Museum Trust

- *47 After the Apocalypse continued from p. 27.

EXECUTIVE COUNCIL MEMBERS 2020

Pete Bainbridge (re-elected, 2020–23), Simon Coleman (re-elected, 2020–23), Patrick Dillon (re-elected, 2020–23), Roger Ebbatson (re-elected, 2020–23), Margaret Hunt (Swindon Secretary, re-elected 2018–22), John Price (Vice President), Mike Pringle (re-elected, 2020–23), Andrew Rossabi (President, re-elected, 2015–21), Jean Saunders (Hon. Secretary, re-elected, 2015–21), Tom Saunders (Hon. Treasurer, elected 2017–2023), Barry Sloan (Chair, re-elected, 2020–23), Richard Stewart (contact for Literary Award, re-elected 2018–22), and Phyllis Treitel (Honorary Vice President). In order to secure a degree of data protection for the Society's Executive Council members, full contact details are no longer provided.

GENERAL DATA PROTECTION REGULATION

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

2021 MEMBERSHIP SUBSCRIPTIONS

Annual memberships are due for renewal on 1 January 2021. Subscriptions have been held at their current level for nine years now—a real bargain—but this is not sustainable as the fees barely cover costs. Those of you who pay your subscription by standing order (there is an '[s]' after your name/s on the mailing envelope) will not have to do anything—your instructions to your bank will automatically deal with this. A few members are still paying their membership in July rather than January—an '[sp]' after your name indicates that you have already paid your 2021 subscription. Others, apart from Life Members, will find a membership renewal notice with this mailing.

Please send your remittance to the Hon. Sec as soon as possible albeit that any cheques received early won't be banked until 1 January 2021.

Subscriptions can also be paid by card online via our Paypal account. Go to: <https://www.richardjefferiessociety.org/p/membership.html>. To pay by bank transfer, send to Account No. 00346595; sort code: 30-98-41.

To those of you who include a donation with your subscription every year, we are truly grateful. This is much appreciated.

<http://www.richardjefferiessociety.org/> Have you looked at the Society's website lately? It is packed with information: latest additions include the transcripts of Jefferies' notebooks and a Twitter feed. There have been over 90,000 page views since the website was created and the numbers grow each month.

FROM THE CHAIR

Barry Sloan

Like all other organisations in this year of global disruptions and difficulties, the Richard Jefferies Society has had to adapt to the needs of the time and explore new ways of conducting its business. With the inevitable cancellation of all face-to-face meetings, including the AGM, matters have been taken forward by means of e-mail exchanges and the opportunity for members to vote and comment remotely. As on so many other occasions, our secretary, Jean Saunders, has been the pivotal figure, sending out essential communications and managing the responses of members, and we are greatly indebted to her. Thanks are also due to those who voted remotely and helped us to make decisions. One of these decisions concerns our former Chair, John Price, who we are now delighted to recognise as the Society's Vice President—a well-deserved acknowledgement of John's many years of service to the Society, and a welcome sign that we will continue to be able to draw upon his experience and knowledge.

At this time, it is impossible to foresee what the future of meetings will be in the longer term. People frequently talk about 'the new normal', and it may be that virtual meetings will be an important part of this for the Society, although I am sure we all hope that there will eventually be opportunities for at least some face-to-face gatherings. That said, the availability and ease with which virtual meetings can now be conducted may actually be a way of encouraging the participation of people who would find it difficult to travel to a specific venue, and it would be particularly good if we can move to using a system such as Zoom which enables people to see each other and engage in live conversation. I have a feeling that these are questions we will be returning to in the coming months.



The meeting to select the winner of this year's Richard Jefferies Society and White Horse Bookshop prize was another casualty of the Covid-19 restrictions, but this, too, was successfully dealt with by remote communications.

In a year when there were several strong contenders for the Prize, Benedict Macdonald's *Rebirding* impressed the judges by its ambition and scope and by

the extensive research which underpins the book's lively and thought-provoking engagement with some of the key environmental issues in the UK and their impact on our wildlife—and especially on bird life. *Rebirding* not only highlights how modern industrialised agriculture and land management practices have depleted biodiversity and bird life in Britain and compares the situation here with the much more favourable position in other parts of Europe; it also challenges the efficacy of some of the work of conservation organisations, insisting that small scale successes with some endangered species of birds will never result in sufficiently large populations to be viable, and that there is an urgent need for a network of links between conservation areas across the country. However, Macdonald is not defeatist, and nor is he afraid to be controversial. He argues for the game-changing potential of radical schemes of change, such as the rewilding of economically inefficient areas like those worked by Welsh hill farmers, or in the Cairngorms, the revision of the environmentally destructive land management of grouse moors to ensure a flourishing diversity among wild life that is threatened and dwindling, and the encouragement of new economic and employment opportunities in the countryside through the promotion of ecotourism. You may not agree with all of Benedict Macdonald's ideas and arguments, but his book is a passionate, informed and important intervention in one of the most pressing concerns of our time, and it deserves serious attention and a wide readership.

There is more information about the 2019 award and a review of *Rebirding* by Richard Stewart on pp.32–4.

THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY AND
WHITE HORSE BOOKSHOP LITERARY PRIZE 2020

PLEASE SEND YOUR NOMINATIONS FOR THIS YEAR'S
PUBLICATIONS TO RICHARD STEWART, 112, WESTERFIELD
ROAD, IPSWICH, IP4 2XW, AS SOON AS POSSIBLE & BY
1 DECEMBER 2020 AT THE LATEST.

Nominations can be sent by email to
award@richardjefferiessociety.org

TO THOSE DEPARTED:
NORMAN CHANEY 19 FEB. 1935–6 MAY 2020



On 2 March 2013 Freda and Norman Chaney, from the USA, attended a Society meeting at the Museum. Freda had written a book about George Eliot and was doing further research in the UK; Norman, a Professor of English at Otterbein University in Westerville, Ohio, was writing a book on several nature writers, including Jefferies. Prof. Chaney explained why he loved Jefferies' writing in the Society's Spring 2012 Newsletter, pp.29–30 and offered readings from 'Walks in the Wheat-fields' and 'The Country Sunday' at our meeting.

We are so sorry to receive this sad news from Freda and return to her wishes of 'peace' and 'joy'.

July 25, 2020

Richard Jefferies Society Members

My dear friends,

It is with great sadness that I must tell you that my husband, Norman Chaney, passed away on May 6, 2020. He had been battling cancer for three years. Miraculously, he did not have a lot of pain. He passed away at home in his favorite room we fondly referred to as the 'Thoreau Room' because it was filled with live plants. Sunlight streamed through the overhead windows, and books and nature memorabilia from around the globe were at his fingertips to while away his final hours. Hospice was with him along with his family in his final moments. His passing was so peaceful that we thought he was just sleeping at first. There is solace in this, and so many other moments just before his final day. I read to him from the most recent edition of *The Richard Jefferies Society Journal* #35, 70th Anniversary Edition and from *The Story of My Heart* by Richard Jefferies.

Norman was the most amazing human being and a true modern Renaissance man. He will be missed by all. On that note, I am enclosing his obituary, memorial card, and eulogy, and I do hope we will remain in touch. I wish you all peace and joy.

Sincerely,

Freda Chaney

Prof. Chaney's obituary can be read at:

<https://obituaries.tribstar.com/obituary/norman-chaney-1079192840>

‘RAIN, STEAM AND SPEED – THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY’ AND OTHER FAVOURITE PAINTINGS

Richard Jefferies wrote in *The Story of My Heart*: ‘I am not a picture lover: they are flat surfaces, but those that I call human are nevertheless beautiful.’ He had some particular favourites, mentioned in his works, that he regularly visited at the National Gallery.

Joseph Mallord William Turner’s oil-painting, illustrated on the front cover of the newsletter, went on show at the Royal Academy in 1844. Jefferies referred to it in his essay ‘Walks in the Wheat-fields’, first published July 1887 in the *English Illustrated Magazine* and later in the *Field and Hedgerow* collection:

If I were a painter I should like to paint all this; I should like to paint a great steam-ploughing engine and its vast wheels, with its sweep of smoke, sometimes drifting low over the fallow, sometimes rising into the air in regular shape, like the pine tree of Pliny over Pompeii’s volcano. A wonderful effect it has in the still air; sweet white violets in a corner by the hedge still there in all their beauty. For I think that the immense realism of the iron wheels makes the violet yet more lovely; the more they try to drive out Nature with a fork the more she returns, and the soul clings the stronger to the wild flowers. I should like to paint the lessening square of the wheat-field, the reaping machine continually cutting the square smaller, as if it traversed the Greek fret. People of the easel would not find it easy to depict the half-green, half-made hay floating in the air behind a haymaking machine. Sunlight falls on the modern implements just the same as on the old wooden plough and the oxen. To be true, pictures of our fields should have them both, instead of which all the present things are usually omitted, and we are presented with landscapes that might date from the first George. Turner painted the railway train and made it at once ideal, poetical, and classical. His ‘Rain, Steam, and Speed,’ which displays a modern subject, is a most wonderful picture. If a man chose his hour rightly, the steam-plough under certain atmospheric conditions would give him as good a subject as a Great Western train. He who has got the sense of beauty in his eye can find it in things as they really are, and needs no stagey time of artificial pastorals to furnish him with a sham nature. Idealise to the full, but idealise the real, else the picture is a sham.

The scene is identifiable as Maidenhead railway bridge, across the Thames between Taplow and Maidenhead. The bridge, which was begun on Brunel’s design in 1837 and finished in 1839, has two main arches of brick, very wide and flat. The view is to the east, towards London.

Andrew Rossabi donated a print of the painting to the Richard Jefferies Society on 18 April 2013 that was placed on display next to the old iron bed in the attic study of the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate.

In his notebook numbered XIV, 12 October 1884, after remembering fondly an old pit filled with bulrushes, Jefferies asks: 'Why doesn't the Painter paint such places? Is it because he can't see them? or because his patrons will only purchase fancy scenes. But look at Millais' 'Chill October'—that is no fancy scene I am sure.' (see back cover).

Mention of other art work includes 'The Rape of the Sabine Women' by Rubens, 'Venus and Adonis' by Titian, and Alma-Tadema's 'The Flower Girl'. Jefferies reveals in his last notebook (XXIV), dated around May 1887, that there is 'not a picture in the world to equal a naked callipygous'.

In London always my pilgrimage was to the East. Seaward out of London Bridge, I used to watch the ripples of the tide and think of the sea. Once I saw the sun rise from the Bridge. I liked to visit a few pictures in the National Gallery. I used to rest in the Gallery or the British Museum—generally the Gallery. I could not afford a restaurant; sometimes not even a glass of ale. I only wanted to sit and rest. I sat and rested before 'Daphnis and Chloë', before Titian's 'Venus and Adonis' before Rubens' 'Rape of the Sabines'. Though not a picture lover, these were beautiful. (*Chronicles of the Hedges*, p.210)

and again:

The glowing face of Cytherea in Titian's 'Venus and Adonis', the heated cheek, the lips that kiss each eye that gazes on them, the desiring glance, the golden hair—sunbeams moulded into features—this face answered me. Juno's wide back and mesial groove, is any thing so lovely as the back? Cytherea's poised hips unveiled for judgment; these called up the same thirst I felt on the green sward in the sun, on the wild beach listening to the quiet sob as the summer wave drank at the land. I will search the world through for beauty. I came here and sat to rest before these in the days when I could not afford to buy so much as a glass of ale, weary and faint from walking on stone pavements. I came later on, in better times, often straight from labours which though necessary will ever be distasteful, always to rest my heart with loveliness. I go still; the divine beauty of flesh is life itself to me. It was, and is, one of my London pilgrimages. (*The Story of My Heart*, Ch.V)

and further:

Then there is the well-dressed, stout florid girl, who meets you every afternoon, week after week, at the same spot. She reminds me of the fruit or flower girl painted by Alma-Tadema—I remember an etching; I wish I could buy the print—but it is far too expensive for me. ... Inside the National Gallery I think it is a mistake that they have put the Disembowelled Stag (Landseer) close to the great Rubens. (*Chronicles of the Hedges*, p.208)

What might Jefferies have thought about modern art and of the many illustrations that have accompanied his works that were published after his death? Perhaps he might have enjoyed the most recent depiction of *After London* that accompanied an article published on 23 April 2020 (see p.47).

ACTION FOR SLANDER IN ACTON

The Editors

At first glance the archives of *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette* would not appear to offer much potential to add to our knowledge of Jefferies. But Acton was where Jefferies' widow, Jessie, lived for much of the 1890s and a browse was potentially worthwhile.

In the High Court of Justice, Queen's Bench Division
1897 J. No. 1999.
Between JESSIE JEFFERIES (Widow) Plaintiff,
and CHARLES EDMOND SIDNEY TISDALL
and MABEL TISDALL, Defendants.
I CERTIFY that this Action came on for
Trial before the Honourable Mr. Justice Bruce,
in the County of Middlesex, on the 23rd day of May,
1898, when the DEFENDANTS UNRESERVEDLY
APOLOGISING and admitting that the slanderous
statement complained of is entirely without foundation.
By consent the Judge directed that Judgment
should be entered for the Plaintiff for £2 and Costs,
as between Solicitor and Client.
(Signed) **JOHN BAINES.**
Dated 23rd May, 1898
We certify the above to be a true copy of the
Certificate for entry of judgment in the above Action.
PHILLIPS, CUMMINGS & MASON,
14, Sherborne Lane, London, E.C.,
Plaintiff's Solicitors.

The Acton and Chiswick Gazette, 1 July 1898

To our great surprise we came across a legal action for alleged slander brought by Jessie¹ against local Acton resident Charles Tisdall and his daughter, Mabel. The notice by the Queen's Bench Division was published in *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette* on 1 July 1898. Although the case was due to be heard on 23 May 1898, a report in the same newspaper on 27 May reported that the case had

¹ Checks were made in public records to determine if another Jessie Jefferies in Acton could be identified as the plaintiff but none was found.

been settled out of court. The Tisdalls unreservedly apologised and Jessie was awarded £2 [£180 today] and costs.

The Law Reports for 1898 were examined but cases passed without discussion and valueless as precedents were omitted, so we may never know what was said.

The case of Jefferies v. Tisdall and another for alleged slander, which was to have been tried at the Queen's Bench on Monday before Mr. Justice Bruce, was settled out of court, the damages agreed upon being 40s. and costs.

The Acton and Chiswick Gazette, 27 May 1898

Slander wasn't actionable without proof of special damage; one couldn't obtain damages merely for loss of reputation, one would have had to suffer pecuniary loss. In 1891 the UK government passed The Slander of Women Act which amended the law in that any words spoken or published that imputed unchastity or adultery to any female did not require special damage to render them actionable.

To all appearances Charles Tisdall, a retired dyer, was a pillar of Acton society, a deacon at the Acton Baptist Church and an inveterate writer of letters to *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette*, chiefly criticising the local authority. At the time of the action for slander he was seventy and his daughter, Mabel, about twenty years of age. The Tisdalls, with three sons and three daughters, lived in a substantial property in the Mill Hill Park area and Jessie lived nearby². Despite his financial loss and unwelcome exposure in the local press concerning the slander case, Charles Tisdall continued to represent his church at various meetings and *The Acton and Chiswick Gazette* published his many letters until his death in 1908.

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With thanks to member Michael Sherwood for legal guidance.

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<sup>2</sup> By the time of the 1901 census, Jessie had moved to 257 Chesterfield Road in Ashford with her daughter Phyllis, perhaps to remove herself from the Tisdalls. Ten years earlier she lived at 3 Townley Park Villas, Lordship Lane, Camberwell (1891 census) to be close to Dulwich College where her son Harold was a student until December 1891. However, by 1892 Jessie was living at 158 Avenue Road, Mill Hill Park, Acton.

## JEFFERIES' LETTER TO REV. F. GODDARD

John Price came across a letter from Jefferies (see below) dated 28 Feb 1874 that was sold at Lockdales auction on 19 February 2020. The letter is addressed to Rev. F. Goddard. As it happens, George Miller knows the person who bought it—a Charles Nugent who, he says, 'has an outstanding collection of Late Victorian and Edwardian literature, including Jefferies.' Jefferies writes that he is returning a letter sent to Goddard [from John Blennerhassett of Sherborne] in answer to the Reverend's query concerning the Goddards of Kerry. Blennerhassett had been unable to help but referred him to a 'History of Kerry' by Mrs. [Mary Agnes] Hickson [1821–99] that Jefferies would seek out. Jefferies asked Rev. Goddard, who had seen the correspondence of General Thomas Goddard, whether this was in the British Museum.

Amazing how these things turn up.

Coate  
Sturton  
Feb 28<sup>th</sup> 74

Dear Sir,

I return the letter, & shall  
try & see the History of Kerry.  
You mentioned that you had  
seen the Correspondence of Gen.  
Thos. Goddard: might I ask  
if it is in the British Museum?

Faithfully Yours  
Rich. Jefferies

Rev F. Goddard.

## 70<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY OF THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY

The inaugural meeting of the Richard Jefferies Society was held 70 years ago at the Town Hall in Swindon on Tuesday, 13 June 1950. There is documentation, held in the Society's archives at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre in Chippenham, that details how the Society came into being, but an article in the *Wiltshire Herald and Advertiser* reported the meeting three days later. The article explains that the early aim of the Society—that had been set out by a sub-committee, and recounted by Harold Adams, founder of the Society—was to encourage and stimulate 'admiration and love' for Jefferies' work and 'to maintain careful observation on Coate Water and Coate Farmhouse, and to provide the means of meeting together in fellowship of those who sincerely love and admire his life and work'. This might seem a long time overdue. Even as long ago as 28 Apr 1894, there was a letter from Charles Farr, in the *Salisbury Journal*, who suggested the formation of a 'Richard Jefferies Club'.

Samuel J. Looker was appointed President; Mr. W. Bramwell, and Mr. F. Davenport—Vice Presidents; Secretary—Mr. Harold E. Adams; Treasurer—Miss R.M. Vick; auditors—Messrs. A. Norman and W.J. Rose; Executive Committee—Mrs. Frances Gay, Miss Edna Manning, Miss Jean Day, Mr. H. Whiting, Mrs. Harding and Mr. S. George.

Mr. George proposed that Jefferies' birthplace should be converted into a museum as a memorial to his spirit. Ten years later, on 24 June 1960, a room at Coate Farm was dedicated as a Museum to both Jefferies and Alfred Williams which was ably curated by Kathleen Sewell (Jefferies' second cousin) and also a founder member of the Society. Regrettably both Looker (11 January) and Kathleen Sewell (22 September) died in 1965. The only photograph on record (see following page) is that dated 12 February 1955. Frances Gay stands in the middle of the front row (fourth from the left), Looker is in the second row looking over Mrs. Gay's left shoulder, Kathleen Sewell—on the back row next to the bay window and her nieces Clodagh Kilminster in front of her and Doreen Lewis to her left.

Membership of the Society was, understandably, centred on Swindon but even in 1949 Harold Adams was writing letters to the media to highlight the fact that a Society was being established and invited the general public around the country to contact him for more information.

It is an amazing feat to keep an organisation running for 70 years with nothing more than the dedication of volunteers and a keen membership. Membership numbers peaked in 1991 to 414 members but the numbers are steadily declining, and with a growing elderly stronghold, the figure is now just over the 200 mark. Jefferies' works will live on, however, and let's hope that a new audience will take pleasure in his writing for many years to come.



A gathering of Richard Jefferies Society members outside Coate Farm,  
12 February 1955

## PAST PRESIDENTS AND OFFICERS

### PRESIDENTS

|           |                  |
|-----------|------------------|
| 1950–1965 | Samuel Looker    |
| 1965–1974 | Henry Williamson |
| 1974–1991 | W.J. Keith       |
| 1991–1996 | Andrew Rossabi   |
| 1996–1998 | Richard Mabey    |
| 1999–2004 | Jeremy Hooker    |
| 2004–2010 | Hugoe Matthews   |
| 2010      | Andrew Rossabi   |

### VICE PRESIDENTS

|           |              |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1950–1956 | W Bramwell   |
| 1950–1983 | F Davenport  |
| 1956–1961 | E Whiting    |
| 1958–2000 | Harold Adams |

|           |                        |
|-----------|------------------------|
| 1961–1978 | J.O.A. Arkell          |
| 1971–1974 | Frances Gay            |
| 1974–1977 | Henry Williamson       |
| 1974–1975 | Stanley George         |
| 1977–2000 | Mark Daniel            |
| 1977–1995 | Cyril Wright           |
| 1978–1992 | Edna Manning           |
| 1980–2015 | Brian Fullagar         |
| 1980–1987 | Clodagh Kilminster     |
| 1980–2004 | Robert McCloy          |
| 2005      | Phyllis Treitel (Hon.) |
| 2016–2019 | Ray Morse (Hon.)       |
| 2017–2019 | Sheila Povey (Hon.)    |
| 2020      | John Price             |

## CHAIR

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1950-1971 | Frances Gay     |
| 1971-1986 | Harold Adams    |
| 1986-1989 | Phyllis Treitel |
| 1989-2004 | Leonard Grugeon |
| 2004-2018 | John Price      |
| 2018      | Barry Sloan     |

## VICE CHAIR (post created 1968)

|           |              |
|-----------|--------------|
| 1968-1971 | Harold Adams |
| 1971-1972 | Frances Gay  |
| 1972-1977 | Cyril Wright |
| 1977-1982 | A.T. Rose    |
| 1982-2000 | Ray Morse    |
| 2000-2004 | John Price   |
| 2005-2006 | Ray Morse    |
| 2012-2018 | Eric Jones   |
| 2018      | post vacant  |

## HON. SECRETARY

|           |                 |
|-----------|-----------------|
| 1950-1957 | Harold Adams    |
| 1958-1960 | Frances Gay     |
| 1960-1967 | E.M. Thompson   |
| 1967-1971 | Frances Gay     |
| 1971-1973 | Joan Jefferies  |
| 1974-1995 | Cyril Wright    |
| 1995-2005 | Phyllis Treitel |
| 2005      | Jean Saunders   |

## HON. TREASURER

|           |                  |
|-----------|------------------|
| 1950-1964 | R.M. Vick        |
| 1964-1974 | Cyril Wright     |
| 1974-1992 | Margaret Gould   |
| 1992-1995 | Jack Thomas      |
| 1995-1999 | Dick Bedwin      |
| 1999-2014 | Geoff Hirst      |
| 2014-2017 | Peter Bainbridge |
| 2017      | Tom Saunders     |



Henry Williamson chatting with members at the Richard Jefferies Society Birthday Lecture. Photo credit: *Wiltshire Gazette & Herald*, 4 November 1971

## SHALL WE USE AN ALGORITHM, MINISTER?

Peter Robins

Victorian reformers of the Civil Service introduced competitive testing in the 1870s to improve the quality of applicants as the service had gained a reputation in attracting the unambitious, the indolent and the incapable. Over time, these revisions benefited public school and university candidates and by the early twentieth century further changes were proposed by the addition of a section of the exam that tested candidates' use of the English language. It also included a topic on Richard Jefferies.

An account of the 1917 reforms by the Committee appointed by the Treasury was published in *The Daily Telegraph* of 7 August:

An interesting proposal is that which makes it obligatory on all candidates to take a section which does not test the results of university study alone. To qualify in this candidates must be able to use the English language skilfully and accurately. Thus the essay, formerly optional, becomes obligatory. Longish prose and poetical passages are quoted, of which brief summaries are asked, and other questions demand the deducing of a man's character from quoted utterances, discussion of a philosophical theory outlined, the weighing, as a judge, of conflicting views of Edmund Burke and Mr. H.G. Wells on the same subject, a short indication of the candidate's view as to the respective values of history and science as sources of enlightenment, the turning of a prose passage of Richard Jefferies into blank or rhymed and metrical verse, and an analytical criticism of Clough's poem, 'Come home.' Two to four answers are asked, and, says the instruction, 'it is probable that a first-rate paper can be composed in not more than a thousand words.'

In that same issue *The Daily Telegraph* reported on the progress of the war, 'Sharp Fighting on the British Front: Advance Near Lens'. Four months before, on 11 April 1917, the newspaper had given an account of 'The Battle of Arras'. Though unrecorded in the report, on the first day of that offensive, 9 April, a bitterly cold Easter Monday, Sec. Lieut. Edward Thomas, Jefferies' biographer, was killed.<sup>2</sup> Thomas's father, Philip, had distinguished himself in a Civil Service Examination (Executive Branch) and worked in the Board of Trade. He wanted Edward to enter the same field and urged his son to study for the Civil Service Examination after leaving St. Paul's School in 1895. Though Edward prepared for the exam, he pursued his writing and with an early success of his first book *The Woodland Life* and gaining a history scholarship to Lincoln College, Oxford, he gave up the idea of a clerical life.

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<sup>1</sup> Arthur Hugh Clough (1819–1861). 'Come home' forms part of his 'Songs in Absence' (1852). Coincidentally, Jefferies and Clough both met premature deaths, the poet dying from malaria contracted in Florence.

<sup>2</sup> Sec. Lieut. Edward Thomas was remembered and was listed with other journalists who had fallen on 'the field of honour' at a service held at St. Bride's Church, Fleet Street on 28 July 1917 and reported by *The Daily Telegraph* on 30 July.

## WALKING: FOOT AS CONDUIT<sup>1</sup>

Brooke Williams

Is there a force coming up out of the earth that we absorb through our feet while walking? This question has been vapour, been a ghost, been there invisible throughout my walking life. We'd walked, following Richard Jefferies, the 19th-century nature-mystic who came here before, to White Horse Hill and standing above on a green hill that at that moment had been turned into an



island, an ephemeral grey sea washing in around its base. Into the green turf carpeting White Horse Hill is cut the Uffington Horse (pictured above). One hundred meters long, we walked slowly, mindfully from tail-tip to head, dropping between its ears, to stand in its table-like eye where for the first time real words condensed onto my tongue and I said them aloud. *What Richard Jefferies knew he absorbed directly from the earth through the bottom of his feet as he walked.*

We were there walking the scarp of the Berkshire Downs, hoping for insights as to why Richard Jefferies had, or so it seemed, pierced the veil between life and death, as if the present might make use of his past. We were eight miles from Coate, where Jefferies was born in a farmhouse, the same farmhouse from which he staged daily walks throughout the years he lived there, thinking, dodging accusations of 'idleness' raging against him, sitting atop hills, back against trees, wondering. We were there because the year before we had discovered in a used-book store in Maine, a copy of the book, *The Story of My Heart* (1883).

'Have you heard of this book?' Terry asked. I'd not. 'Have you heard of this man?' I'd not. We bought the book, read it out loud to each other and wondered

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<sup>1</sup> This essay originally appeared in *The Brooklyn Rail*, March 2020. Brooke Williams and his wife Terry Williams, from the USA, visited the Richard Jefferies Museum when they were on the Jefferies' trail back in February 2013 (see RJS Spring 2013 newsletter, p.28). And true to their word, an edition of *The Story of My Heart* was published in the USA in 2015 (report in RJS newsletter Spring 2015, pp.29-30). It sold over 2000 copies. Brooke Williams can often be found near Moab, Utah, walking, writing, and thinking. *The Brooklyn Rail* was founded in October 2000 to provide 'an independent forum for arts, culture, and politics throughout New York City and far beyond'. Many thanks to Brooke Williams and *The Brooklyn Rail* for permission to reproduce the article.

why it had been invisible and how to make it visible. The book, full of unpredictably accurate futures, the clear blending of worlds, spiritual and ecological concerns that transcend generations, seemed to us to have come from somewhere else. Somewhere beyond Richard Jefferies, who although his education was scant, had read Plato, Socrates, and possibly Thoreau, to whom he is often compared.

I spent a year obsessed with this book, with Jefferies, and could only conclude that this book was only possible by the act of walking. For a time, that was enough. Once we finished our introduction and afterword and the new edition of *The Story of My Heart* was published, I began wondering, what is absorbed from the earth ‘through the soles of [our]feet?’ and how?

Since then, I’ve made more discoveries, clues supporting the possibility that feet are conduit for the raw truth of the earth. At Charles Darwin’s Down House, I discovered his ‘Sandwalk,’ where he went daily or while writing down some of history’s most important ideas, he became stuck or lost. We explored the South Downs of Sussex where Virginia Woolf walked while writing *To the Lighthouse*, *A Room of One’s Own*, and other novels which continue to pass the test of time. I’ve walked in Thoreau’s footsteps around Walden Pond and read and re-read his famous ‘Walking’ essay, because I need to know why ‘in wildness is the preservation of the world.’ These great thinkers had one thing in common. They walked. Nietzsche who walked wrote that ‘only thoughts reached by walking have value.’

The Daoists believe that the earth emanates life-force that we can absorb. This life force is directly related to evolution—*this life-force may be evolution!*—which moves life successfully into the future. Once we understand this, we may realize the role we play in our own evolution. Recently scientists have discovered the ‘Schumann Resonance’—which pulses at 7.83 Hertz per second. The earth’s life-force is a pulse.

According to the Tao, we can absorb this energy through our feet—there’s a point, upper-mid sole, at the base of the ball of the foot, the *yuan-chauny*, through which when during each step weight is placed there, the earth’s energy is drawn up. Which, they say, represents the roots of the Tree of Life, penetrating into the earth.

The ball of the foot.

Lately, I see much documenting the benefits of walking barefoot, due I’m sure to this same phenomenon. I like walking barefoot. I do it when I can. And now, because I cannot always be barefoot, to remove the obstacle for the earth’s energy as it passes through me, I will cut a hole in each of my shoes.

## WARNINGS TO THE OVER-ZEALOUS

And whilst on the subject of the pleasures of walking, 'Warnings to the Over-Zealous' was the title of chapter XXIV *Of Walking and Walking Tours: An Attempt to Find a Philosophy and a Creed* by Arnold Haultain (London: T. Werner Laurie 1914) reprinted as follows:

Now, I know precisely what will happen. Some epimethean enthusiast, carried away by the anticipated delights of a walk, will suddenly make up his mind to take one; will hastily stuff some things into a bag, and will start off at four o'clock in the morning with some vague and distant goal in view. He will think to roll John Burroughs and Richard Jefferies into one in his minute observation of Nature, and to outdo Wordsworth and Amiel combined in his philosophico-poetical disquisitions on the same; he will rid his mind of the world and the worldly, and float in themes transcendental and abstruse. But I think I know what will happen. By the afternoon of that selfsame day he will be hungry, thirsty, footsore, and tired. His boots will be tight; his bag as heavy as his spirits; his head as empty as his craw. Instead of observing Nature he will find Nature—in the shape of the rustics (and the rustics' dogs)—very narrowly observing him, not always with sympathetic or benignant gaze. Instead of deep and transcendental meditations rising spontaneously to his mind, he will find curt and practical questions assailing his ear as to who he is and what he is doing there.—My dear but epimethean enthusiast, you must know that Nature is a jealous mistress. If so be you are sedulously engaged for fifty weeks in the year in the pursuit of pelf, think not to woo her by a half day's worship at her shrine. Even if your courtship be sincere, it must be slow. Not in forty-eight hours will you brush away the cobwebs of the workaday world and prepare for the reception of sweet Nature's influence a mind free from all uncharitableness: their skies, not their characters, they change who sail over-seas. From all blindness of heart, from pride, vainglory, and hypocrisy, you must seek to be delivered, else you will walk in vain. For most men walk in a vain show, and the perpetual perambulation of the streets of Vanity Fair is a poor preparation for the Delectable Mountains.—But take heart. If you will keep but a corner of your mind free from the carking cares of barter and commerce—if only by half-holiday jaunts and Sabbath-day journeys, great will be your reward. By the end of the third or fourth day's tramp, what with the exhilarating exercise, the fresh air, the peace and loneliness, the long hours of mental quietude, the freedom from the petty distractions of social and official life, if you are humble and childlike, the world forgetting by the world forgot—the scales will fall from your eyes; then indeed you will see—and feel—and think. The trivial little objects at your feet, equally with the immense expanses of earth and sky, will lift you high

above themselves; the wet and drooping high-road weed, the tender green of a curled frond, the soft oozy of a summer marsh—the sense of beauty—of the fitness of things—of their immense incomprehensibility—the wonder of it all ... words seem useless to say how such things sink into the soul, plough up its foundations, sow there seeds which, like the Indian juggler's plant, spring up at once and blossom into worship, reverence, awe.—Believe me, I am not extravagant or hyperbolic, nor do I beguile with empty words. If you will not hear me, hear the simple-minded Richard Jefferies:

I linger in the midst of the long grass, the luxury of the leaves, and the song in the very air. I seem as if I could feel all the glowing life the sunshine gives and the south wind calls to being. The endless grass, the endless leaves, the immense strength of the oak expanding, the unalloyed joy of finch and blackbird; from all of them I receive a little.... In the blackbird's melody one note is mine; in the dance of the leaf shadows the formed maze is for me, though the motion is theirs; the flowers with a thousand faces have collected the kisses of the morning. Feeling with them, I receive some, at least, of their fulness of life. Never could I have enough; never stay long enough.... The hours when the mind is absorbed by beauty are the only hours when we really live, so that the longer we can stay among these things so much the more is snatched from inevitable Time.... These are the only hours that are not wasted—these hours that absorb the soul and fill it with beauty. This is real life, and all else is illusion, or mere endurance. To be beautiful and to be calm, without mental fear, is the ideal of Nature. If I cannot achieve it, at least I can think it.<sup>1</sup>

Which passage has received the *imprimatur* of quotation by no less an authority than Lord Avebury (better known, perhaps, as Sir John Lubbock), himself not only a man of science, but a statesman and a man of affairs as well. Listen:

The exquisite beauty and delight of a fine summer day in the country has never perhaps been more truly, and therefore more beautifully, described.<sup>2</sup>

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But surely, with all deference to the learned quoter, there is something deeper in Richard Jefferies, these his dithyrambs, than a description of a fine summer day. Surely Jefferies finds himself here, in Amiel's fine phrase, *tête-à-tête* with the Infinite, and tries, poor soul, in vain to find vent for his thoughts. It is not a picture, it is a poem. Nor needed it 'The Pageant of Summer' to transport this poet thither. Jefferies was here viewing Nature through a seventh sense—a sense more delicate than that of sight or sound, the sense that Maurice de Guérin has defined as,—

Un sens que nous avons tous, mais voilé, vague, et privé presque de toute activité, le sens qui recueille les beautés physiques et les livre à l'âme, qui les spiritualise, les

¹ 'The Pageant of Summer.'

² *The Pleasures of Life*, Part II., chapter viii.

harmonie, les combine avec les beautés idéales, et agrandit ainsi sa sphère d'amour et d'adoration.³

It is not Richard Jefferies his catalogue of the things he saw which moves us to admiration and delight, it is his sense sublime which enabled him to rise from the things which are seen to the things which are unseen, to rise above the *hic et nunc* of the parochial and to peer into the *illuc et tunc* of the eternal. He saw 'into the life of things,' and in him the finite stirred emotions which savoured of the infinite.

JEFFERIES AND T.S. ELIOT

George Miller

I was looking through some of my books on mysticism that mention Jefferies. He is usually assigned a fairly minor place, often in the category of nature mystics alongside Wordsworth, Tennyson and Whitman, and in a minor role in relation to them. I was surprised by F.C. Happold's *Mysticism: a Study and an Anthology* (Penguin, 1963). Again the early Christian and Medieval mystics and 17th century divines are fully represented, but after Traherne and William Law none of the above. Except Jefferies that is, who gets a warm appraisal and lengthy passage from *The Story of My Heart*, 'that glowing and lovely history of the journeyings of a great soul'. Well it's purely circumstantial but I wonder if this unusual direction in the narrative has anything to do with Happold's dedication of the book to 'T.S. Eliot, poet of the *Four Quartets*.' I wonder if he knew Eliot, or perhaps attended his WEA lectures? I've often felt there's an affinity between *The Story of My Heart* and the *Quartets*—sensations of timelessness evoked by certain aspects of English countryside, and the sea.

Andrew Rossabi found reference to a letter from Eliot to Happold in Volume I of *The Poems of T.S. Eliot*, edited by Christopher Ricks and Jim McCue (Faber and Faber 2015). The editors cite a letter^{#4} from T.S. Eliot to F.C. Happold dated 18 November 1958: 'I shall be pleased to answer any questions I can about the *Four Quartets*, but you must not think of me as a mystic or contemplative. I have had a few flashes during my life, though there must be many people whose experience has taken them farther. Tennyson, for instance, knew more about certain types of experience than I do.'

³ *Journal, Lettres, et Poemes*, p.17. Paris, 1880. Quote translation: 'A sense that we all have, but veiled, vague, and deprived almost of all activity, the sense that collects physical beauties and delivers them to the soul, that spiritualizes them, harmonizes them, combines them with ideal beauties, and thus enlarges its sphere of love and adoration.'

^{#4} On p.985, in their commentary on 'The Dry Salvages' (V 18–19 The point of intersection of the timeless| With time.)

CLAUDE DEBUSSY

Robert Albright

I thought I would send you some notes which have occurred to me in this period of lockdown. I listen to classical music every day for an hour as part of my ‘stay indoors’ routine.

The piano music of Claude Debussy (1862–1918) is, for me, the perfect accompaniment to Richard Jefferies. Their lives overlapped but Debussy lived on into the early years of the last century, a period of revolutionary change in the arts, of which he was a leading proponent.

A wonderful performance by Gordon Fergus-Thompson of the Complete Piano Music of Debussy is on the ASV label. The CD booklet notes by Bryce Morrison provide many insights which have equivalents in Jefferies’ writings.



Claude Debussy

For Debussy the imaginative life was real life. A musical pantheist and revolutionary, he sensed the very heart of the centre of natural phenomena, their ‘inscape’ or essence; and seeking, as he put it, to ‘express the inexpressible’, he longed to liberate music ‘from the barren traditions which stifle it. It is a free art boundless as the elements, the wind, the sky, the sea. Music is the expression of the movement of the waters, the play of curves described by changing breezes. There is nothing more musical than a sunset. He who feels what he sees will find no more beautiful example of development than in the book of Nature.’

As a specific case we may compare Debussy’s *Poissons d’or* from *Images Book 2* (1907) with examples of Jefferies writing about trout observed in a brook:

Tremolandi, trills, leaping grace notes and a final opalescent cadenza suggest a world of flashing fins and sunlight, the sudden eruption of threshing activity and a no less sudden cessation, of a calm at once visionary and voluptuous.

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Note from the editors: Does anyone else have a favourite composer, musician or piece of music that might accompany Jefferies’ writing or which evokes his memories?

## FEATURING PHYLLIS TREITEL



Phyllis Treitel and John Webb 'Looking through Archives'  
at the Richard Jefferies Museum  
*Swindon Advertiser*, 5 December 2006, photographer Siobhan Boyle

This is the first in our series of features about Society members who deserve more recognition for the part they have played in bringing Richard Jefferies to the public eye.

Phyllis Treitel has been an active member of the Society since September 1979. From 1986–9 she was appointed Chair and from 1995–2005 she served as the Honorary Secretary taking over when Cyril Wright died and passing on the reins to me in October 2005.

She will be best remembered by those who never met her for co-authoring *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Petton Books, 1994) and *Richard Jefferies: An Index* (Petton Books, 2008) with Hugoe Matthews. It is unimaginable how much work went into producing those two invaluable reference books. Phyllis spent weeks/months, possibly years, at the British Library copying out letters by hand in the Richard Jefferies archives as well as all the contents of his notebooks that ran to many hundreds of pages and which are virtually illegible.

It is thanks to Phyllis that the *Journal* was introduced in 1992. Cyril Wright, who was secretary at the time, was opposed to introducing the publication fearful that there would be insufficient material available to fill the pages. Nearly thirty years later, the *Journal* has grown and has become an important part of the Society's aim to raise the profile of Richard Jefferies.

When I took over from Phyllis she delivered many boxes of papers that she had gathered and that was after arranging for the majority of the Society's archives to be placed in the Wiltshire Records Office in 2006. I had only been a member of the Society since May 2004 but knew Phyllis well before this when I engaged the Society in my fight to stop Swindon Council's development plans for the Commonhead/Coate area. She gave me a platform as a long-serving member of Swindon Friends of the Earth.

Phyllis is currently in a nursing home in Oxford suffering from Alzheimer's—a particularly cruel disease for one with such a brilliant brain. Her husband Guenter died in 2019—a genius in his own right who came to Britain on the Kindertransport and married Phyllis in 1957 in Tenbury, Worcestershire. Professor Sir Guenter Heinz Treitel QC FBS (26 October 1928 – 14 June 2019) was a Vinerian Professor of English Law and described as 'one of the most distinguished academic writers on the law of contract in the English speaking world', as well as the leading authority on English contract law. He was knighted for his services to law. He is the author of many books on the subject, all of which Phyllis had a hand in proof-reading.

Phyllis Margaret Treitel née Cook was born on 1 June 1929 in Birmingham. Her father was a police sergeant and she is the middle of three children—an older brother and a younger sister.

In 1939 the family were evacuated to Lindridge, a village in the Teme valley, Worcestershire, but as soon as the bombing of Birmingham was bearable they returned to the city. She attended King Edward VI School, Handsworth—a girls' school that she loved—and on gaining her School Certificate, her history teacher offered to coach her for Oxford although other teachers discouraged this. Nevertheless Phyllis gained a place at Somerville after her second attempt to enter, reading Philosophy, Politics and Economics. On her first sitting of the entrance exam papers she was isolated in her bedroom with an attack of scarlet fever. Heavy snow had blocked the roads and her bedroom ceiling collapsed—snow fell on her bed—the bed was moved away from the hole! This all scuppered her chance to do well that time, so she returned to school, was made Head Girl and House Captain, and set about her Higher School Certificate.<sup>1</sup> After

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<sup>1</sup> Much of this information was set out by Phyllis in an article for the *Somerville Report*, 2006-7 pp.53-55, titled 'Life Before Somerville'.

Somerville, where she gained her degree in 1948, she worked for the Colonial Service in West Africa. Records show that she was a passenger, aged 24, leaving the UK from Liverpool on 31 Dec 1953 and heading for Lagos, Nigeria on the Accra. During her many years of correspondence with Peter Robins, she wrote about her colonial service in Douala, Cameroon, as assistant secretary for the finance department in the Commissioner's Office, where her French was useful. Hers was the first year in which women were allowed to apply for temporary administrative posts where she was in office until 27 January 1955. Her archives from that time are now at the Bodleian Library.

She spent twenty years as an ASM Secretary for Somerville plus 'rather a lot of other part-time jobs' as well as raising two sons—Richard and Henry. Her last job before retirement was teaching publishing at Oxford Polytechnic. Her other interests included collecting commemorative medals of different sorts and she was an active member of Friends of the Ridgeway.

Unlike my slapdash approach to everything, Phyllis is meticulous and she taught me much about publishing too and how to follow *Hart's Rules for Compositors and Readers* that Penguin Books use as their Bible.

She can be heard on the film titled 'Jefferies Land' that was shot by John Webb in 2001 which captured those places in the Coate area that might still be recognised by Richard Jefferies. Phyllis talks about the first book by Jefferies that she ever read: *The Amateur Poacher* followed by *The Gamekeeper at Home*, that she enjoyed even more, and describes the keeper's cottage at Hodson.

Most members will be completely oblivious to the volume of work that Phyllis has undertaken for the Society—a kinder person I have yet to meet and with a wicked sense of humour.

Thank you Lady Treitel.

*Jean Saunders*



Phyllis at a Society gathering in 1998

## AFTER THE APOCALYPSE

Darryl Accone

This article was first published by *New Frame* on 23 April 2020. *New Frame* is a not-for-profit, social justice media publication based in Johannesburg, South Africa.

As we navigate a world that suddenly has become uncharted, solace can be found in *After London*, published in 1885, a remarkable science fiction novel that speaks to our Covid-19 condition.

One hundred and sixty years before Francis Fukuyama made his breathless claims in *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), the painter of the ‘apocalyptic sublime’, John Martin, made his deeply moving watercolour *The Last Man*. The painting shows a somewhat Christ-like man standing on cliffs overlooking the sea, a seemingly empty seaside town bathed in eerie light below him, and a fiercely red setting sun blurred behind banks of black clouds to the left. Near the man lies a lifeless body—a woman, to judge by the clothing.

Martin first made a study of this theme in 1826, and was to return to it in an oil painting dated 1849. In this last work, the man is aged and has a long white beard. He faces the sun defiantly, with a raised right hand. The figure of the woman is now more distinct and lies directly behind him. Whereas in 1832 the man looked out of the painting at the viewer, here his whole being is directed towards the sun.

Martin’s painting could well have inspired the poet A.E. Housman when he wrote his now famous seven-liner:

Ensanguining the skies  
How heavily it dies  
    Into the west away;  
Past touch and sight and sound  
Not further to be found  
How hopeless under ground  
    Falls the remorseful day.

(Published posthumously in the collection *More Poems*.)

It was with exquisite judgement that Oxford University Press used *The Last Man* (1832 version) on the jacket of *After London or Wild England* by Richard Jefferies. This masterpiece of nature writing, extraordinary fantasy novel and significant work of science fiction was first published in 1885. Its young author was already badly stricken with the tuberculosis that was to kill him two years later at the age of 39 (*sic*).

*After London* deals with England after London and the rest of the country are affected by an 'Unknown Orb'. Effectively destroyed, the great city is uninhabitable, most of its populace flee abroad by ship, and nature overtakes not only the capital but much of the country. Part I, 'The Relapse into Barbarism', making up about one-fifth of the book, is a masterly depiction of human life regressing in the absence of universally agreed modes of behaviour, travelling, agriculture, commerce, worship and other integral aspects of human existence.

## After the fall

In that, *After London* speaks to the world's current situation of flight, refuge and thinking about remaking the world after the coronavirus outbreak. Jefferies paints a picture of a postlapsarian world in which the great centre of social and economic evil, London, is no longer. The way to a new world seems to beckon, fresh with possibility, exactly the same consideration that at present is exercising thinkers and governments of both the Left and the Right.

Sadly, the reality of the novel is different, as ours may well be. The pre-industrial, pre-commercial world that evolves in England is not a pastoral idyll but a patchwork of competing rural poverties. Selfishness and greed assert themselves as the primary elements of human nature and the book's protagonist, Sir Felix Aquila, discovers that he is not the paragon of virtues that he believed he was.

Felix is on a journey, the sort that Jefferies muses about in his notebooks: 'In the heart of most of us there is always a desire for something beyond experience. Hardly any of us but have thought, Some day I will go on a long voyage, but the years go by and still we have not sailed.'

The millions stuck at home because of widespread lockdowns would certainly empathise with those sentiments. They would find solace, too, in the reality that our world is unlikely to relapse in quite the same way of Jefferies's imagination.

When Oxford University Press republished *After London* in 1980, after almost a century of neglect, it was to revive awareness of Jefferies. Readers picking up the book today will find much in it that speaks to the Covid-19 world because his startling novel is, in the words of the great literary critic Queenie Dorothy Leavis, filled with 'instinctive humanity and indignant expression'.

Here is how it begins:

The old men say their fathers told them that soon after the fields were left to themselves change began to be visible. It became green everywhere in the first spring, after London ended, so that all the country looked alike.

*continued on p.47 ...*

Mike Pringle came across the interesting and unknown fact that Richard Jefferies was the first to coin the phrase ‘wild life’ to describe the flora and fauna of a locality, as in *Wild Life in a Southern County* (1879).

The Oxford English Dictionary lists Richard Jefferies’ first use of the term in 1879. A search through old newspapers revealed that the term ‘wild life’ was only ever used to describe human behaviour, as in living a wild life. According to the OED, by 1936, the words started to appear hyphenated as in the June edition of *Discovery* that describes ‘a wild-life photographer’ and on 18 October 1982 *The Times* had dropped the hyphen: ‘Ancient woods ... are especially important for wildlife’. Apart from the OED, Dr. Oliver Tearle seems to be the only other person to have noted that ‘Richard Jefferies, who appears to have been the first person to use the phrase “wild life” to describe the natural world in 1879, is one of England’s greatest ever nature writers’ in his article ‘Richard Jefferies’ “Dystopian” Vision: *After London*,’ published 6 October 2018 for ‘Interesting Literature’. Dr. Tearle is a lecturer in English at Loughborough University and founder of the ‘Interesting Literature’ blog that examines the history of dystopian literature. So well done to Dr. Pringle for bringing this important discovery to our attention that also received publicity in the *Swindon Link* on 20 July 2020.

Further research reveals that Walter Besant was the second writer to use the phrase in, of course, his 1888 *Eulogy* to Jefferies. And Jefferies first mentions ‘wild life’ a year earlier than the OED record: on page 64 of his second notebook—somewhere between 1–6 May 1878. Jefferies has noted a title for his planned essays for the *Pall Mall Gazette* as ‘Wild life of a Southern County’ although, on the next page of the notebook, he changes this to ‘in’ a Southern County and explains: ‘In evidence why? thought—I have explained at once what the wild life is so that the title shall convey no false impression’. This suggests that he knew readers would not have heard the phrase before. Perhaps he was noting a proposed letter to Frederick Greenwood, editor of the *PMG*, to explain the reason for his title.

‘Wild Life in a Southern County’ first appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 9 May 1878 (pp.10–11) and ran until 4 December 1878 in 46 instalments under this title. Jefferies commenced the articles with a look at the Downs—in his notebook he reflects that he had said so little about the Downs in *The Gamekeeper at Home* but that ‘in the country the first thing one is sure to look at [is] the hills: they attract attention’. *Wild Life in a Southern County* was later published by Smith, Elder & Co. in 1879.

## NEWS IN BRIEF

Jessie Jefferies' grave at St Piran's Church, Perranzabuloe was alive with daffodils this spring probably for the first time since she was buried there by her daughter on 16<sup>th</sup> July 1926.

Our Vice President, John Price, provided suitable extracts from Jefferies for Sir Simon Russell Beale to read as part of the Marlborough LitFest activities that were broadcast on their website from mid-May at weekly intervals. Genevieve Clarke, the LitFest Chair, said 'Everyone needs to be reminded of the solace and inspiration that nature can provide, especially if they can't get out into it themselves at the moment.' John's selections were, in the order broadcast, 'Wild Flowers', the opening of *The Story of My Heart*, 'A Summer Day in Savernake Forest' and from *Amaryllis at the Fair*. Sir Simon's renditions were moving, engaging and soothing to listen to and can be heard at <https://www.marlboroughlitfest.org/litfest-speaking>. The event was covered by the *Marlborough Times* on 15 May 2020 whilst Sir Simon was interviewed on BBC Wiltshire Sound on 23 May.

In setting out the text John Price discovered a typographical error in 'A Summer Day in Savernake Forest' that was originally published unsigned in *The Globe* 27 July 1876, p.4 and identified by John Pearson who reprinted it in *Landscape & Labour* (Moonraker Press, 1979), pp.25-27. It reads:

Savernake Forest is not a toy place. The 'rides' are endless, the roads manifold, and it may well chance that a stranger who has no compass in his pocket to point the way to Marlborough, Dudley, or Great Bedwyn, might lose his way and be compelled to make his bed among the bracken.

There is no such place as Dudley in Wiltshire—the village south-east of Savernake Forest is DURLEY and, perhaps, the typesetters for *The Globe* struggled to read Jefferies' handwriting. The error was never spotted until now.

On 8 April 2020 Richard Vobes aka 'The Bald Destroyer' put up a You Tube clip of his search for Jefferies' grave at Broadwater Cemetery. Although he enjoyed Jefferies' writing he should have carried out more research about the writer that would have improved his commentary but for those who have never seen the cemetery and have access to the Internet, the film can be viewed at [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIOG-slh038&feature=emb\\_logo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XIOG-slh038&feature=emb_logo).

What stands out is the magnificent job that Mike Parrott and his wife Pat have done looking after Jefferies' grave. Thank you!

Extracts from Richard Jefferies' work, particularly *The Story of My Heart*, are regularly read at the School of Philosophy and Economic Science in London,

which teaches the ancient Hindu doctrine of *advaita* or non-duality. The link between Jefferies and Hindu spirituality was explored by Lisle March Phillipps in a review of the biography by Edward Thomas published in the *Edinburgh Review* (July 1909). The article was reproduced in *RJS Journal* No. 32 (2017), pp.84–106.

In his research for Volume III of *A Peculiarly English Genius*, Andrew Rossabi came across C.M. Jackson-Houlston's *Ballads, Songs and Snatches: the Appropriation of Folk Song and Popular Culture in British Nineteenth-Century Realist Prose* (Ashgate Publishing, 1999; Routledge, 2016) that includes a chapter on Jefferies. Dr Jackson-Houlston based the chapter on the Birthday Lecture that she presented to the Society on 8 November 1989 titled: 'Richard Jefferies: Folk Song and Popular Culture'. A report of the lecture was printed in the *RJS Autumn Newsletter and Annual Report, 1989-1990*, pp.4-5.

Experimental film maker Ben Rivers revealed, in a lengthy interview talking to Gareth Evans from the *London Review of Books*, that he has been working on a film about the environmental crisis based on an adaptation of Jefferies' *After London*. The interview, that took place on 13 May 2020, can be watched at the link below. 'The focus is on the pleasures of the solitary life, as luminously filmed in Ben Rivers' affectionate and insightful monochrome portrait of Jake Williams, Scottish "citizen of the forest" ["Two Years at Sea"]. We follow him at work and rest, imagining and realising strange projects, in this documentary reverie of a desired and fulfilled life.' Talk about his new project is towards the end. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYzERFwYeOM&feature=youtu.be>

Some ten years ago or more the Society was given a cine film made by the Film Production Unit of Swindon Public Library Film Society in 1948, produced as a centenary year tribute to Richard Jefferies. The film ran for fifteen minutes, with no sound-track, and showed Jefferies' birthplace and places that were special to the writer such as Liddington Hill, the Gamekeeper's Cottage and Coate Water. There is a charming re-enactment of a scene from *Bevis*, where local boys wield hand-made wooden swords in the mock Battle of Pharsalia. An appeal went out in the local paper to Swindonians in their seventies who might remember making the film. There were no responses until ten years later when Ken Mears (now 83) came across the story during lockdown and wrote to say that he left Swindon some 60 years ago but remembers that boys in his scout group, the 2nd Swindon, were invited to take part; the only criteria being that they should own some leather boots! With boots on Ken took part in the filming and it wasn't until being shown the film in July 2020 that he realised that he was the young boy who lead the charge. He recalls that the shots were filmed in the

old quarry at Queen's Park where the lake is much smaller and narrower than at Coate Water. This would have made the view of the boys across the lake easier to film. From his bedroom window, as a child, Ken could see Liddington Hill and the clump—the film brought back many happy memories of his childhood.

It has come to light that the Jefferies' farm at Coate opened out on to a turnpike road and that there was a toll house on Coate Road. There will be an article about this in a future *Society Journal*.

John Yard (a direct descendent of Richard Jefferies' grandfather through his daughter Fanny. She married farmer William Cox of Lower Snodshill Farm opposite Coate Farm) visited the Jefferies' museum in April 2012. John volunteered to transcribe Mary Cox's private journal (that belongs to Andrew Lewis) and photographed all 382 pages of it. John and his wife have been slowly transcribing the journal, that covers 1887–9, and will provide the Society with an electronic version once the work is complete.

Mary records the news of Richard's illness and death as follows:

16<sup>th</sup> July 1887

Mother has heard from Aunt Sewell & Joe came home last Friday. Aunt has not been at all well & she tells us that Dick is very ill not any hopes of him now they think.

August 20<sup>th</sup> 1887

Poor Dick was to be buried today he died last Sunday, the papers do speak nicely of him & his works, for years he has been ill & for the last two unable to hold a pen his wife wrote from dictation, poor fellow it was for daily bread, his wife two children and penniless, hope they will get in a good subscription for them.

*The Story of My Heart* has been translated into Spanish by Enrique Girón and Andrés Arenas. The book was published on 24 September 2020 by Langre ([www.clangre.es](http://www.clangre.es)). ISBN: 9788494481093. The only other translations of *The Story* are in French, German and Japanese. A Chinese translation was never published.



### RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY RESEARCH BURSARY

The Executive Council has approved a grant of £2,000 to the Richard Jefferies Museum Trust towards the printing of *Wild Life*— the beautifully illustrated coffee-table hardback book about Richard Jefferies written by Dr. Mike Pringle. In view of the strong educational reasons for publishing the book, and plans to distribute many free copies to a potential new audience, the Executive Council approved a further donation of £2,000 on 3 October 2020.

## THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY AND WHITE HORSE BOOKSHOP LITERARY PRIZE 2019

The judges met ‘remotely’ on 4 June 2020 and selected Benedict Macdonald’s *Rebirding: Rewilding Britain and its Birds* as the overall winner of the 2019 award. The announcement generated further media publicity and the paperback version released in late July included mention of the award on the back cover. The book also won the Wainwright Prize for Global Conservation, announced on 8 September. Benedict Macdonald was born in Bristol on 16 December 1987. He is a nature writer, conservationist and television producer. He is a regular columnist for *BBC Wildlife*, *Nature’s Home* and *Birdwatching*. In natural history television, Ben has worked on well-known BBC series such as *The One Show*, *Springwatch*, *The Hunt* and Sir David Attenborough’s *Our Planet*, for Netflix, and, more recently, as a director for Apple TV & National Geographic. With a lifelong passion for the natural world, particularly birds, Ben has travelled the UK, Europe and many of the world’s wilderness areas; finding and filming wildlife. In doing so, he has developed a keen passion for restoring the denuded nature of our own country. Ben studied at Christ Church, Oxford. He lives and works in Bristol.

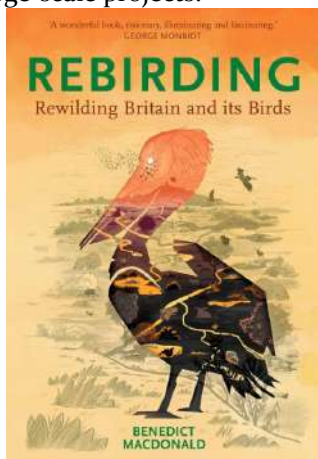
### BOOK REVIEW OF BENEDICT MACDONALD’S *REBIRDING*

*Richard Stewart*

The title has a superficial resemblance to *Wilding*, the 2018 winner, but this book covers far more than just one part of Sussex. Many parts of Europe are covered and further afield, with the emphasis on how wild life could be enriched by land management changes—not just a theoretical series of ideas but giving many successful examples. The title is misleading as the subject matter extends well beyond birds, but it was probably necessary to distinguish this book from many other recently published ‘wilding’ or similar books. The text, covering 226 pages, has a multitude of statistics and is sometimes a demanding read but this is balanced by chapter divisions into separate sections, some less than a page in length.

Part of the text covers former events, with the Enclosure Acts seen through the eyes of the poet John Clare, then the negative effects on ancient woodlands when the Forestry Commission began its planting of quick growing conifers, then the rush to use farming chemicals that negated the more wildlife-friendly system of crop rotation that had existed for thousands of years. The author regrets the loss of beneficial large animals ‘whose numbers, size and majesty we have entirely forgotten today’, but he does praise the work at Knepp and stresses

the importance of trees as hosts to a multitude of invertebrates, especially oak, willow and birch. The colour plates illustrate many successful schemes both at home and abroad, and on a very localised scale there is ‘sterile Britain’ as exemplified by two photos of the same Hampshire house, one from 1914, the other taken in 2017. The more recent one shows how it is ‘now cleansed as a result of ecological tidiness disorder’—a succinct but meaningful three word infection. Many of the colour plates and text examples of successful wildlife enhancing schemes stress the need to ‘think big’ and ‘allow flexible movements and successful reactions to adverse circumstances’. The RSPB is criticised for not using more of its revenue in land purchases and some National Park management is criticised, with the shameful fact that the United Kingdom was 189<sup>th</sup> in 2018 world rankings for countries with biodiversity intactness. Macdonald lists the ‘big six’ to control as grouse, deer, sheep, forestry, dairy and arable farms, adding that ‘chaos, dereliction and decay’, which are among the most important elements in rewilding success, are ‘the last words you’ll hear in British conservation’. To balance this pessimism there is praise for the RSPB’s Wallasea Island development in Essex, the Great Fen scheme in Cambridgeshire and rather brief coverage of the Forsinard Flow Country work in Sutherland—all being large-scale projects.



Here are a few comments from the judges:

‘He is powerfully and persuasively critical of the National Park authorities and other conservation bodies, and demonstrates convincingly the need for radical revision of government policy in this respect.’

‘It is heavily laden with facts and figures but it definitely doesn’t feel like it. It certainly packs a punch, well-researched, passionate with good writing.’

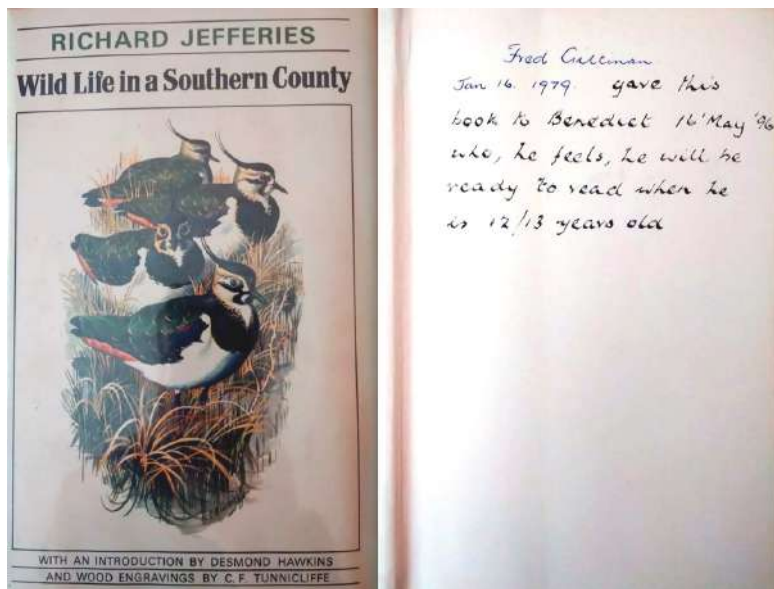
‘Definitely a book with a purpose, not merely observation or personal engagement, but trenchantly written studies of general and specific species and landscapes.’

‘Bill Oddie’s comment on the back cover about how “they left the best till last” in a long series of rewilding books is one I support.’

‘An agenda for radically altering the British countryside in order to enrich the environment and increase its capacity to support diverse and multiple forms of wildlife.’

‘The colour plates are much better than the illustrations in the other shortlisted titles. ... Scientifically very sound, though I do not agree with all his criticisms of existing organisations and systems.’

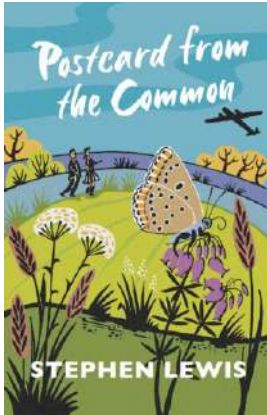
The winner has achieved a hat-trick of ‘firsts’ in the brief history of this award: his first book, the youngest ever winner at the age of thirty-two, and the first winner not to base their book partly or completely on land they own. Ben’s comment on hearing the news was: ‘My wise grandfather gave me a copy of *Wild Life in a Southern County* when I was eight years old. Today I am humbled beyond measure to have won this literary prize. This one’s for you, Fred Giltinan.’



Inscription in *Wild Life in a Southern County* given to Benedict by his grandfather on 16 May 1996 that Fred Giltinan feels ‘he will be ready to read when he is 12/13 years old.’

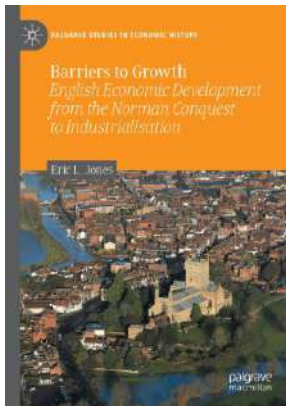
Finally, can I thank our Chairman, Barry Sloan, for all the extra and unexpected work he carried out in respect of this year’s award. This was because the judges couldn’t meet as usual and I am reliant on computers in our library, which was closed at the time.

## BOOKS BY MEMBERS



*Postcard from the Common* by Stephen Lewis was published by YouCaxton Publications on 5 September 2019 (paperback, ISBN: 978-19124198-8-3, £8.99).

An area of Common Land in England is used as an airfield in World War Two. A plane crashes and a series of events begins as, seven years later, two teenagers try to unravel the truth about what happened. As they seek answers they are faced with increasingly urgent questions about the background to their own lives as the Common itself, its heritage, landscape and wildlife, is threatened. All royalties from this book will go to support the work of Butterfly Conservation.

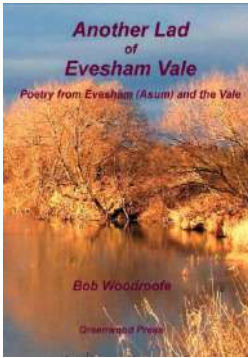


*Barriers to Growth: English Economic Development from the Norman Conquest to Industrialisation* by Eric L. Jones—part of Palgrave Studies in Economic History. It was published in hardback on 30 June 2020 by Springer International Publishing. 153pp., ISBN: 978-30304427-3-6.

This book deals sequentially with major impediments to economic growth and their slow dissolution. It is original and quite different from standard economic history, which has always sought for one prime mover of the industrial revolution after another. These supposed positive forces are usually depicted as novel and little reference is made to

inertia. Instead the barriers dealt with here run, in the first section, from early misallocations of resources to nineteenth century reforms which of their nature indicate the problems to be overcome. The second section deals with more physical impediments and shocks, such as floods and settlement fires. These too are ignored in ordinary treatments, which this book will supplement or even replace. It will be of interest to academic economic historians and practitioners of neighbouring subjects such as economists, historians, historical geographers, and of course their students.

*Another Lad of Evesham Vale—Poetry from Evesham (Asum) and the Vale* by Bob Woodroffe was published by Greenwood Press on 1 May 2020. 64 pp., ISBN: 978-09957290-3-2.

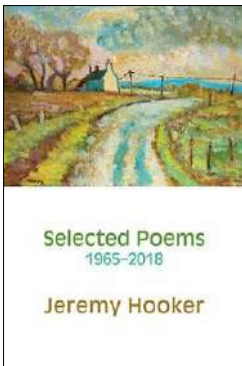


This is Bob's second hardback collection following on from his *Pick of the Crop* (Greenwood Press, 2017). It contains poems from life in the Vale of Evesham including many written in the local dialect known as Asum grammar. This collection celebrates growing up and working on the land and is also a catalogue of the many changes that have and still are occurring in the area. A CD of the dialect poems, and others previously published but not recorded, is included with the book. The book & accompanying CD is £12 + P&P £1.50— Please order direct from Bob at 38, Birch Avenue, Evesham, Worcs. WR11 1YJ. Tel 01386 446477.



*Here's that Rainy Day* by Tom Saunders was published by Reuben Books on 17 August 2020. 214 pp., ISBN: 978-1-9993172-3-2, softback, £10. This is Tom's fourth novel where he excels at beautiful descriptive writing and excellent characterisation. Mr. Lampeter from Flat Two has gone missing and the other residents of 14 Beresford Park Road have no idea what has happened to him and when, or if, he'll ever return. Then his nephew Vaughn arrives . . .

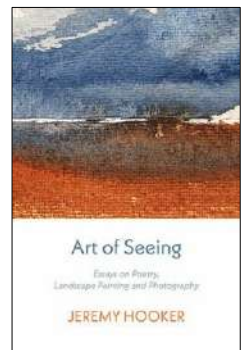
Available from the Hon. Secretary (see p.2) or at <http://www.reubenbooks.org/p/heres-that-rainy-day.html>.



*Selected Poems 1965-2018 and Art of Seeing: Essays on Poetry, Landscape Painting & Photography* by Jeremy Hooker were both published in paperback by Shearsman Books in July 2020.

Poems: ISBN: 9781848617070, £14.95  
Essays: ISBN: 9781848617087, £16.95

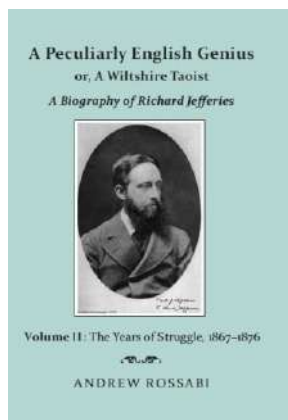
Available from  
<https://www.shearsman.com/store/>



There is an illuminating and interesting interview with Jeremy Hooker dated 17 July 2020, talking about his writing and his latest books on *Wales Arts Review* <https://www.walesartsreview.org/jeremy-hooker-interview/>

## A PECULIARLY ENGLISH GENIUS: OR A WILTSHIRE TAOIST

It is good to hear when others are quoting from the new biography as part of their research work. Peter Merchant, Principal Lecturer, Canterbury Christ Church University did just that and used Volume I of *A Peculiarly English Genius* as a reference work for his article “‘What one sees another sees’: Synchronicity in the Juvenalia of Anna Kingsford<sup>1</sup> and Richard Jefferies’ that was published in the *Journal of Juvenilia Studies* 2.2 (December, 2019), pp.102–117. Merchant focused on ‘A Strange Story’, as one of Jefferies’ best early tales.<sup>2</sup> The article is at <https://journalofjuveniliastudies.com/index.php/jjs/article/view/38/38>



Volume II was sent to the printers in the early stages of the Covid-19 epidemic. Antony Rowe succeeded in making another good job of the printing and binding and the order was delivered on Earth Day (22 April). Pre-orders were sent out well before the publication date of 8 July—the date when Richard and Jessie married at Chiseldon Church 146 years ago.

Richard Emeny has provided an excellent review of the book for both the Edward Thomas Fellowship and The Richard Jefferies Society (see below). Prof William Baker will be reviewing the book for ‘The Years Work in English Studies’.

### REVIEW: *A PECULIARLY ENGLISH GENIUS, or A WILTSHIRE TAOIST* A Biography of Richard Jefferies, Volume II: The Years of Struggle, 1867–1876

Volume I of Andrew Rossabi’s magnum opus covered Richard Jefferies’ early life, placing it clearly in the social, economic, and agricultural context of its time. By the end of the volume I felt that I could have walked from Coate Farm to Swindon, knocked on the doors of several houses, and would have known

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<sup>1</sup> Roger Ebbatson mentions Kingsford in footnote 9 of his article ‘The Marabar Echo: Forster and Jefferies’ (*RJS Journal* No 28 p.29): ‘Edward Thomas found among his books translations of *The Assemblies of Al Hariri and of the Bhagavad-Gita*, and the diaries reveal acquaintance with the work of Anna Kingsford, the Buddhist explicator. *Edward Thomas, Richard Jefferies* (London: Dent, 1938), 163; *The Nature Diaries and Notebooks of Richard Jefferies*, ed. S. J. Looker (London: The Grey Walls Press, 1948), 273–4.’ The reference to Kingsford in Jefferies’ Notebook XXIV (folio 3, May 1887) reads: ‘Burning books to begin with./Babylonish children psalms/dust them on the stones./Sparrows fall to the ground= Buddha/See Kingsford—in all living/things. Egyptian.’

<sup>2</sup> Published in *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies* edited by Grace Toplis (1896) and reprinted in *Richard Jefferies: A Miscellany* edited by Andrew Rossabi (Galileo Publishers, 2019).

enough about their inhabitants to converse easily with them. The book presented a whole society in the third quarter of the nineteenth century. Volume II, also over 700 pages in length, continues in the same way, is just as readable and just as fascinating. Nobody need be put off by its length. It carries the story from Jefferies' attempts in Swindon to be a professional journalist, through his marriage, fatherhood and move to Sydenham in 1876. Before I started to read it, I wondered if it could retain my interest. I need not have worried: Volume II is as readable, pleasant, informative and thoughtful as Volume I. It also sent me back to my bookshelves to re-read several Jefferies titles—a good thing.

The book is largely chronological in the way it covers Jefferies' articles, books and life. This could become tedious but doesn't. Rossabi is keen to show how Jefferies' writing during this period, while undertaken to earn a living, shows the early development of his mystical philosophy and skill at portraying natural history and rural subject matter. This was initially tentative, but became more identifiable as the months and years went by. His personal life during this period was often difficult and unhappy: apart from the hostility between his father and him, he suffered early attacks of what would prove to be a fatal illness not many years later. He also had a less than placid relationship with some of the newspaper editors he worked for.

Life at home did not become any easier, with disagreement, particularly with his father and an underlying feeling he felt that he was not regarded as a proper person, a judgment that was to echo beyond the family circle. Jefferies tended to avoid his father as much as possible, but repaid his debt as a son to him in many of the sympathetic portraits of small farmers in several of his books. One has to feel sorry for Jefferies Senior, an intelligent and educated man, who had fallen out with his own father, and who was left a farm with such encumbrances that it could not succeed, especially in the days of rapid agricultural change. It was eventually repossessed and Jefferies' father ended his days as a jobbing gardener in Bath. More successful members of the family in Swindon business circles also found the young man difficult to understand or empathise with.

Meanwhile, young Jefferies was observing, wandering and contemplating on nature of course, but also on the people he encountered: shepherds, labourers, small town businessman and gentry. As is well known, he became a journalist with the *North Wilts Herald* and *Swindon Advertiser*. Rossabi is particularly good at describing how Jefferies approached this work from the Swindon end of the paper's catchment area. Despite being Swindon-based, he had to travel further afield for stories, becoming familiar with places as far away as Cirencester and Malmesbury, about which he wrote a book, and the Badminton country. His horizons were broadened even if only in the counties of Wiltshire and Gloucestershire. He saw courts at work, witnessed elections and noted how rural conditions were changing. Occasionally he would write a short story, perhaps a

macabre legend, for the press. Rossabi makes the point that Jefferies' journalistic experience helped to improve and hone his prose style: he discovered 'copy' and deadlines, though he did not always meet them. Journalism was a formative experience and an important part of his life. He was not regarded as a good employee, being unreliable and with a tendency to laziness. Despite this and arguments with editorial staff, he was regarded highly enough to keep in touch and have a friendly relationship with his editors.

Jefferies' early fiction came more or less in parallel with his journalism. Here was no slouch, whatever his reputation. While journalism provided an income of sorts, his purpose in writing fiction was to make a fortune, or at least to allow him to accumulate a decent amount of capital. Fiction, particularly of the Romantic and Gothic type, was popular with the new urban middle class and numerous of its writers had gained not only wealth, but a place in Society, Dickens being the most successful of all.

The possibilities attracted Jefferies. As Rossabi makes clear, critics of the early fiction have understandably concentrated on its literary merits and found it wanting, but he was not aiming at a highly educated market or at literary excellence, but at one that enjoyed melodrama and sensational stories, so the books should be considered as such. In fact, they did not sell well. He failed in that ambition.

Whatever the critics said, Rossabi shows that the early fiction is not a complete failure: it is important in the flashes of quality it shows when Jefferies is writing about nature, and reaching towards his philosophy of nature fully shown in *The Dewy Morn* and *The Story of My Heart*. The characters are frequently cardboard, but some have greater depth and seem to enshrine aspects of his own character. With hindsight and with knowledge of his later books, it seems obvious that his strength lay in writing about natural history, his own observations and the people of the countryside. Hindsight is often a cruel judge, and this would not have been at all obvious to him as he puzzled his way towards his greater works.

It was the letters to *The Times* that found Jefferies' early market. Agricultural unrest had set farmers, especially small and tenant farmers against their labourers. Low wages, agitation by the embryonic union and the rapid industrialisation of agriculture, all contributed to this. Little had changed in husbandry for thousands of years until the nineteenth century. His letters on this crisis, largely on the side of the farmers, made his name, albeit not in the way he had planned. He was seen as an intelligent, knowledgeable, in a practical sense, countryman. The expertise came from his experience not just in Swindon but from his childhood on a farm, and travels as a journalist recording the power structure of rural areas, small town politics and the treatment of the labouring class.

If Jefferies was seen by his neighbours and colleagues as different, he saw himself as different too. He recognised that he had more in common with his relatives in London than with closer family. The Harrilds in Sydenham and their connections were successful in printing and 'up with things' intellectually and socially. Their surroundings were stimulating to a young man, who felt starved mentally and emotionally. The Sydenham branch encouraged him in his literary ambitions. Aunt Ellen in particular was consistently his champion in practical financial ways, funding his publications to some extent: she gave him money which he needed for his various schemes, as well as encouragement. For a man reputedly lazy, he showed a remarkable energy in the amount he wrote and what he planned to write.

Day House Farm was next door to Coate Farm, and Jefferies fell in love with Jessie Baden, the farmer's daughter, much to the horror of the Baden family, who no doubt regarded him as useless in a farming community, and whose father was failing. To make things worse, Jessie returned his love. There were arguments and even an assault, which ended in court, though it was settled in a reasonably civilised way. The young couple persevered and eventually they were married and a new phase in their lives began. The obstinacy with which he pursued his wife might have surprised the Baden family, but was a sign that he would follow his literary ambitions equally single-mindedly. Again, with hindsight, we know he was successful in that. After a period at Coate, the newly-weds moved to Swindon, thence to London where this volume ends after the birth of a son.

In Volume I Rossabi frequently refers to Edward Thomas's fine early biography of Jefferies with approbation. In Volume II, Thomas appears more often and again with strong approval. He finds Thomas very perceptive in his consideration of this period of Jefferies' life, together with his writing and the difficulties that a struggling writer trying to find his voice encounters, something which Thomas had experienced and suffered just as strongly. He owed Jefferies a great amount: in thought, in observation, love of the country and of beauty, and his influence over rural writers was not only on Thomas, but on many others up to the present day. Hudson, George Sturt (Bourne), Thomas and Jefferies, and many since, all wrote for an urban audience, describing a way of life and a society that was passing fast, to be replaced by increasingly industrialised agriculture: tractors were poised to invade from over the horizon.

None of these writers regretted the passing of the old ways insofar as the changes meant a better life for labourers and others in the rural economy: more money, pensions, less of a near bondage status, and greater independence. Laurie Lee, writing of 1920s Slad caught the mood of the next generation when he identified the motorcycle and the cinema as prime symptoms of the change.

Physically, Slad was the same when he retired to it in old age, but unrecognisable in every other respect.

But while change was welcomed by Jefferies and his followers, they also felt a regret at what was lost, and their work often has a dying fall. While they saw that reform was required, they also lamented the passing of a way of life that had lasted for centuries and had many good points. While the old ways had to go, they saw a loss of much of value, of social cohesion, mutual understanding and help. It was a theme, perhaps started by Jefferies that would last through the twentieth century and is still with us. Siegfried Sassoon, a rather naïve socialist, and from a different class, wrote six biographical books, several exhibiting many of the same sentiments. ‘Dawdling’ and ‘homespun’ are the two adjectives he uses to characterise the pre-1914 era. The theme, possibly started by Jefferies, continues to the present day. Here is Charles Fry writing in 1939, ‘With agriculture reorganised on capitalistic lines, the successive booms and depressions of the last hundred years have not made the life of the country population an easy one. The dismemberment of the rural community has laid it open to the attacks of outsiders and parasites of every kind, from the politician down to the ribbon builder.’ That would still be true today.

Over 1500 pages from the start, Rossabi’s books still give much pleasure, and it would be a shame if potential readers were put off by their length. Indeed, I hope Volume III will not be shorter. As the notes are on each page, and integral with the text, the main text is shorter than the number of pages suggest. I prefer this system, and the notes themselves show a remarkable breadth of knowledge, reading and research. The book shows Jefferies’ development from a youth with dreams through work and marriage to a readiness to start the writing for which he is best known. Rossabi shows how even the dismissed early fiction contains seeds of later greatness, and how family support, not in Coate but in Sydenham, helped him stick to the ambitions he had always cherished. Meanwhile, his journalistic work sharpened his style and taught him much about writing. If not the founder of modern country writing, largely for urban people, he was in its vanguard and he has many followers. By 1876 thanks to *The Times* correspondence, he had found his voice and was poised to express his beliefs and skills.

For over a century Edward Thomas’s biography of Jefferies has deservedly remained the best, most accurate, perceptive and sensitive work about him. Rossabi pays full credit to Thomas and draws on his wisdom, but this work is likely to replace it for its detail, contextualisation and scholarship. Rossabi loves his subject and it shows.

Richard Emeny  
July 2020

## CITINGS OF RICHARD JEFFERIES

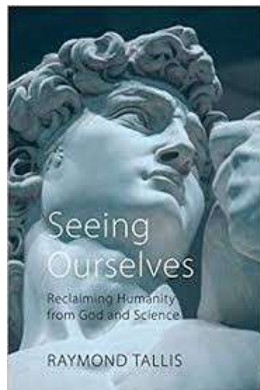
Janice Lingley

Please email your citations to [citings@richardjefferiessociety.org](mailto:citings@richardjefferiessociety.org)

An Index of the Citations published in the Society's *Newsletters* since 2006 is available online, formatted by date and alphabetically, and can be viewed at the Society's webpage: <http://www.richardjefferiessociety.org/p/newsletters.html>

**B**rian Morris has provided the following citation from a recently published book by the well-known philosopher and neuroscientist, Raymond Tallis. In *Seeing Ourselves: Reclaiming Humanity from God and Science* (Newcastle: Agenda Publishing, 2020), Professor Tallis emphasises, says Brian, 'that humans have a unique self-identity and cannot be reduced to the body': the Professor writes (p. 82):

Richard Jefferies' beautiful autobiography *The Story of My Heart* was not, for example, a long ECG trace or a succession of coronary angiograms [ . . . ] my body has a story.



**R**JS member Robert Albright wrote to say: In these times of Covid-19, 'social distancing' and 'lockdown', I was intrigued to read this extract in *Journal* Number 35 (2020) from Jefferies' Preface to Gilbert White's *The Natural History of Selborne*<sup>1</sup>:

Be very careful not to go too far; keep round the skirts of home near the garden, or in the nearest field, else you will jump over the very best; for it is a fact that the greatest variety of information is generally gathered in a very small compass. I have noticed that people are never so astonished as when some fact of natural history is unexpectedly pointed out to them, where it must have been for a very long time under their very eyes. There are people who have never seen a humble bee drill a hole in the nectary of a snap-dragon, and yet have whole gardens full of flowers. At least, do not go out of your own locality much for some time.

**I**n an article titled 'In praise of crowds—the city's most remarkable art form', which appeared in *The Financial Times* on 22 April 2020,<sup>2</sup> the English architect, designer, and author, Edwin Heathcote muses upon the 'jarring' impact of seeing Trafalgar Square almost deserted, when walking through the

<sup>1</sup> Gilbert White, *The Natural History of Selborne with A Naturalist's Calendar and Additional Observations* with a Preface by Richard Jefferies (London: Walter Scott, 1887).

<sup>2</sup> Copyright rests with *The Financial Times*.

capital city just before the Covid-19 lockdown was imposed. Jefferies' *After London* is one of the four 'apocalypto-utopian' novels—the others being H.G. Wells' *The War of the Worlds* (1898), William Morris's *News From Nowhere* (1890), and Edward Bellamy's *Looking Backward 2000–1887* (1888)—cited by Heathcote as examples of portrayals of the city abandoned because of invasion, revolution or disease. The article focuses especially on Edgar Allan Poe's short story 'The Man of the Crowd' (1840) as touching upon 'the paradoxes of urban life, the blend of repulsion and attraction, the strange magnetic draw of a crowd and the alienation and unknowability of the modern city', in contrast to previous eras when most people lived with their family and in communities where everyone was known.

In an article titled 'A Garden in Lockdown' which appeared in the weekly lifestyle magazine *Toast* on 20 June 2020, Matt Collins, the Head Gardener at the Garden Museum in south-east London, says that the magnificent spring we have had this year brought to his mind the beauty of a comparable season that Jefferies, with not long to live, observed and recorded in his essay 'Hours of Spring' (*FH*). Working alone in the Lambeth garden in the absence of the usual throng of staff, volunteers and visitors, and with more time to observe, Matt Collins says he gained a new perspective on the garden's vitality and the beauties of individual plants, and, in a time of crisis, change, and uncertainty, a greater appreciation of the therapeutic effects of gardening. 'Hours of Spring' is quoted, and Jefferies' 'profound attention' to his natural surroundings through observation and note-taking has assumed for this garden and landscape writer a new significance. He records his determination to record the ever-changing season for those unable to visit the Garden.



'A thousand buds and leaves and flowers and blades of grass, things to note day by day increasing so rapidly', wrote nature writer Richard Jefferies in the late 19th century. 'You never know what will come to the net of the eye next'. Jefferies was not a gardener, instead he considered all countryside his garden, and wrote about

it ceaselessly. His walks through rural Southern England produced essays drawing profound attention to its floral and faunal inhabitants; an anthology of philosophical and often euphoric reflections on Nature and its reassuring annual rhythms, drawn always from direct experience and fervent note-taking. These last few months I've found myself returning to Jefferies, and in particular to the essay 'Hours of Spring', written not long before his death in 1887. Here he recounts a spring much like the one we've just had: full of sunshine, exuberance and copious blossom, but also unpredictability and surprise. Reading 'Hours of Spring' reinforced my own resolution to observe and document the Museum's gardens on behalf of those no longer able to visit. But also to anchor current anxieties to the bedrock of the changing season.

Thanks to Matt Collins for allowing us to quote from his article, and to George Miller for providing the Citation.

*The Story of My Heart* is a favourite book of the children's writer Ruskin Bond (pictured right). An article titled 'Lockdown Tales from Mussoorie', recording an interview, which appeared in the *Hindustan Times* on 7 May 2020, reports that Jefferies' auto-biography is a book that the prolific, prize-winning author 'carries with him everywhere'. Bond, an Indian of British descent, lives in the cantonment of Landour (formerly a colonial hill-station) in the Lower Western Himalaya, and, used to solitude, has not been unduly affected by the rigours of lockdown.

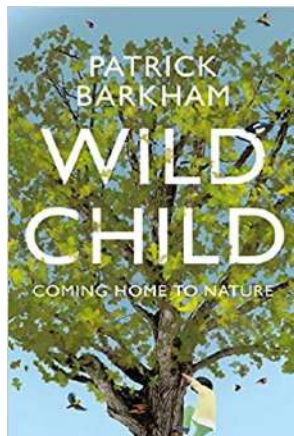


Jean Saunders writes: 'Andrew Rossabi came across the fact that at the age of 18, the poet and writer W.H. Auden (1907–1973), dedicated a short poem to Richard Jefferies, and another to Edward Thomas. These were written in 1925, whilst Auden was in his final year at Gresham's School at Holt, Norfolk. Both are published in the W.H. Auden Critical Edition, *Juvenilia: Poems, 1922–1928*, edited by Katherine Bucknell (Princeton University Press, 1994), pp.92 and 100. The Society has been unable to obtain permission from the copyright holder, the US agents Curtis Brown, to publish either of the poems on reasonable terms. Consisting of just 14 lines, the Jefferies' poem highlights Jefferies' sensitivity to nature; to the beauty of the song of the wind and the lark, and that he wrote in praise of the light—even to his dying day.'



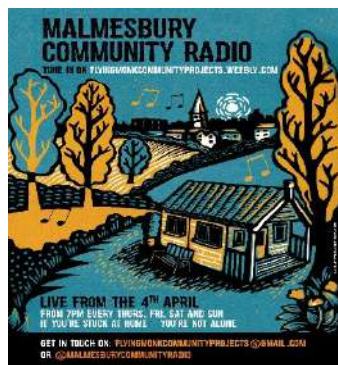
W.H. Auden, 1926  
by James Sloan  
National Portrait Gallery

Patrick Barkham, Natural History writer for *The Guardian*, and author of *The Butterfly Isles* (2011) and *Badgerlands* (2013), has had a new book published titled *Wild Child: Coming Home to Nature*, which argues for an education system for young children which places more emphasis on the direct experience of the natural world and less time before the ubiquitous electronic screen. The review by the writer and researcher Oliver Balch, which appeared in *The Spectator* magazine on 20 June 2020, briefly mentions an epigraph by Jefferies to one of the book's chapters: 'They will forget their books—they will never forget the grass fields'—a quotation from Ch. 19 of Jefferies' novel *The Dewy Morn* (1884), in which Felise Goring's countryside childhood is described, and Jefferies makes a heartfelt plea for children's right to explore the woods and hills and to be allowed 'the freedom of the meadows' (pp.110–112 of the 2009 Petton Books edition). *Wild Child* is based upon the author's year-long experience of voluntary work at a nursery school in Norfolk providing an outdoor education for pre-school children.



During the summer, Malmesbury Community Radio broadcast four readings by the actress Jacqueline Tong of the three final chapters on 'Modern Malmesbury' from Jefferies' *History of Malmesbury*, originally published in the *North Wilts Herald* in 1867. The radio station, which has been operating on an occasional basis since 2017, and has increased its output during the lockdown, had also earlier in the summer broadcast a reading from *The Open Air*. The Radio Team are enthusiastic about Jefferies and intend featuring more of his work. The *History of Malmesbury* readings have been combined and condensed into one, and can be accessed online in the 'Listen Again' category of its 'Spoken Word' broadcasts:

<https://flyingmonkcommunityprojects.weebly.com/listen-again---spoken-word.html>



[Malmesbury Community Radio is part of Flying Monk Community Projects, a Wiltshire-based Social Enterprise, working across the UK, to promote social inclusion and having recourse to the media, the arts, and outdoor activities.]

## NEWS FROM OTHER SOCIETIES

As to be expected societies and museums have cancelled all meetings and openings as a result of the Covid-19 epidemic. However activities on the Internet have increased along with many new ideas to engage a virtual audience. The Internet has been a life-saver for organisations and has enabled the use of inventive techniques to communicate. For example, the Wiltshire Museums introduced a new webpage: <https://www.wiltshiremuseum.org.uk/at-home/>.

Henry Williamson Society. The HWS celebrated its 40 year anniversary (founded on 4 May 1980) by issuing a commemorative oak coaster (with cork backing) to members. It bears the owl colophon designed by Henry as his special symbol and can be purchased on the HWS website for £5.



## RICHARD JEFFERIES MUSEUM TRUST

To keep up-to-date with news about activities at the Richard Jefferies Museum, please go to the Trust's website: <http://richardjefferies.org/>. There are also Facebook and Twitter pages. If you don't have access to the Internet, telephone Mike Pringle: 07768 917466. Mike reports that he has managed to get many jobs done at the Richard Jefferies Museum during the closed period and has had more time to focus on writing the coffee-table book (see Spring 2020 newsletter pp.46-7). The book is nearing completion but is now running under the title 'Wild Life' to reflect the discovery that Richard Jefferies was the first to coin the phrase when applied to the natural world (see p.28 and p.31). Thanks to a new grant from the Arts Council the museum was able to cover its bills and provide online music from musicians who would have played on Sundays. A new virtual tour of the museum is also under way. The first open day was planned for Sunday 6 September—Apple Day—when the apple-juicer was in operation. There was also a podcast on 20 September when Mike Pringle toured the Museum giving a running commentary about the farmhouse.

The Trust launched a children's nature writing competition in mid-September, with support from the Arts Council, Nosy Crow Publishing, and the White Horse Book Shop. There are two age categories (8-11 and 12-16). Children's book author, Anna Wilson, will judge and the winners will be announced in December, in time for pre-Christmas prize presentations.

‘After the Apocalypse’ *continued from p.27.*

... And ends:

Felix pushed on, absorbed in thought. The sun sank; still onward; and as the dusk fell he was still moving rapidly westwards.



Illustration by Anastasya Eliseeva. Anastasya is a Russian-born artist, illustrator, animator and general creative who studied fine art and worked in various fields before settling in the media industry. She uses creativity as a form of activism and to further her desire for social change.

Darryl Accone has been in journalism for the best part of four decades. He is also a Fellow of the Salzburg Seminar and the International Writers Workshop of Hong Kong Baptist University and the author of ‘All Under Heaven: The Story of a Chinese Family in South Africa’ and ‘Euripides Must Die’.

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<https://www.newframe.com/text-messages-after-the-apocalypse/>



'Chill October' by John Everett Millais



'Venus and Adonis' by Titian  
See p.9.