

# THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY

## AUTUMN NEWSLETTER 2008

**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).

Membership is open to all on payment of the current annual subscription of £7 single or £8 couple. New overseas Members should add £1.50 towards additional postage costs.

Members receive spring and autumn newsletters, an annual report and a *Journal* and can take advantage of the Society's extensive library. Activities include winter meetings, a study day, special outings, events, a Birthday Lecture and an Annual General Meeting.

### **TRUSTEES AND COUNCIL MEMBERS 2007-8**

Margaret Evans (Membership Secretary), Brian Fullagar (Vice President), Norma Goodwin (Sales), Geoff Hirst (Treasurer), Eric Jones, Hugoe Matthews (President), Helen Newman (ALS Representative), John Price (Chairman), Jean Saunders (Secretary), John Savage, Richard Stewart, Phyllis Treitel (Vice President) and John Webb (Librarian).

Co-opted members: Stan Hickerton and Ray Morse.

Hon. Sec.

Jean Saunders

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**COATE FARM MUSEUM** The Richard Jefferies Society provides the volunteers to open the Jefferies' Museum at Coate to the public on the second Wednesday of the month throughout the year from 10am to 4pm as well as the first and third Sundays of May to September from 2-5pm. The "Footsteps" writers' group meet on the same Wednesdays. Admission is free.

## FROM THE CHAIR

I am writing this as the dulllest (as measured by hours of sunshine) August on record draws to a close. And what a contrast that has been to your Society's activities over the past six months! Three new publications: the long-awaited and much-needed **Index** – thanks to the Herculean readathon undertaken by Hugoe Matthews and Lady Phyllis Treitel; a new edition of **Restless Human Hearts**; and, thanks to the alertness and generosity of Audrey Smith's son a new biography – **The Interpreter**.

As you will read later, our hosting of the Alliance of Literary Societies' AGM turned out to be successful and enjoyable, and I am grateful to those members of our Society who attended and supported on both days. My congratulations to those who (almost) completed the Literary Treasure Hunt on the Sunday, and my apologies to those of us who were nearly arrested by the security guards at Burderop House. Fortunately I had brought along the "permission to visit" letter from the Director of Communications at Halcrow's – who had failed to communicate his agreement to the security firm on duty!

I was very pleased to be invited to contribute to a one-day Conference at Southampton Art Gallery in June. The event was associated with a rather splendid exhibition of Art Work titled: "Ancient Landscapes – Pastoral Visions. From Samuel Palmer to the Ruralists". My brief was to speak on "Three Victorian Visionaries: A E Housman, Edward Thomas, and Richard Jefferies". The link to the exhibition was that all three authors had inspired artists to produce paintings, some of which, of course, have been used to illustrate editions of their books. I found Housman difficult to link to Thomas and Jefferies, as his best-known work, the "Shropshire Lad" cycle, was almost entirely imaginary, in contrast to the first-hand rural descriptions of our two Wiltshire-based authors. One artist included in the exhibition, but whom the organisers had curiously failed to link with Richard Jefferies, was J W North, whose magnificent painting, "The Pear Tree" is in the permanent collection at Southampton Art Gallery. I do urge members living in, or visiting, the South West to try to catch the exhibition, which is now at the Victoria Art Gallery in Bath until 19<sup>th</sup> October, and then transfers to Falmouth Art Gallery until 1<sup>st</sup> November.

I admitted in a recent "From The Chair" that I had never visited Richard Jefferies' Grave in Broadwater Cemetery. I now intend to; and shall make the journey next year. The stimulus for this is the wonderful news that Martin Perryman is in the process of voluntarily

“tidying-up” the graves of both Richard Jefferies and W H Hudson in his spare time. Further details are given on page 15, but this effort deserves our grateful thanks and full support. Our own Mark Daniel, has of course, been tending the grave for many years, but this renewed effort by an employee of the local Council will support Mark’s work, and address many of his, and our, concerns. We shall be discussing at our AGM whether the Society should offer a contribution towards the likely total cost of £1500 for re-leading the inscriptions on the grave, but quite apart from this, members are welcome to send their contributions, however modest, to our Secretary.

I would like to finish by thanking, yet again, our amazingly energetic, inspiring and indefatigable Honorary Secretary, Jean Saunders. She has not only continued to manage the Museum, often opening it up by herself to show round visitors who could not make the normal opening days; but has undertaken all the arrangements for the printing and binding of our three publications that have been produced this year.

**John Price**  
**September 2008**

## **HOW DID YOU DISCOVER RICHARD JEFFERIES & THE SOCIETY?**

Dorothy Cornforth of Derbyshire first became acquainted with the works of Richard Jefferies through reading Henry Williamson’s nature books as a young girl, and she wished to learn the reason for HW’s enthusiasm. “I was soon to be addicted and have read RJ’s works avidly and collected his books ever since. Discovery of the society came from an advert, plus articles, in an old copy of *The Countryman*, I picked up somewhere.”

## **REPORTS OF MEETINGS HELD AT COATE FARM 2007**

### **Readings from Alfred Williams and Richard Jefferies**

The Friends of Alfred Williams hosted the joint meeting, held on 1<sup>st</sup> March, attended by 20 enthusiasts. Kaye Franklin took the Chair and, in particular, welcomed Sheila Povey whose husband, John, had died only a few days earlier. There is an obituary for John Povey in this newsletter.

As usual, the readings from the works of Jefferies and Williams were varied and inspirational. Of the Williams’ choices, four main themes emerged: Jefferies’ positive influence on Williams, the delights of nature associated with his village of South Marston and that especially related to the River Cole, life in a rural village – specifically Bishopstone – and the different outlook of town and country folk even in their description of the weather (villagers took a more positive view of “rotten” weather conditions), and the horrors of working in the filthy, noisy railway works compared to the life of rural workers who were not condemned to a life of monotonous soul-destroying repetitive factory toil.

Themes from Jefferies' works included the recurrent expression of his passion for "beauty" in its many forms, the pleasure to be found in walking through mowing grass, the importance of taking children into the countryside as part of their education, and readings that revealed changes to Coate that would make it unrecognisable to Jefferies now.

### **E H Shepard: the man who drew *Bevis***

On a chilly 5<sup>th</sup> April day, 15 Members looked at the life of Ernest Shepard (1879-1976) and some of his illustrations. With the aid (or hindrance) of an erratic display of pictures on the television screen, Jean Saunders described Shepard's early years. Born in St John's Wood, Shepard's father was an architect and his mother, the daughter of William Lee, a Royal Academy water-colourist. Shepard was already displaying exceptional artistic abilities at the age of 7 and his drawings of this time captured line and movement beautifully. He described his childhood as very happy until his mother died when he was 10. His thoughts of the time are captured in an autobiography of his early years: *Drawn from Memory*, published in 1957 when Shepard was aged about 78. Shepard went to St Paul's School where he might have known Edward Thomas, 2 years his senior. He won a scholarship to the Royal Academy Schools and his first picture was exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1901. By 1907 he had his first illustration accepted by *Punch* with which he had a long relationship.

Shepard was commissioned to the Royal Artillery in 1915 and served in the battles of the Somme, Arras and 3<sup>rd</sup> Ypres. He rose to the ranks of Major and was awarded the Military Cross and might have crossed paths again with Edward Thomas who died at the Battle of Arras in 1917. Shepard supplied *Punch* with illustrations of the battles during the war years although his grand-daughter, novelist Penelope Fitzgerald, felt that he was ill-suited as a political cartoonist. Nonetheless Shepard became part of the regular staff of *Punch* for many years. Shepard met E V Lucas at *Punch*. It was Lucas that suggested Shepard as A A Milne's illustrator. Shepard was later known to resent being known as "The man who drew *Pooh*".

In 1932 Jonathan Cape commissioned Shepard to illustrate a new edition of *Bevis* (E V Lucas wrote the introduction). His unpublished manuscripts (notes and diaries) held by the University of Surrey indicate that Shepard enjoyed illustrating *Bevis* and coming to Coate to draw at Coate Water, although he described the lake as "weedy and uncared for," and observed that "now Swindon has spread almost as far as the farm ... the lake is an ornamental water for the townsfolk." He worked on the drawings until 19<sup>th</sup> August 1932 finishing with the "New Sea" map and the title page drawing.

Art historian, Bevis Hillier, named after *Bevis* cherished Shepard's illustrations. In his book *A Master of Line* (published 1979), he chose "The willow was obstinate," "The mast fitted," and "Bevis puzzling over" as his favourite drawings that show the power of the composition: the movement and detail as well as an awareness of the direction of light. Bevis Hillier believed that Shepard had an unsentimental understanding of children and was able to get under their skin. He wrote: "Richard Jefferies had the same gift, which is

one reason why Shepard was so ideal an interpreter of *Bevis*.”

John Webb talked about the artistic quality of the illustrations not only from *Bevis* but also from *Drawn from Memory* that revealed superb observation of the behaviour of pets and animals and the ability to bring their characteristics alive with a few masterful lines. He pointed to various illustrations of Pan (the spaniel) in *Bevis* that included the dog shown biting his fur to rid himself of a flea, shaking water off his fur while on the raft, lying on his back with his legs in the air and crawling out of the lake with a fish in his mouth. John was particularly fond of the picture of the one footed hen that Shepard took to bed with him on a childhood farm holiday recounted in *Drawn from Memory* and the drawing of the cats sidling up to the milkmaid in the hope of getting a drink. Not only did Shepard capture movement so realistically but also John admired Shepard’s ability to portray atmosphere in a black and white drawing. For example, in “Making the gun barrel” you can feel the heat coming off the fire. Other favourite drawings of *Bevis*’ scenes among the audience were those that are still clearly recognisable features at Coate Water such as the Council Oak and the old quarry albeit that both are smaller now. As Stan Hickerton said: “Anyone possessing the Shepard edition of *Bevis* owns an art collection as well as a treat to read!”

## **STUDY DAY AT JEFFERIES MUSEUM 26 JULY 2008**

### **SUBJECT: Richard Jefferies’ Early Fiction**

On what was one of the first and few summer days of the year, 21 Members gathered at Coate Farm to explore fragments of Jefferies’ early fiction. The morning session was dedicated to individual readings.

Jean Saunders read from the first page of book two of *World’s End* (1877) or “Wurdel’s End”, as it was pronounced locally. Set in the Downs around what is clearly Barbury Castle, rural life at World’s End is described: the farm-lads who alter the arms of the way-marker making the sign-post “an unwitting liar,” pelting the milestones with flints obliterating the words and the occasion of the horse-race under “Berbury Hill”.

John Webb quoted from *Traits of the Olden Time* published in *The Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies*, edited by Grace Toplis, 1896. The five pieces in the book were written in 1866, when Jefferies was 18, and printed in the *North Wilts Herald*. *Traits* foreshadows the later essays on the social conditions of farm-labourers and of *Hodge and his Masters*. He praises some changes, and regrets others: the prevalence of gibbets for the execution of sheep stealers, the importance of almanacs, the dining customs of the farmer and his labourers, the Anglo-Saxon dialect in Wiltshire and the nastier examples of medical practice in the “good old times”.

Wendy MacLeod-Gilford enjoyed *The Scarlet Shawl* (1874). Nora, a beautiful, rich, wilful young woman who scorned her lover and played the field reminded her of Bathsheba Everdean in Thomas Hardy’s *Far from the Madding Crowd*, published in the same year. *The Scarlet Shawl* contains a love story, some nature/mystic writing and many references to women who wear the colours scarlet and purple, which made Wendy think that Jefferies might have been

a catalyst for Jenny Joseph's poem "Warning": "When I am an old woman I shall wear purple, With a red hat which doesn't go, and doesn't suit me." Wendy thought that coincidences used in the plots were totally plausible and mirrored real life situations.

Raymond Roys delivered the opening paragraphs from *A Sin and a Shame* with gusto. This short story was the first of Jefferies' fiction to be published in a national magazine, the *New Monthly Magazine*, in November 1875. The first paragraph describes the idyllic surroundings in which Biddlestone Mill is located, and where the miller, John Barton, lives with his daughter, Georgie. The reader is then introduced to Georgie in her neat, sweet-smelling small room under the eaves. This pretty, but innocent and trusting, young maiden is excited when her beloved Ralph, a doctor, comes to visit her, but the enthusiasm is not fully reciprocated. Although having been successful in obtaining a position, with accommodation, he is dissatisfied. The pregnant Georgie sees this as good news and enquires when they will be married. To her dismay he is dismissive and takes his leave.

Phyllis Treitel read a passage from *Restless Human Hearts* (Ch. IX volume I) describing when Victor (22) and Francis (21) cross the Channel via Dover, lose most of their money to card-sharps, pawn their watches, leave Calais on foot and head for Paris. Phyllis selected the passage as it appears to provide a written idea of how Richard and his cousin James Cox ventured into France in 1864. He revealed a side of himself in his novels not shown elsewhere.

Helen Newman selected a reading from *Restless Human Hearts* (Ch. XI volume I) that reflected his attitude towards religion and government. Helen wondered if there wasn't a danger in Jefferies tending to attribute Godhead to man, since, she believed, no man can become greater than his Creator although he is made in His image and has elements of divine in him.

Brian Morris explored the nature mysticism expressed in his early work and Jefferies' sense of isolation. *Restless Human Hearts* anticipates his later autobiographical writing, particularly *The Story of my Heart*, but in *RHH* expresses it through the third person. The passage Brian read reflected his own early experiences and feelings.

Andrew Rossabi discussed *Ben Tubbs Adventures*; Jefferies' earliest extant work of any length, a novella of some 119 pages written in a neat tight hand in a plum-coloured stiff-backed exercise-book now in the British Library. Ben Tubbs is a mischievous 15 year-old who runs away from school with a friend called Ned. The pair board a slave-ship to America where they have many adventures including hostile Comanche, stampeding buffalo, a prairie fire and a meteorite.

John Price read a short story titled "Out of the Season". This was originally published in *London Society* in 1876, but was considered by the publishers to be so good and/or popular, that it was reprinted twice. First in *Society Novelettes Volume II* with an additional illustration and a tailpiece, and then again in *The Dove's Nest*. The story concerns the heroine finding true love, and refusing to marry for status or money. The happy couple then emigrate to Africa, where they successfully breed! Victorian Mills and Boon.

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In the afternoon Margaret Evans gave a talk entitled, ***Small Acorns – An Appreciation of the Early Fiction of Richard Jefferies***, the range of which encompassed short stories, a one volume novel and two three-volume novels.

Of the short stories reviewed a few were originally published in the *North Wiltshire Herald* under the name of Geoffrey between 30 June 1866 and 2 February 1867. *A Sin and a Shame* and *A Midnight Skate* were published in national magazines in November 1875 and in December 1876 respectively. *Snowed Up – A Mistletoe Story*, held in manuscript form in the Hugh Walpole Library, King's School, Canterbury, remained unpublished until 1996.

The novels, all of which were published by Tinsley Bros, London, were: *The Scarlet Shawl*, published in one volume in July 1874; *Restless Human Hearts*, published in three volumes sometime during February/March 1875; and *World's End*, published in three volumes in July 1877.

The purpose of the presentation was to demonstrate that the early fiction, although having shortcomings, had degrees, and aspects, of worthiness.

The short stories cover a wide variety of subject matter. Several love matches are thwarted in different ways but win through in the end. Conversely, a love interest can provide a vehicle for other purposes. Over ambition in *A Sin and a Shame* has disastrous consequences. *A Strange Story* is a supernatural story about a premonition of death. *Snowed Up* is in diary form and chronicles the deteriorating situation which takes place in a household in London, and several areas of the city, during a period of freak weather.

As a novel, *The Scarlet Shawl* has the capacity to concern itself with a raft of characteristics endemic in the human condition. *Restless Human Hearts*, as its name implies, proves to be an emotional roller-coaster as causes for a vast degree, and variety, of inner turmoil and human degradation are examined and worked through. *World's End* is concerned with the evolution of the midlands town of Stirringham and claims to its ownership. It has originated through the activities of water rats, and various species of rats are used as symbols for the ever-increasing examples of human corruption which are exemplified as the story progresses.

In the execution of this wide-range of subject matter Jefferies employs a number of narrative techniques. He mostly uses the omnipresent third person narrator, although he can interrupt with his own voice, but he can also adopt that of the first and second person.

A full analysis of several of the short stories had revealed them to have been well constructed, having defined exposition, development, dénouement and resolution of conflict. Jefferies therefore shows a firm grasp of the fundamental building blocks necessary for writing fiction. A drawback is that he can sometimes rely on coincidence to the extent that the story is so obviously contrived that it undermines its credibility.

Jefferies eventually realised that his forte lie in descriptive writing and the quality of this can be found in the many types of description which appear in these early works. For example, in characterisation, man's relationship with nature, reflecting a persons moods and feelings, building up mental images,

and personification.

Jefferies can be seen to be influenced by, and experiment with, different categories of literature, for example, sensationalist, Gothic and poetry.

Some literary techniques employed by Jefferies, and situations in which he uses them, were explored. One of them was satire, a technique which is used to make a serious point in a humorous way in order to make it palatable. Some of the methods used to achieve this, exaggeration, ridicule, caricature and irony were exemplified and showed that, although Jefferies is often accused of being humourless, that is not the case.

It is often commented that Jefferies' characters are representational of a type but not fleshed out into rounded individuals. It is noticeable, however, that when Jefferies' characters contain reflections of himself, part of himself, or draw on people he knows, the characters are better delineated. Jefferies shows a fascination for feisty and exotic women. Several of his female characters appear on the stage. Motherless young women abound. To make up for the deficiency of mothers, doting fathers or indulgent uncles take their place. Among his male characters he was excited by the adventurer/scholar.

A theme which occurs in these early novels, and which will run through his later work, is that of the artificial versus the natural and although his bias is towards the natural, he can show some ambivalence.

Despite the fact that it can be demonstrated that Jefferies shows a comprehensive knowledge of literary techniques in these early works, the general opinion appears to be that they should be ignored and only the later work, on which his reputation lay, be acknowledged. A proponent of this idea is Besant in his *Eulogy*, in which he gives many reasons to explain why Jefferies could never have been a novelist and, given such an extensive range of shortcomings, Jefferies was "easy meat" for damning reviews by the critics. However, in an attempt to establish whether the reviews for Jefferies' first three novels were as bad as Besant and others imply several reviews for each novel had been collected, and the various comments extracted from them.

Although on the whole the reviews were negative some positive observations were made. Some critics totally contradicted each other. For instance, one reviewer considered that, given any amount of industry, he could never make a good novelist. On the other hand two thought that, with some aspects addressed, he had the potential to become a novelist, and one whose novels could rank with those of the best of the period in that category of literature.

The desired effect of the wide-ranging investigations was to redress the balance in respect of the general perception of Jefferies' early work. If it were disregarded, a lop-sided view of his corpus would result, and this was not academically sound. It had weaknesses, but Jefferies did not come to writing fully fledged. He had to learn by experience. This he did, and despite the setbacks he experienced, he stuck to his aspirations, and eventually achieved success. His tenacity had to be admired.

**Margaret Evans**

Andrew Rossabi rounded a most productive and stimulating day by reading extracts from his introduction to the 2008 edition of *Restless Human Hearts*



that was “hot off the press”, and printed only two days before the meeting.

## **RICHARD JEFFERIES’ BOOKISH UPBRINGING**

For much of his early youth Richard Jefferies lived in Sydenham with his aunt, Ellen Harrild, wife of a prosperous printer. According to Audrey Smith’s biography of Jefferies, *The Interpreter* (see p. 26), Ellen had a close friend and neighbour in Ada Leary Besemeres (nee Wilson). Ada is interesting to followers of Jefferies because she “took a kindly and abiding interest in Richard.” She is interesting to me because, by a coincidence remarkable for its timing, the Besemeres turn out to have been ancestors of an Australian friend.

When I wrote the introduction to *The Interpreter* in March, 2008, I was in Australia. During that time my wife, Sylvia, and I visited an old friend called Ken Crompton. He happened to start recounting work on his family tree and mentioned the name “Besemeres”, which Sylvia astutely recognised from *The Interpreter* because she had just proof-read the text. Ken had an extensive file on the Besemeres (who have dropped one “s” from their name as Audrey Smith gives it) and it did not take him long to confirm that this was the family who knew Richard Jefferies.

Ada Leary Besemeres was the wife of Ken’s three-greats uncle, John Daly Besemeres, which is to say she was Ken’s three-greats aunt by marriage. Contrary to Audrey Smith’s account, however, she was not childless. She had five children, the first being born about 1850. One daughter became governess to an aristocratic Tsarist family. Another married a Sydney accountant and moved to Australia: following the death of John Daly Besemeres, Ada joined this daughter and died in Sydney in 1912, aged 82.

John Daly Besemeres had been in partnership with his father in the clothing trade in London but the business was dissolved in the 1850s, apparently acrimoniously. John Daly Besemeres took himself off to India for a time, and wrote a primer on how to succeed there. He published other books and wrote plays which were performed on the London stage. One of his sisters, Jane Besemeres, likewise wrote several books and founded a school for the deaf in Wolverhampton.

Leaving aside the personal coincidence that an old friend in Australia happens to descend from a family who knew Richard Jefferies, the Besemeres’s connection adds to our sense that the young Jefferies grew up in a rich literary milieu. He was always close to his aunt Ellen, whose friendship with Ada Leary Besemeres shows that from his earliest years he would have been well aware of the world of authorship.

**Eric Jones**

## **COATE FARM AND MUSEUM REPORT**

### **Attendance figures**

Averaged out over the year, attendance figures are likely to be similar to the high records of last year of over 1,000 visitors. The Alliance of Literary Society event alone brought 60 visitors through the doors whilst a group of 40 members of the Friends of Red House (William Morris’s home in London)

organised a special visit in July. The “Footsteps” writers’ group has continued to meet on the second Wednesday of the month and the members of it are now quite at home in Jefferies’ old house. The CCTV cameras were installed in the Spring and, thankfully, there have been no “incidents” this year. We are always grateful to new Members who step forward to keep the Museum open. A special thanks to Gillian Bromhead and Keith Maxwell who have helped for the first time this year. We are still toying with the idea of opening more days.

### **Book donations.**

Thanks to everyone (too many to mention) who has donated books to the Jefferies’ Library, the Hudson’ Library or the Reference Library at the Museum. Thanks also to people who have donated books for sale, boosting our funds. Most of the Jefferies’ books on sale have been purchased by us to sell on, so gifts are always most welcome.

### **Museum additions**

Hugoe Matthews donated a copy of the 1882 edition of the *Magazine of Art* that contains two of Richard Jefferies’ essays: “The Beauty of the Fields” and “New Facts in Landscape” (also published in *The Life of the Fields* in 1884).

Mr Matthews also donated an interesting hand-written book that explains the “**Rule of Three**”, written in 1827 by Eliza Townsend Bellefield. In a letter to Uncle Thomas Harrild dated 7 May 1860, Richard Jefferies (aged 11) writes: “I am in the Rule of Three now, which Rule I like very much.” There is reference to the letter in *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies* (Matthews & Treitel, p. 11) which mentions that it is a system of mathematics of finding the fourth term of a mathematical proportion when the first three terms are known (also known as the “Golden Rule”). However, it is also a principle in English writing that suggests that things that come in threes are inherently funnier, more satisfying, or more effective than those grouped in other numbers.

Hugoe Matthews also donated a collection of letters mainly sent to Bill Keith from Frances Gay (dated between 1958-1974) and from Samuel Looker. They offer interesting insights into Jefferies. If the Swindon & Wiltshire Records Office is willing to accept the letters, the collection will be added to the repository in the Chippenham building.

Gill Davis was kind enough to donate some historic press clippings about Jefferies. A couple of these are not listed in the *Bibliographical Study* (Miller & Matthews) and new findings are always exciting to find.

### **Trees**

Despite the heavy storm damage last September, the mulberry tree has sprung into new life. However the cuttings, taken from the fallen branches, survived to early summer even supporting new leaves, but then died.

On 11<sup>th</sup> June at 4pm, an almighty crash was heard in the back-garden. A massive old ash tree at the end of Jefferies’ “Great Hedge,” had been completely uprooted, narrowly missing Sue Birley who had locked the gate under the tree a few minutes earlier. The tree toppled into the back garden across the ha-ha wall and ditch. It is another sad loss.

Swindon Borough Council has blamed an ancient yew tree in the back

garden, near to the house, for movement in the building (the council removed the famous espalier pear on the gable-end wall citing the same reason). The council plan to remove the tree in its entirety but we are requesting that it should be lopped and better managed. We have asked the council to sort out the blocked drains first that have caused localised flooding for the last two years directly next to where the cracks in the house have appeared – an obvious solution to try before destroying a sacred tree.

### **Lease**

There has been no progress on letting the cottage or negotiating a lease that is acceptable to the Society. In addition, all the Swindon Borough Council officers involved in the museum section, with responsibility for the Jefferies' Museum, have left. There is a Catch 22 situation with Property Services announcing that they will not carry out any further restoration work on the house and out-buildings until the cottage is tenanted. At the same time, the cut-backs in council staff mean that the Jefferies Museum sits even lower in council's priorities.

### **JEFFERIES GRAVE AT BROADWATER CEMETERY, WORTHING**

Martin Perryman, a building surveyor who works for Worthing Borough Council, made contact with the Society in June to inform us that he has been tidying up the graves of Jefferies and Hudson at Broadwater Cemetery in his spare time. Along with help from his partner, Sasha, who works in the council's Parks Department, signs have been erected directing people to the graves. Information boards will be placed at the entrance to the cemetery. Mr Perryman hopes to renovate a memorial birdbath and memorial garden too and will plant up the Jefferies' grave with the author's favourite flowers. It is hoped that the lead lettering might be reinstated. An estimate for the work has been obtained from a local stone mason for £1,500. It is a labour-intensive job and the Society hopes to pledge a contribution of up to £500 if Worthing Borough Council can fund the rest of the work. Should any Members like to make a personal contribution to the restoration, please send donations to the Hon. Secretary.

Mr Perryman informs us that the mulberry tree, planted in the graveyard and donated by the Richard Jefferies Society, is doing well. In the meantime, we are delighted and grateful that Mr Perryman has worked so hard to improve Jefferies' final resting place. Martin and Sasha visited the Coate Museum on August 13 with their young daughters and enjoyed the experience. Perhaps we might organise another visit to the grave next year.

Society Member Mark Daniel has been tending the grave for some thirty years. He provided the following information about it and supplied the photographs.

Long after Richard Jefferies' death in 1887, only a slight easterly tilt of his white marble cross, and some erosion around the plinth, showed much ageing. The grave had been kept in pristine order by a succession of carers, one of the last being an old RJ Society member (name regrettably forgotten) living close by, but who had to stop in the late Seventies. Fortunately, I moved to Brighton about the same time and, living only fifteen miles away, was able

to take over. As a retired road research engineer, I was able, in 1984, to repair the erosion and underpack the plinth with about 100 kg of cement-stabilised gravel, which while stable, could still allow grass regrowth. The marble was freshened up with chemicals handed over by the retiring carer, and the lead lettering buffed.

It was a shock to discover, at a routine visit in 1994, that the cemetery had been extensively vandalised, with Jefferies' cross lying in pieces on the ground. Damage being concentrated nearer the entrance, it is possible that the cross, some seventy metres back, was targeted for its brilliance. The Authorities were told, the local press, in a major feature, suggested devil worship, and the Society got estimates for repairs.

Discussions with Mr. Rudkin, of the Worthing Crematorium and Cemetery Service, led to their agreeing, exceptionally, to fund half the cost of repairs which were carried out by H.D. Tribe of Lancing, whose quote of £70.50 for reassembly, using dowels as well as masonry adhesive, was accepted. Costing the Society only £35.25, it was an excellent job, just two faint lines visible across the stem, and only someone particularly concerned with earlier straightening would notice the small northerly tilt.

With the continued decline in respect for many graveyards, it was hardly surprising to find, in the summer of 2000, that the monument had again been smashed. A short while earlier, a group of beer-drinking lads, sitting against tombstones, had cheerfully declared their right to be there, though promising to take their beer cans with them which, in fact, they did.

The damage, this time, looked too serious for complete restoration, but it was decided to again approach the Authorities for cooperation in reassembling the pieces, setting the cross flush with the turf, and capping the plinth with an engraved marble slab.

The question of whether the Society should ever carry out work on the monument, beyond simple maintenance, had gone on periodically for many years, but formality concerning Jefferies' descendants had always been declared a stumbling block. However, such was the urgency for restoration which would inevitably alter the appearance of the grave, it was decided to put the work in hand without delay. Relations had shown little interest for several decades, but if any did arrive they would surely be pleased.

One big improvement resulting from the work could be the simple, but boldly cut, inscription reading RICHARD JEFFERIES and his dates, which would be of help to those unfamiliar with his first name, John, on the existing monument.

H.D. Tribe were again invited to quote for making, inscribing and fixing a cap matching the existing stone, slightly wedge-shaped to make it more readable from the east side, and mending and setting the cross flush with the turf. Their quote of £229.11 was accepted, and Worthing Borough Council which had earlier offered £100, actually shared the cost equally.

It seems unlikely, in its now more substantial form, that the monument will suffer structural damage again, but of greater concern is the state of the lead lettering which is becoming increasingly more vulnerable to the elements and accidental damage.

An event which would have interested Jefferies, had he been around at the time, was the appearance of a partially paralysed fox, dragging its body

The new cap fitted in 2001

rapidly across the cemetery to a lair in the bushes by the cemetery wall. Its amazing agility, using front paws only, might have made long-term survival possible, but a local fox-rescue society was contacted anyway.

### **JEFFERIES LAND CONSERVATION TRUST**

The Trust has set up a Land Fund with the purpose of buying up as much of the land under threat from proposed development between Coate Water and Liddington Hill (that might include Coate Farm) in order to place it into conservation use. Whilst this is an ambitious and seemingly impossible task, the Trust believe that this is the only way that the battle to save Coate will succeed.

### **SAVE COATE CAMPAIGN**

In June, Persimmon Homes and Redrow Homes revised their planning application for 1,800 houses, a university campus and over 14 hectares of offices at Coate. Some areas identified for housing that are of significant archaeological interest have been left as open space, whilst some university land has been given over to housing. The developers insist that they are still in negotiation with an unnamed university. Swindon Borough Council has not made a decision about the planning application leaving itself open to an appeal to the Secretary of State to make a decision instead. There will be a Local Public Inquiry should the developers appeal. In the meantime, 44,000 signatures have been collected on the Save Coate petition, including support from TV personalities Ant & Dec, Lord Apsley of Cirencester Park, Lady Philippa Scott, Gilbert O'Sullivan and Lou Macari. For more information about the Save Coate campaign or the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust, contact Jean Saunders (see page 2) or visit these web sites: [www.savecoate.org.uk](http://www.savecoate.org.uk) and [www.jefferiesland.org.uk](http://www.jefferiesland.org.uk).

In an article that appeared in the *New Age* of 2 April 1896, Edward Thomas wrote: "Coate is a name which has probably little significance for the mass of Englishmen; yet it may well be conjectured that this little hamlet will one day attain the celebrity, not to say sanctity, now enjoyed by the Hampshire village of Selborne. For Coate is the birthplace of Richard Jefferies."

### **SUN INN PROPOSALS**

In March, planning permission was granted to Arkells Brewery to build 19 new letting rooms next to the boundary of the Jefferies' garden. Little notice appears to have been taken of our suggestion to soften the planned stark rendered walls that will be seen from the Museum side, but we shall have to see the outcome. We have been assured that the Jefferies' garden wall and the fruit trees will be protected and that there will be no direct access from the Sun Inn to the Jefferies' garden.

### **CITINGS OF JEFFERIES**

Wendy MacLeod-Gilford spotted two references to Jefferies in the January edition of **The Countryman**. The first, on page 10, was in an article by David Bellamy who discusses people's influences on the countryside. Bellamy extols the good-side of farms "ring-fenced with hedgerows and drystone walls and managed by yeoman farmers, gamekeepers and ghillies of the Richard Jefferies ilk." The second, on page 15, is a quote by Jefferies in an article by Humphrey Phelps. "There is the grass and the wheat, the clouds, the delicious sky, and the wind, and the sunlight which falls on the heart like a song." The source of the quote isn't provided but it comes from "Notes on Landscape Painting", first published in August 1882 in the *Magazine on Art* and in *Life of the Fields*, June 1884.

Both Tom Saunders and Brian Burrows reported listening to a **BBC Radio 4** programme broadcast on Friday 28 March that mentioned Richard Jefferies' description of the Ridgeway path. The programme, entitled "Ramblings: Walking through time," followed Clare Balding (horse-woman and sports commentator) talking to various guests as they explore an old footpath. This particular episode described a walk along the Ridgeway Footpath from Fox Hill, east Swindon to the Uffington White Horse along with Mark Thomas (comedian and activist) as her guest. Clare refers to Jefferies as a "sort of journalist" and that in 1879 he described the Ridgeway that "runs like a green ribbon".

Wendy MacLeod-Gilford came across a new poetry book entitled **The Vale of White Horse - An Anthology** compiled and published by Frank Poller. On pages 7/8, in a section about The Ridgeway, Richard Jefferies description of it appears: "A broad green track runs for many a long, long mile ... a width that allows a flock of sheep to travel easily side by side." (*Wild Life in a Southern County*) Brian Burrows spotted the same quote used in the Chairman's introduction to the latest newsletter published by the Friends of the Ridgeway.

The Ridgeway is also described as Europe's oldest road in Richard Ingrams' **Paintings from the Francis Kyle Gallery** ISBN 0-7148-2506-9, Phaidon Oxford 1988. There are several references to Richard Jefferies:

p12; The Ridgeway was "discovered" by Richard Jefferies in the 1870s in the same way that William Stukeley "discovered" Avebury - that is to say he wrote about something that had been there for a long time but which had remained unremarked upon. Jefferies, a nature poet who wrote in prose, was born at Coate near Swindon in 1848 and spent the first thirty years of his life there. In 1879, in his book *Wild Life in a Southern County*, he wrote the first description of the Ridgeway (though he did not name it): "A broad green track ... neither is it the King's highway ... The origin of the track ... ploughing engines jolt and strain and pant over the uneven turf ..."

p18/20; Kenneth Grahame, was a nature worshipper who derived his religion from the writings of Richard Jefferies and was even, in his youth, among a group of writers known as the New Pagans.

p60-66; Liddington Hill is the middle on a line of three great hill forts or "castles" which lie along the western end of the Ridgeway. It is a place sacred to the memory of Richard Jefferies, who is now commemorated on the Triangulation Point on the hill. Jefferies died of tuberculosis in 1887 at the age of thirty-eight. Like many consumptives, he was a man of intense vision who responded with special acuteness to all the wonders of the natural world. But he was far from being an airy-fairy "mystic", and in his early books, written at Coate, he describes the life and work of

farm-labourers, gamekeepers and poachers, as well as the topography of the area, with great sympathy and affection. The atmosphere of the downs, the Ridgeway and the hill-forts had the profoundest effect on him and inspired some of his most lyrical writing. In his last book, *The Story of My Heart*, he tells how as a young man he would climb Liddington Hill “to breathe a new air, and to have a fresher aspiration ... Moving up the sweet, short turf ... I spoke in my soul to the earth, the sun, the air and the distant sea far beyond sight.”

“Jefferies often thought of the sea upon these hills,” wrote Edward Thomas in his life of the great naturalist. Regrettably, environmental bureaucrats have chosen to create something here called the Barbury Country Park, which is sign posted on the Swindon-Marlborough road and which is nothing much more than a massive car park to the east of the castle, complete with information centre and unpleasant lavatories. Here in this gigantic litter trap the tourist may learn from fading fact-sheets about the life of Richard Jefferies, a man who more than anyone would have abominated the whole idea of organized “leisure”.

Stan Hickerton came across *The Diaries* by William Allingham. In Chapter XXII, Mr Allingham reflects on people who died in 1887. He mentions Richard Jefferies and writes: “I never saw him, but had much correspondence with him (then quite unknown) when I edited *Fraser*. I put in various pieces of his, as good as anything he afterwards wrote, but no one took any notice; save indeed that Barbara L.S.B. was struck with the truth of his picture or photograph of women in farming classes.” Stan informs that the lady mentioned was Madame Bodichon, wife of Dr. Bodichon of Algiers.

Jean Saunders spotted a reference to Richard Jefferies’ in *The Independent*, 19th May. Miles Kington was dipping into one of his favourite browsing books by Society Member, John Chandler. Mr Kington writes:

There are plenty of books giving advice to journalists and reporters, but not many telling editors how to do it. In fact, I had never come across one at all until this week, when I met a reference to a book called *Reporting, editing and authorship*: practical hints for beginners in literature. And this is what the author says about how a beginner should run a Fleet Street daily. See what you think.

“The principal rule in editing a paper is to insist upon every line being readable. The public want no solid cleverness, no prosy compilations, however good in their object; they require amusement. Men will read an *Extraordinary Discovery in California* who would contemptuously pass over long speeches and dull leaders. With the vast flow of news that now comes in there is an increasing impatience of long accounts – a constant tendency to condense everything.”

Amusement... impatience with longwindedness... soundbites rather than speeches... vast flow of news... It all sounds very modern, doesn't it? In fact it was written in 1873, by Richard Jefferies, the Victorian countryside chronicler, in his first published book, based on his experience as a local reporter. And I would never have been aware of it if I had not reopened John Chandler's *Small Talk in Wiltshire*, one of my favourite browsing books. John Chandler is a young archivist, based in Wiltshire, who has spent his life in dusty local archives, discovering long-forgotten diaries, journals, newspapers, pamphlets, magazines and so on. Anyone who has sampled such memoirs when reprinted will know that although the good bits are always good, the boring bits outweigh them and you eventually give up, wishing that someone had filleted out the good bits and put them all together.

**The Guardian** (3<sup>rd</sup> May) asked some writers if they had an old favourite book that they would like to see back in print. Andrew Motion selected Edward Thomas's *The Heart of England*, *The Childhood of Edward Thomas* and *The Pocket Book of Poems and Songs for the Open Air* which he said:

... show three distinct but linked aspects of his character and his quality - in rural evocation, autobiography and an anthology. They are all books of their moment, but have their roots in the great tradition of nature writing - as does Richard Jefferies's *The Story of My Heart*, a book Thomas especially admired. It is this, as well as their vigilance and sincerity, that allows them to speak so clearly to our present.

On the strength of the article, Faber and Faber have published all the books mentioned by the writers including a new edition of *The Story of my Heart*.

"I'm going a milking, sir' she said" was the title of an article published in the **Weston & Somerset Mercury** on 9 May and spotted by Jean Saunders. It included this extract:

That great naturalist, Richard Jefferies, took a more realistic view of milking time in his day: "To put on coarse nailed boots, weighing fully seven pounds, gaiters up to the knee, a short great-coat of some heavy material, and to step out into the driving rain and trudge wearily over field after field of wet grass, with the furrows full of water; then to sit on a three-legged stool, with mud and manure half-way up to the ankles, and milk cows with one's head leaning against their damp, smoking hides for two hours, with the rain coming steadily, drip, drip, drip ..."

Geoffrey Moorhouse was asked various questions in an article entitled "What Book...?" **Daily Mail**, 23<sup>rd</sup> May. When asked what book gave him the reading bug he replied:

Sheer loneliness as a small boy, when I was intimidated by almost everything. I took refuge in books from the moment I first read one — Richard Jefferies' *Wood Magic* — without the assistance of an adult, at the age of four. It's a sentimental fantasy about a lonely little boy who is befriended by birds, foxes, all creatures great and small. But it opened a window on the world of literature which, one way and another, has sustained me ever since — a vital constant in my life, both as a reader and a writer.

### ***Trains and Buttered Toast***

Andrew Rossabi notes that the above is the title of a paperback of selected radio talks by John Betjeman. The volume, edited and introduced by Stephen Games, was published by John Murray in 2006. It includes a talk on Swindon from the series "Town Tours", first broadcast on the West of England Programme on Saturday, 8 May 1937 (Producer J.G. Pennethorne Hughes). The talk contains three references to Richard Jefferies. Swindonians "aren't exactly poetic—Alfred Williams, a local nature writer who worked in Swindon, was none too comfortable. Even Richard Jefferies, the greatest Swindon literary figure, who lived outside Swindon Old Town, was considered a bit loopy. (But good writers always are. It's only best-sellers who are considered sane.)" Betjeman dilates on the charms of old pre-railway Swindon, a typical small English market town set on a hill "in country which Richard Jefferies has described in the best nature books we have in the language". Finally Sir John bemoans the ribbon development that spoils the approaches to Swindon: "Perhaps the ugliest houses of all go all the way to Coate, the place where Richard Jefferies lived. Here there is an attempt at a public park..."



Postscript: In fairness to Swindon, it should be said that Betjeman gives a much more sympathetic view of the town in his later essays, such as “Architecture” in *Studies in the History of Swindon* (Swindon Borough Council, 1950) by L.V. Grinsell, H.H. Wells, H.S. Tallamy, John Betjeman, with an introduction by David Douglas, and “St Mark’s, Swindon” in *First and Last Loves* (John Murray, 1952).

A charming paperback entitled **Waterside Walks in Wiltshire** by Nick Channer (Counterside Books, 2001, ISBN 1-85306-667-2) includes a walk around Coate Water and Hodson that mentions Richard Jefferies and his home along with a quote about the pleasures of footpaths. The walk also includes a photograph of the Cicely’s Bridge poster, painted by Stan Hickerton, on the foot-path to Hodson. For those who have never seen the sign, the front cover of this newsletter bears a photograph of the poster.

Eric Jones came across a copy of **From the Hedgerows: A collection of short stories on the wildlife, places and people of Newbury District** by Lew Lewis (Privately printed, 2008). It contains (pp.28-29) reference in a piece by P. S. Mann to Richard Jefferies’ “My Old Village”, saying that Jefferies “for all of his acute love of the English countryside mistakenly went to live in Surbiton, when he might easily have remained in Wiltshire, how could he have been happy under urban conditions? Before he had been there two minutes he must have developed the acute nostalgia for the countryside and country things that was to become an obsession in later life and which ran like a grey or golden thread through everything he wrote.” Eric adds that *From the Hedgerows* is an attractive collection, well worth drawing to Members’ attention for its own sake.

Ruskin Bond (born 19 May, 1934), an Indian author of British descent has included *The Story of my Heart* in his recent work entitled **My Book of Favourite Books**. He confesses in the introduction: “I read Shakespeare’s plays out of [a] sense of duty, and found some of them extremely boring. I could not stomach Jane Austen, and I found Hardy terribly depressing.”

John Price came across a new publication entitled **We need to talk about funerals** by Jane Morrell and Simon Smith. The book tells you all that you need to know on the subject and includes useful readings appropriate for the occasion. Page 151 includes a quote from *The Story of my Heart*.

**Jonathan Calder**, who writes for the *New Statesman* has a blog mainly concerned with matters relating to the Liberal Democrats and culture. On Monday, May 26, 2008 he commented on a Channel Four programme: “Life After People” that asks: “What would happen to planet Earth if the human race were to suddenly disappear forever? Would ecosystems thrive? What remnants of our industrialised world would survive? What would crumble fastest?” He recommends that people should read *After London* about which he wrote his Master’s dissertation.

Andrew Rossabi reports that last Easter term’s issue of **CAM** (Cambridge Alumni Magazine) carries an article by Neil Fleming about science fiction (“Outer space – in a turmoil”). It ends with the words “There is nothing new under the sun. In 1885 the Victorian novelist Richard Jefferies published his surprising *After London*, and drowned us all”. Then follows a passage from the

novel, describing London as a vast stagnant swamp, with Fleming's sardonic comment "No wonder they built the Thames barrage".

Wendy MacLeod-Gilford read a Comment in the *New Scientist* dated 16 July 2008 by Stephen Baxter entitled "What if..." providing a fictional account of global flooding. He mentions several writers that have used flooding in fictional dramas that includes "Will Self's *The Book of Dave* - the latest manifestations of a tradition that reaches back to 1885 and Richard Jefferies's astonishing *After London, or Wild England*: 'It became green everywhere in the first spring, after London ended'."

Thanks to John Webb, we are now enjoying a third year of monthly "Nature Notes" published in the *Swindon Advertiser*. The coverage in the newspaper of matters related to Jefferies and Coate Water is most helpful.

Bill Crosbie-Hill, a railway enthusiast, sent in a copy of an article written by him that was published in the July 2008 journal of the **Railway and Canal Historical Society**. Entitled "Richard Jefferies and the Story of Swindon: an essay in public relations", he quotes from "The Story of Swindon" and noted that whilst Jefferies had a passion for nature, he did not dismiss the advantages brought by the introduction of the railways.

The August 2008 edition of *The Handy Mag*, distributed to businesses and the community in south-east Swindon carried a feature on "Broken promises and threats to Coate" and gave the Richard Jefferies Museum some publicity.

***Walking the North Wessex Downs through art, history and literature*** by Mark Loos-Page. Four walks are featured in this colourful booklet based on four objects that had influenced the author. These items include a copy of *The Story of my Heart* that inspired a walk around Liddington Hill and a painting by David Inshaw of Avebury that illustrates a walk around this World Heritage Site. Mark visited the Richard Jefferies Museum last year whilst researching the area for the pamphlet. He has donated 200 copies of the publication (£1) to sell at the Museum to help with its upkeep.

***The Argus***, a Wokingham local paper reported on the work undertaken to restore graves wrecked by vandals at Broadwater Cemetery. The article, published on 7 August 2008, mentioned a recent tour conducted by a former mayor who pointed out notable graves including "world-renowned naturalists Richard Jefferies and William Hudson".

Kedrun Laurie came across this interesting, if disparaging, reference to Jefferies in George Gissing's ***Charles Dickens: a critical study (1898)***:

The gravest of his [Dickens's] faults, from *Oliver Twist* onwards – and he never wholly overcame it – is the habit of writing metrically. He is not alone in this vice. Charles Kingsley illustrates it very badly in some of his prose; especially, I remember, in the *Heroes*. Should any one wish to see how far the trick (unconsciously, of course) can be carried, let him open Richard Jefferies' paper "The Open Air", where he will find several pages written, with very few breaks, precisely in a metre made familiar by Longfellow. As thus: "All the devious brooklet's sweetness / where the iris stays the sunlight; / all the wild woods hold of beauty: / all the broad hills' thyme and freedom: / thrice a hundred years repeated". This, of course, betrays an ear untrained in the harmonies of prose; the worst of it is, that many readers would discover it with delight, and point to it as admirable.

## OBITUARIES

### **John Povey** (4<sup>th</sup> February 1925 – 26<sup>th</sup> February 2008)

There are few people who have done more to promote Richard Jefferies than John and Sheila Povey during their many years of membership of the Richard Jefferies Society. It is with regret that we announce the death of John.

John's childhood home was in Highworth. One of his school reports describes him as "capable, reliable and dependable," characteristics that continued throughout his life.

Early on, John showed an aptitude for woodwork. He wanted to be, and should have been a carpenter. But the job which was found for him was a plumbing apprenticeship with Kilminster's – a local building firm.

Once, as a young plumber, John was working in a home where Sheila was one of the daughters of the house. John saw Sheila toiling over her school homework, which was a needlework exercise in smocking stitch. John said "I could help you with that," which sounds improbable, but John did possess some smocking knowledge – his Aunt Mag had been making smock garments for years. That was how John met Sheila.

John spent a number of years in the ATC but was called up to the RAF in 1943. John and Sheila were married after the war and moved to a house in Edinburgh Street where Robert and Ian were born. They joined the Swindon Ex-Serviceman's Housing Society who were short of a plumber to embark on their project of self-build homes. John became their plumber – and the Farleigh Crescent houses were soon built – John and Sheila moved into Number 20 and there they stayed. At the time, John also started working in the Pressed Steel Factory and inspired by *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* put himself forward as a shop steward.

Despite John's final months of suffering, Sheila said that John never complained once.

John will always be remembered, particularly at the Richard Jefferies Museum where his many photographs of the area adorn the walls and information booklets – he was always ready to help others.

On 1<sup>st</sup> March 2008, the Friends of Alfred Williams and the Society held their joint meeting at Coate Farm. As a tribute, snowdrops and primroses were planted in the gardens around the Povey's damask rose, itself planted in 2006 as a thank you to both Sheila and John for their many years of help at the Museum. By some coincidence, Sheila spotted a copy of *The Ragged Trousered Philanthropists* on the top of the pile of books for sale at the Museum. Sheila just had to buy it and swears that John was at that meeting.

### **Paul Scofield**

Members of the Society will have been sorry to learn of the death on 19 March of one of our honorary members – Paul Scofield. He was 86. He was notable as a stage actor, his performances as Mercutio in "Romeo and Juliet,"

as Hamlet (1948) and later as King Lear being best known. Most of us will remember him as Sir Thomas More in the film “A Man For All Seasons,” for which he was awarded an Oscar.

However, he endeared himself to us by his reading on the radio of some of Jefferies’ most memorable words. In November 1976 he read passages in a programme entitled “Song of Summer”. He also spoke Jefferies’ words in the Channel 4 film entitled “The Man on the Hill” (1987). Both programmes were produced by Keith Slade and compiled by Roger Frith, with music by David Cain.

Scofield’s clear diction combined with his uniquely sonorous voice enhanced Jefferies’ words, delighting his listeners.

On the occasion of his being made an honorary member of the Society, he wrote to Cyril Wright, saying, of Jefferies: “I admire and feel very much for his writings. I was brought up in the village of Hurstpierpoint in Sussex, an area which was close to him, and indeed spent much of my time on Woolstonbury which you mention in your Annual Report [of 1983]. I didn’t know that this was his hill as well as mine.”

**Phyllis Treitel**

(Note. Keith Slade gave the Birthday Lecture in 1982; Roger Frith gave the Birthday Lecture in 1983 and a second one in 1998. The Society has tapes of the Scofield readings.)

### **John and Joan Jefferys**

John Jefferys, a great nature lover, lived in Launceston and was a member of the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust along with his wife, Joan. John died last Christmas only months after his bequest to leave his Richard Jefferies’ book collection to the Society. Within a few months, his wife also died. In May 2008, Wendy and Mike Gilford visited John’s daughter, Elizabeth Bird. Mrs Bird had previously contacted the Society wishing to follow her father’s instructions. Mrs Bird not only donated the books but also some wild-flowers to plant in the Jefferies’ Museum garden. Although John Jefferys never visited Coate Farm, he would have been delighted to know that this floral tribute had been made.

### **BOOKS PUBLISHED BY THE SOCIETY**

2008 will be noted as the year that the Society embarked upon major book production. The first release was *The Interpreter: A biography of Richard Jefferies* followed soon after by *Richard Jefferies: An Index* and a new edition of *Restless Human Hearts*. Work is progressing on *World’s End*. These are all “must-have” books that can be purchased at the Museum or ordered from Norma Goodwin (see p46). The books are also available on the Internet via Amazon (amazon.co.uk). We hope to publish other works by Jefferies that are difficult to buy second-hand and, perhaps, some new compilations of essays.

### ***The Interpreter: a biography of Richard Jefferies***

The Spring 2008 newsletter announced that a biography written forty years ago by Audrey Smith, a former Society member, had been donated to the Society by her son. The typescript was scanned and a masterful introduction was added by Professor Eric Jones. Sketches and illustrations by Stan Hickerton were included along with some old photographs of buildings and relatives. Inevitably there are some factual errors in the book, but the biography reflects the state of information about Jefferies at the time of research. The book is nearly 300 pages long and has been published in soft-back by Blue Gate Books.

The book is available for £5 plus postage of £1 within the UK (£2.50 overseas). ISBN 978-0-9555874-3-6. George Miller has produced a limited edition (limited to 12) of the book in hard-back available for £25.

### ***Richard Jefferies: An Index of Themes, Thoughts and Observations***

Hugoe Matthews and Phyllis Treitel, Petton Books, 264pp, hardback, July 2008 ISBN: 978-0-9522813-2-0 (£15 plus postage £2 within the UK).

The book provides a basic index to the principal elements in Jefferies' published work (the latter are also listed in the book in date order of publication). It is partly a word-index (e.g. names of species) and partly a subject-index (e.g. Nature and Man, Farming, Religion) - the emphasis is on the non-fictional writings but where fictional works are explored, the *Index* includes passages where Jefferies makes personal statements or observations that connect with his main themes.

Hugoe Matthews has been compiling the information for the last three years. As no-one has ever attempted to produce an index for a collection of works this, in itself, is a major achievement. In the last year, Lady Treitel has added to the material. Where possible, the *Index* refers to the most commonly available edition of Jefferies' works. The book has been printed in hard-back as a companion book to *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies*.

Our President has been extremely generous not only with his time but also all proceeds for 150 copies of the *Index* have been donated to the Society.

Once again, we cannot express our gratitude enough to both Phyllis and Hugoe for all their dedication and hard-work in undertaking an exhausting amount of research in order to compile the *Index* and setting it into a format that will be of great benefit to students of Jefferies' works. There will be an opportunity to hear how the authors embarked upon this project; to explain the concept and arrangement of *The Index* at this year's Annual General Meeting.

### ***The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies***

Hugoe Matthews has also donated his remaining stock of *The Forward Life* to the Society. Written by Hugoe Matthews & Phyllis Treitel, and published by Petton Books in 1994 (ISBN: 0 9522813 0 9), the book documents events or facts pertinent to Jefferies' life that can be dated with reasonable accuracy. The information is placed in chronological order from the date of marriage of his parents to his death. It is a most useful reference book and a good read. The hard-book is available at £12 plus postage of £2.

### ***Restless Human Hearts***

Published by Petton Books, July 2008, ISBN: 978-0-9522813-3-7, 480pp with a new introduction by Andrew Rossabi. Both softback (£8) and hardback (£20) copies have been printed. Postage: £2.

*Restless Human Hearts* is the centrepiece of the triptych of novels published by Tinsley Brothers in the 1870s. It was an ambitious three-volume work that anticipates the mature author in many of its themes. Nature and nature mysticism are sharply contrasted with the decadence of fashionable Mayfair society. Brimming with original and often audacious ideas, the novel is also notable for its gallery of women characters – Heloise, who experiences mystical raptures alone on the downs but marries a brutal and debased peer; Georgiana, a feminist intellectual who defies convention by entering on a trial marriage with her lover; and the sin-stained Carlotta, a cross-dressing *femme fatale* whose nemesis comes in a close encounter with a cobra in a train compartment. This new edition carries a lively introduction by Andrew Rossabi, a past President of The Richard Jefferies Society, who argues for a reevaluation of a neglected novel never before re-issued.

Thanks to the original scanning work undertaken by Ray Evans several years ago and subsequent proof-reading by Richard Wright, Carolyn Clarke and Jean Saunders, who also type-set the novel, the book can now be enjoyed without the need to seek out a copy at Swindon Reference Library or the British Library!

## **DISCOVERIES 2. W. H. ----- ?**

In a paper on Jefferies written for the Manchester Literary Club in 1906 George H Bell comments on the lack of appreciation for Jefferies during his lifetime, and gives the following illustration:

“There are few more pathetic revelations than the note attached to a set of Jefferies' books (1<sup>st</sup> editions) in a recent second-hand catalogue. They are all inscribed in Jefferies own writing to a friend of his, and came to the bookseller's hand *uncut*. The books of a man who yearned for sympathy and to whom it meant so much.”

This is without doubt the same collection that Walter T Spencer refers to in his memoirs, published in 1923:

“Twenty years ago I remember disposing of nine volumes of his best works, first editions, for twelve guineas. Each book was inscribed with an autograph presentation to one and the same person, who had inked out his own family name before selling them. But the fact of the volumes remaining with unopened sheets is a melancholy evidence that this particular friend of poor Jefferies was careless of his connection with such an unrivalled painter of country life...”

Elsewhere Spencer describes Jefferies coming into his shop in New Oxford

Street. He says he could never quite fathom Jefferies, who rarely seemed at ease. It's tempting to identify Spencer as the "cunning old bookseller" Jefferies refers to in 'Nature in Books', who offered to make up an early copy of Gerard's Herbal for him. A made up copy of *The Gamekeeper at Home* in Swindon Public Library has Spencer's label in it!

Despite his delight in the Gerard, even in its defective state, Jefferies resisted the temptation to buy a book he couldn't afford. I was not so successful when two inscribed copies of Jefferies' own books turned up on ABE a couple of years ago. I bought one of them – *Hodge and His Masters*. What specially interested me was that the name of the dedicatee in both cases had been crossed out, and when I contacted the dealer he told me he'd bought the books at a fair where there were four similarly inscribed copies on offer. I had no doubt these were from Spencer's 9 volume set, and was curious to see if I could work out the name of Jefferies' false friend. All the dealer could decipher were the initials W H.

It wasn't that difficult. The recipient was W H Mudford, and *Hodge* proved a happy choice as he was editor of the *Standard* where *Hodge* first appeared. Mudford, whose father wrote sketches and owned two newspaper titles, joined the *Standard* as a young man, and so impressed the proprietor that in 1876 the latter made him manager and editor for life by the terms of his will. Under Mudford's control the paper came to rival the Telegraph as a popular 1 penny daily, and the *Times* in its coverage of US and foreign affairs. Though stolidly Tory under his predecessor Mudford made it more independent and culturally broader, and had the reputation of being a law unto himself. When Longmans published Disraeli's last novel, *Endymion*, in November 1881, the *Standard* somehow obtained an early set of sheets and published a review three days before publication summarising the entire plot and identifying the originals of the characters, and also was somewhat cool about the book's merits. Longman was furious and complained to Disraeli, who replied that Mudford must have obtained the copy by bribery or deception – it was just his style. He accuses Mudford of affecting a conservative tone in the paper to appease his readers and "make his assistance more effective to his secret Liberal allies." Longman asked for a meeting with Mudford, who refused. He then instructed his solicitors to proceed against him but there was no actual proof of wrong doing. Mudford emerged unscathed by the incident, and even remained a member of the exclusive Carlton Club.

It can be seen that Mudford moved in rather different circles from Jefferies and was not perhaps the sort of man he might have struck up a personal friendship with. His one extant letter to Mudford, in reply to criticism of a hunting scene in *Hodge*, is entirely formal. Why then did he send Mudford copies of his books?

The *Standard* published articles by Jefferies in 1875 and from 1878 to 1887, the longest period of all the journals he contributed to. His father read the *Standard*, and with its independent, if not subversive, conservatism it was perhaps the paper Jefferies read himself. Sending his books to the editor was simply a way of reminding him that he was still a productive and successful author.

Jefferies life certainly had its tragic aspect but he was not “pathetic”, or “poor” in any but the pecuniary sense. And he had more business acumen than he is generally given credit for.

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**George Miller**

## **BOOKS BY SOCIETY MEMBERS**

***Portrayal of Birds in Selected Nineteenth and Twentieth Century French Fiction*** by James Jonas Walling. Published in 2002 by Edwin Mellen Press (Mellen House, Lampeter, Ceredigion, SA48 8LT. Tel: 01570 423356), £64.95 ISBN: 0-7734-7079-4 148pp. This work consists of textual analyses of a representation of 17 authors. This analysis produces not only significant and original observations and the stylistic exploitation of avian material but also, in some cases, provides an assessment of the writer's standpoint on important environmental issues such as nature conservation and hunting. In addition, the author's reaction to individual species or family groups offers the reader fresh insights into the image of the birds concerned. James Walling graduated in French and Latin at Bristol University. He received a doctorate from the University of Poitiers. He is a Senior lecturer in the Department of French Studies at Reading University. A past Chair of the Reading Ornithological Club, his interest in birds dates back from childhood days in Devon.

## **ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING OF THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES HOSTED BY THE RICHARD JEFFERIES SOCIETY AT THE HOLIDAY INN, MARLBOROUGH ROAD, SWINDON ON 17/18 MAY 2008**

Just by way of introduction, I would like to say what a wonderful achievement it has been for a small society like ours to host the ALS weekend, and to thank, especially, Jean Saunders and John Price for making it such a success.

Over 50 delegates from various societies gathered at the Holiday Inn for the Annual General Meeting on Saturday, quite a good gathering.

Linda Curry, Chairman, introduced Aeronwy Thomas, President, following which Phyllis Treitel gave a warm welcome to everyone present on behalf of the Richard Jefferies Society. The minutes of the 2007 AGM were approved and Linda Curry, was pleased to report a full complement on the committee, no



new nominations having been received. Since Rosemary Culley, who was responsible for running the ALS website, has now resigned as secretary, it has been decided to set up our own ALS website; this will include membership details, but in order for it to be kept up-to-date it will be the responsibility of member societies to keep us informed of any changes within their particular society.

The Treasurer, Julie Shorland reported a healthy surplus, even though subscriptions were down on the previous year. She went on to report that the Wordsworth Society had resigned and that since she had received no response from the C S Forrester and George MacDonald societies she was assuming that these had also resigned. Now that all future committee meetings will be held in Birmingham expenses should be considerably reduced. Allowing for a degree of fluctuation, the number of societies within the Alliance remains at around 100.

Linda Curry and Robin Healey, joint editors of the ALS journal, *ALSo*, have now prepared the second edition which this year is devoted to Literary Tourism. The theme next year will be “Beyond Text”, an Arts and Humanities Research Council theme which will be centred on spin offs from text, i.e. plays, posters, media, the finishing of unfinished works, etc. Any articles would be warmly welcomed.

Voting for Officers and Committee members then took place. Aeronwy was given a big “thank you” for agreeing to continue as President. The present officers and committee members agreeing to stand, they were proposed en bloc. We were delighted to accept the nomination of Anita Fernandez Young of the Dickens Fellowship as secretary.

Ruth Webb of the Virginia Woolf Society asked for an ALS grant towards the erection of a plaque to D H Lawrence on the building in Croydon where he wrote *Sons and Lovers* one hundred years ago. Lawrence spent some time in Croydon as a teacher, and the D H Lawrence Society is fully supporting the venture. The ALS made a grant of £100.

One of the reasons for setting up the Alliance of Literary Societies over 30 years ago was to protect at risk buildings with a literary connection, and Julie Shorland suggested that we ought to provide an info-pack on how to go about this.

It is hoped that the 2009 AGM will be hosted by the Dublin Literary Circle in Dublin, but this has yet to be confirmed.

The business part of the meeting concluded, we adjourned for lunch.

After lunch, John Price, as a prelude to his lecture, asked how many people had actually read anything by Richard Jefferies; it was rather disappointing to see so few hands go up, but at least it provided John with an excellent platform from which to introduce our little known genius to a, potentially, wider readership.

Anyone with a passing knowledge of Jefferies regards him as a nature writer and little more, but as John so ably pointed out, the writings of Richard Jefferies are so diverse that it is impossible to slot him into any particular category. It is true, of course, that Jefferies is one of the finest writers on nature that this country has ever produced, which was confirmed in a recent

poll conducted by the *Guardian* in which he headed the list of the nation's favourites. John went on to speak of him as a poet in prose, and rightly so, the beauty of his writing lying in its seeming simplicity. But as John was so keen to point out, Jefferies was so much more: novelist, social commentator, essayist, mystic, ecologist, even would be satirist though he is rarely credited with a sense of humour; all these various elements can be discovered in the writings of Richard Jefferies.

John then went on to give a brief outline of Jefferies's life. It would be speaking to the converted if I went on to give this in detail, but John certainly knew how to hold the interest of his audience: the way in which Richard's father instilled in him his love of nature and of how as a child Richard invented a country of his own around Coate Reservoir and of the happy times he spent with the Harrilds at Sydenham. He told of his walks up to Liddington Hill and how he would lie on the ground and commune with the man in the tumulus who seemed as alive to him then as he had been before he was interred beneath the earth.

To illustrate the different strands to be found in Richard Jefferies, John read some carefully chosen passages from books as diverse as *The Gamekeeper at Home*, *Amaryllis at the Fair*, *Field and Hedgerow* and *After London, Wild England*. This, of course, led to the question of which book to read by Jefferies first, a question really impossible to answer as John had intimated in his introduction. There are aspects within Jefferies's works that would appeal to a wide range of readers and others which they would possibly find extremely distasteful, e.g. the rather sadistic strand that creeps into some of Jefferies's works which he seems unwilling or unable to restrain. Turning to his mysticism and his rather esoteric search for spiritual enlightenment, again this could appeal to a certain section of readers and equally deter a good many more. As John pointed out a book like *The Story of My Heart* is a book that polarises opinion. To some it is a work of profound genius, to others a pretentious nothingness. Personally I find it one of his most satisfying works. Perhaps the best method would be to pick up an anthology and go from there; certainly the straightforward nature essays would be a good starting point, as would those lovely collection of essays in *Hodge and His Masters*. As regards the novels, we know that Jefferies could never flesh out his characters in the way that Hardy could, but we can forgive him this when he uses nature as a backdrop and describes it in ways that are equal to anything we find in Hardy and can even surpass him at times. *Bevis*, of course, is the most oft quoted book, and does give a wonderful evocation of Jefferies own childhood, but it is a boys' book and therefore not of universal appeal. Suffice it to say that no one has ever written on nature with such a philosophical and spiritual awareness as Jefferies; no one has so thoroughly understood the delicate balance between nature and man. But as John said, it is for the reader to find that side of Jefferies with which they can readily relate.

John went on to speak of Jefferies's moderate success as a writer, how he mellowed in his attitude towards blood sports, preferring to carry a gun rather than aiming it, and of his final years of debilitating illness when he was obliged to stay indoors and Jessie wrote to his dictation because he was too

weak to hold a pen. Jefferies was never to return to Coate, but he was to write of it as any exile writes of a place with which he has experienced an almost spiritual empathy.

John Price's talk was received with a warm round of applause and rightly so; it was indeed an excellent introduction to Richard Jefferies. No excuses now for the uninitiated not to go out and learn a lot more.

Following the talk we divided into three groups in order to walk around Coate Water, to visit the birthplace and to view the DVD 'Jefferies Land'. Unfortunately it was a rather overcast day, but nonetheless Andrew Rossabi led our particular group round Coate Water where he read relevant extracts from the books at each point of interest, e.g. Cicely's bridge featured in *Round About a Great Estate* and the famous Council Oak depicted in *Bevis* where the rival camps meet before the mock battle of Pharsalia. Back at the Museum we all enjoyed tea and biscuits, courtesy of Jean, who had made up info packs containing our glossy brochures on Coate and the Birthplace Museum which sold very well.

After a very full day we met for dinner at 7.00, following which various readings were given from favourite authors. Our president Aeronwy gave a wonderful reading of her father's poem *And Death Shall Have No Dominion*, Julie Shorland read from the amusing juvenilia of Jane Austen, Anita Fernandez-Young gave an unforgettable reading as Mrs. Gamp from *Martin Chuzzlewit* and the Dubliners Literary Circle gave a rich mix of readings, some poignant, some funny. To round off a lovely evening Aeronwy's husband Trefor sang in Welsh for us, which was much appreciated.

On Sunday a smaller group of people gathered at the Birthplace Museum to take part in the Treasure Hunt devised by John Price. This time it was a fine sunny day and the garden was looking at its best; the house also looked very welcoming, Jean having placed vases of wild flowers in each of the rooms. We wandered round the house and into the garden, viewing the mulberry tree, the orchard and the ha ha wall before the Treasure Hunt properly got under way.

Most of us got to Burderop Park, now owned by Halcrow, but once the home of the Calley family which Jefferies writes of in *Round About a Great Estate*. John Price pointed out the site of the old ice house, the walled kitchen garden and the saddle stones which prevented the rats from getting into the old barn. Afterwards some of us went to Barbury Hill to see the sarsen stone erected to Richard Jefferies and Alfred Williams. A few of the more ambitious got to see what is known as Jefferies Clump at the top of Liddington Hill while others went to look at the Gamekeeper's Cottage at Hodson or travelled to look around Chiseldon and Marlborough. I doubt if anyone finished the entire itinerary, but everyone was enjoying the warm weather, the company and seeing something of Jefferies' country.

Finally, our sincere thanks go to Jean Saunders and John Price of the Richard Jefferies Society for making our weekend such a pleasant and enjoyable one.

**Helen D Newman**

Margaret Evans' article in the last edition (SNL 2008) about her recent visit reminded me of a similar one, again with the Edward Thomas fellowship, in Autumn 2002. Many of the places linked to poets were the same and like Margaret I was emotionally overwhelmed not just by the sheer numbers of graves but also the young age of so many who died fighting. Towards the end of our tour we had to pause at one large cemetery as a newly wed couple were having photos taken - a bizarre episode to me but our guide said it was a local tradition.

However, the single memory that was strongest concerned German war cemeteries. At Langemarck we were told that this was a typical layout reflecting the German attitude to death in war, with communal burials in marble caskets, a large brooding sculpture by Emil Krieger and many oak trees, which to the Germans symbolised endurance and strength. The only thing missing was background Wagner.

That would have been my lasting impression but on the last day, when like Margaret we visited Isaac Rosenberg's grave at Balliol Road East, one of the Thomas family mentioned to a few of us in the coach that there was a German cemetery just down a nearby lane. We stayed to hear a reading of Rosenberg's best-known poem, "Break of Day in the Trenches", then the four of us set off down the lane at some speed, mindful of how little time we had with a ferry to catch. I was only there a few minutes but the vision will remain with me for ever. It was the antithesis of the previous one. Here were trees of many species, all the graves separate, a country churchyard that could easily have been transposed to the time of Richard Jefferies or Edward Thomas. The one difference was that the Star of David was prominently displayed on many tombstones, a reminder of how the same nation that was prepared to fight for Germany was, less than two decades later, fighting Hitler's plans for wiping out all Jews in countries he controlled. To add a final delight to this brief but memorable visit, shafts of autumn sunlight were softly filtering across the quiet graveyard.

It was just a casual remark that took us there and also a salutary reminder in these troubled years that a whole nation can so easily be misunderstood and demonised by superficial and often erroneous impressions.

**Richard Stewart**