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Cyril Wright 1909-1995

# A Book Review by Richard Jefferies

The question 'Did Richard Jefferies ever write book reviews?' can now be answered - he did. He wrote a review of Thomas Speedy's *Sport in the Highlands and Lowlands of Scotland* for the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 19 August 1884. Jefferies' article, which is published here, establishes not only that he wrote at least one book review, but that, even though he never went to Scotland, he must from this date on be assumed to be familiar with the details of sporting habits there.

The review was not signed, and might never have been recognised as by Jefferies, had it not been for the recent discovery of a letter from Jefferies to the *Pall Mall's* editor W T Stead. The text of the letter, also set out here, reveals that already, three years to the day before his death, Jefferies was, at times, too weak to write out his work. The letter itself is in his own hand.

14 Victoria Road, Eltham, Kent. Aug 14th.

Dear Sir,

I enclose the review of *Sport in the Highlands*. The different handwriting is because I dictated it. I find the book a good one & had the author given a full record of his own personal experiences & confined himself to them, it would have been of very unusual interest. I remain

Faithfully yours  
Richard Jefferies

WT Stead Editor *The Pall Mall Gazette*

## Sport and Nature in Scotland

Swooping out of the sky, the great peregrine falcon strikes the head off a passing grouse with a slash of his wing, swifter than the guillotine severed the head of Charlotte Corday when the bolt was withdrawn, and the bird which a moment before was peacefully sailing on its homeward course drops to the earth a carcass. The falcon sweeps on, disdainful even to pick up so trifling a creature, and returns to his eyrie. The falcon, in short, is a true sportsman; he does not desire to make an enormous bag, nor does he care over-much for his quarry. It is the sport which he enjoys - his quick eye, his grasp of the air, his flight like an arrow shot from a 70lb. bow, swifter than the v arrow of the Turkish ambassador sent four hundred and eighty yards, his pride and glory of strength and skill; it is in these that he delights - a mighty hunter under the sun. Therefore true sportsmen rarely if ever disturb the eyrie of the peregrine falcon. Perched on a crag hundreds of feet above the valley, he commands at a glance the mountain lake, the stream, and the slopes of the hills. Let a mallard rise from the lake, let a grouse cross the moor, they are down as quickly as if shot with a rifle. There

is a clap in the air as the two birds meet; but only one rises again. But the damage he does to game is really very slight; it is done in the full light of day, and not by stealth at night. He is no egg-stealer, no devastator of young broods, but a bold and open foe.

Sportsmen have often been censured for sacrificing all to game and destroying everything off their estates except that which contributes to their immediate enjoyment. Here is a direct instance to the contrary; and in like manner, where the osprey builds, care is taken to protect it, and all boats are hauled off the lake in order that no one may disturb it during the breeding season. The decapitation of birds is often effected by telegraph wires; they come with such speed that the wire acts as a knife and they are instantly executed. At one time the grouse along a certain line of railway killed themselves in such numbers against the wires that a young woman made a very good profit by picking them up every morning and selling them; finding, however, that the dealer gave her less money for headless grouse, she very neatly sewed the heads on, and so obtained full value. Quick as they are of eye, grouse cannot escape the fox, whose cunning approach is in such direct contrast to the defiant sweep of the falcon. One day when snow was on the ground a fox was observed going round in a wide circle; the next time he went round, the circle was contracted; and so he continued gradually decreasing the circle, till suddenly, with a great bound, he sprang on some object in the centre. By some feathers this was afterwards found to have been a mallard. Had the fox gone straight at his object the bird would have been alarmed, but by going round he deceived the bird into the impression that he was merely passing.

Up in Scotland the fox is as cunning as ever he was in fabled story, and perhaps people have learned a little from him. Water-bailiffs are sent up the rivers at certain times to prevent "burning the water," which is spearing the salmon by torchlight on the spawning beds. The neighbours generally collect in a quiet sort of way for this amusement. The burning cross has not gone the rounds to gather the clansmen together for many a long, long day, but still there are ways and means of thought-reading without Mr. Bishop. One of the residents' daughters was employed by the minister to distribute tracts from house to house. When any one discovered that the bailiffs were out of the way, the innocent girl was sent round with tracts, at which signal the neighbours prepared for battle with the salmon at night. This looks like Reynard's craft. The stoat is nearly as clever. Of all birds the wariest is the curlew, who acts as sentinel to all the moor and water fowl, and is hated by every gunner who has tried to get near them. His wild cry puts the whole flock on the wing. Mr. Speedy one day saw a curlew suddenly rise from the moor, and soar up fifty yards, screaming, and as suddenly drop again. He found that a stoat had

seized a bird, which flew up with it till loss of blood and pain brought it to the ground. The best bait for a stoat is one of his own species. Kill a stoat, and set a trap with it, and if there is another stoat in the vicinity he is sure to come, not to help his worn and weary brother, but to stick his teeth into him. Badgers are equally cannibalistic, and enjoy "long pig" of their own kind. Badgers are down on young rabbits, and will dig out a nest of them as well as a man with a spade; and on some

estates they are so numerous and destructive that the keepers are obliged to take special pains to thin them out. In spite of which, Mr. Speedy, writing in the true spirit of a naturalist and sportsman, suggests that where badgers are plentiful a few should be captured and carried to estates at a distance, in order that the species may not be exterminated. Every one associates trout with open water and a running stream - the very word trout brings up the idea of rushing water - yet Mr. Speedy gives some instances of trout living in wells. He thinks that a salmon cannot see when out of water, owing to the construction of its eyes.

So much has been written about grouse lately, a propos of the season, that we have intentionally postponed that well-known subject till now. Mr. Speedy's book contains simple but at the same time thoroughly trustworthy instructions, by following which the youngest sportsman may comport himself discreetly in the field. Indeed, any one going to the Highlands for the first time could not do better than take this volume with him as a practical handbook. It explains the method adopted in shooting grouse, black game, mountain hares, ptarmigan, and wild fowl, besides describing the way in which deer are stalked. Not only fresh men but experienced sportsmen will find valuable hints in these pages; but while the book is so written that it may be readily used as a guide, it is not a handbook in the accepted meaning of the word. There is nothing cut and dry; the sportsman is not told to do this or that, as the tourist is told to do this cathedral or that picture; yet at the same time minute details are given. Many sportsmen who go up straight to the Highlands from London know really nothing at all of the rationale of the sport they pursue. They are put in a "grouse fort" and bang away at the birds they see approaching them, but of the reason why grouse are driven, of the habits of the bird, they are entirely ignorant. And the same may be said of many a wealthy "potter" who has been placed in a favourable position and blazed away with a double express at the deer compelled to pass him. He might as well stand by a gateway in an English meadow, and fire at a herd of cows driven through it. He might reckon on hitting one or two, be "blooded", and go home proud as Nimrod. No man can ever be a real sportsman unless he has lived among and studied the denizens of the forest in their home; and no one but he, morally speaking, has a right to shoot them.

The writer of this book has evidently been personally familiar with every species of wild creature that lives in the Highlands for years, and speaks of what he has seen and done. On the vexed question of grouse disease it is his opinion that the cause must be sought in something more than overstocking or the thinning out of birds and beasts of prey; in short, the so-called balance of nature has nothing to do with it. He believes its causes to be mostly atmospheric, and of an epidemic character. The salmon disease he considers is traceable in a great measure to the fish being unable to get back to sea after spawning. A salmon direly afflicted with the fungus was placed in an iron cage in the sea, and, although it remained very thin from confinement, it entirely recovered from its miserable disorder. In reference to deer, Mr. Speedy records a day's sport during which he saw two thousand deer - in fact, he was so troubled with the numbers that he had a difficulty in picking out what he wanted. A great deal has been said about the game laws and the seventy of these feudal institutions, but what shall be said

of the modern fish laws? For thoughtlessly discharging a gun at a vagrant a farmer was fined five shillings, and about the same time a fellow who had been poaching salmon was fined, including costs, £80. This sort of thing brings the law into contempt.

# Charles Jefferies

*Nancie D. Jefferies Cator*

Ten years after the birth of Richard Jefferies, in November 1848, at Coate Farm Swindon, my great-grandmother, Elizabeth Jefferies presented to her husband James, a third son. Born in November 1858, and named Charles, I believe after his maternal grandfather Charles Gyde, the child, as the youngest member of the family, soon became known as 'little Charlie'. From the letters of Richard to Aunt Ellen it is clear that he took an interest in his little brother and builds an amusing, if incomplete, picture of the child's character and interests.

Other sources reveal a little more of Charlie's childhood, for example he once told me that one of his little jobs was to carry cider and bread and cheese to the workers in the fields. Also, Samuel Looker recorded that Charles was Richard's companion in some of the adventures of his boyhood; and cousin Florence Bott, in a letter (undated) to my mother, following the production of the family tree in the 1920s wrote, with reference to her childhood: 'Your father (Charles) and I were the young ones then. I used to be terribly shy of Richard. I remember getting into terrible trouble with him because I laughed at his letter Z in the name Lizzie that he had cut on the wall looking towards Snodshill. They were cut *backwards*, and there they are to this day. I wonder if your father remembers that. I always loved Coate so much, we had such happy days there. Even now, if I could live there I would, but like so many other things that is only a dream.'

It gives me pleasure to be able to quote this letter, especially in view of the sad picture of family life painted by Edna Manning in her *Modem Appraisal*. It is good to know that there were also happy times, and it does appear to me that all three brothers had many interests, including the freedom of the countryside, and enjoyed many country pursuits, such as swimming, rowing and shooting, as recorded by Richard in letters to Aunt Ellen and Oswald Crawford. I would guess that fishing in Coate Water would have been a further pastime since, when Charles came to live with us in 1931, his long since laid-up fishing tackle came with him!

To return to Charlie's childhood - after re-reading chapters XV and XVI of *Bevis* I feel convinced that little Charlie, who runs the errands and follows commands, is a true portrait of Charlie Jefferies. His ascent into the ash tree 'agile as a squirrel' and his perilous descent seem particularly typical of the energetic and very physical little boy who comes to me from the few records that have survived.

Also, of course, there were religious and educational aspects of life to be attended to - Father James saw to that, and Charlie, with the rest of the family, attended the Parish Church regularly. The family also attended services held by the clergy in the house and barn at Coate, at which James assisted. This is recollected by Charles himself in his interview recorded in the *Pall Mall Gazette* in 1891. He also recalled that James read to his family from the Bible, 'explaining and elucidating as he went on', as he did also when reading Shakespeare to them.

As to schooling, Richard wrote to Aunt Ellen in 1871, 'Charlie goes to school.' He was then thirteen, and what preceded this event in the way of education remains a mystery. I do remember that my mother (Charles's daughter Dorothy) told me that, at some stage, Charles (as previously Richard) lived with Aunt Ellen, and that she sent them both to Dulwich College but I have been unable to verify this.

The next information I can trace, regarding Charles comes from Edward Thomas's biography of Richard in which he states that before James was obliged to sell the farm in 1878, both Harry and Charles worked on the farm.



*Charles Jefferies. Photograph taken in May 1879*

Thus times changed and in 1879, it would appear that Charles was living with Aunt Ellen, his parents having moved to Bath. I believe this to be correct, as I have in my possession a copy of Richard's book *Wild Life in a Southern County*; in it is the inscription 'C. Jefferies, Shanklin Villa, Sydenham'. It would seem quite feasible that Charles should step into his sister Sarah's place at Sydenham since she had married and moved to Guildford in 1875. I think it possible that it was from Aunt Ellen's that Charles attended Finsbury Technical College, as is stated in a reference which Professors W E Ayrton FRS and John Perry ME wrote for Charles in 1885, declaring 'Before entering our service he was a pupil at Finsbury Technical College, so that our acquaintance with his character has lasted for several years.' The professors' rooms were at 73 Great Eastern Street, London EC, and Charles was employed in the examination of frames of instruments as they came in from the manufacturers, and in

winding ammeters and voltmeters and in fitting them together. His work is described as 'painstaking and industrious'.

In 1880 Charles's mother Elizabeth gave him, on his 22nd birthday, a beautifully bound 4-volume Bible set 'In memory of his dear kind Grandpapa'. I assume she referred to her own father, Charles Gyde, and, since they were printed in 1849, I am led to the idea that they had belonged to him.

Charles left the professors in 1885. It is possible that it was then that he moved to Guildford, perhaps to be near his sister Sarah Billing and, as has been suggested, to work at Billings printing works.

After Richard's death in 1887, Charles received three letters from Walter Besant, concerning arrangements he wished to make with Charles for a journey together in and around Swindon, to gather material for his biography of Richard. He listed Coate Farm, the church and churchyard, Old Swindon and anything else Charles might suggest. The meeting took place in February 1888, and they made their pilgrimage together in a pony and trap.

On 29 May 1889 Charles, then residing at 27 Farnham Road, Guildford and recorded as a tobacconist, married Louisa Reeve of Guildford at the parish church of St Mary the Virgin. Louisa's family were butchers from Bungay in Suffolk and, according to the address in Louisa's bible, dated 1877, also of Marlborough, Wiltshire. Charles and Louisa were still living at the tobacconist shop when their first child, Dorothy Reeve (my mother), was born, on 10 May 1890. I remember the shop, which my mother pointed out to me as a child, but it is now demolished.

In 1891 Charles was interviewed for his article in the *Pall Mall Gazette* and revealed some serious thinking on the subject of Richard's work *The Story of My Heart* and expressed his belief that 'the opinions there enunciated were the expression of one groping in the dark along a painful way for a gleam of truth. These sceptical views were held only for a time, and I know that he died listening with faith and love to the words contained in the old Book.'

Charles revealed, also, that Richard took an interest in what he was reading and expressed his opinions. 'I was reading Knox's work on the "Races of Men", Charles writes, 'and Richard told me that he acquiesced in the views of the author to a greater extent than he did those of Darwin, though he admired his genius as a writer.' I believe this indicates that Richard regarded Charles's intellect with respect, and worthy of his attention.

By 1892, there was a further addition to the Jefferies family when Dorothy's little brother Richard Oliver Geary was born. Named after his author uncle Richard, Dick, as he became known as, was the treasured son of the household and the apple of his parents' eyes. Dorothy too loved him dearly. It is easy to imagine this happy little family, who later removed to 'Waverley', York Road, Guildford - very near to the Billing household at 'Arncliffe', Nightingale Road. At 'Waverley' Charles was sub-postmaster in his small Post Office. ('Waverley' is still a Post Office today.) From this address Dorothy attended Guildford High School for Girls, a school of The Church School Company, with her cousins Helen and Christine Billing (daughters of Robert



and Sarah - Charles's sister). Uncle Robert, ever generous, was pleased to help with the fees. Dick attended the Guildford Royal Grammar School and was a chorister at Christ Church. He was left-handed which concerned Charles, who was himself ambidextrous, but it amused him to tease, in good humour, and often addressed his son as 'left-handed Dick'.

Religion played an important part in the family's life, as it did also in the Billing home. (The Billings were still holding family prayers, with the servants present, each morning in the 1920s when I was a child.) Regular attendance at church was the custom for both families. Dorothy recalled a very happy childhood, enjoying school, and art lessons, skating and tobogganing in winter, and tennis (probably on the Billings' tennis court) in summer. Reading of Shakespeare continued in the Jefferies family and Dorothy joined the Billing girls' play-reading group.

The two families remained close and Uncle Robert regarded Dorothy and Dick with much affection, giving each a gold watch and a beautiful mahogany bookcase on their twenty-first birthdays.

There was a family dog 'Boy', who should not be forgotten, specially treasured by Charles. My mother (Dorothy) told the story of how Charles, believing Boy to have strayed, was anxiously whistling and calling, while the dog was quietly standing behind him, appearing to be laughing! Boy would sit at table at Christmas time - there was an old photograph (sadly lost) showing him sitting on a chair, with a paper hat on his head. His most skilful trick was to toss a sugar lump from his nose into the air, and catch it as it descended. Thus childhood passed for Dorothy and Dick, and on leaving school, Dorothy learnt photography and the painting of photographs. She joined the Guildford Operatic Society, taking part in singing and dancing, in the productions, and it was there that she met Reginald George Herbert (my father), to whom she became engaged to be married. Reginald was the eldest son of Harry George Herbert of 'Westbury House', Millmead, Guildford, where he managed his own brewery - The Castle Brewery. Reginald worked in Pall Mall, in the Royal Exchange Insurance Company. I believe that Dick worked at Billings after leaving school. How could Charles and his family, in their happiness, imagine the tragedy that lay ahead not only for them, but for millions of families in Britain and all over the Continent?

In 1913, sorrow came to the Billing family with the death of Sarah, and to Charles, the loss of his only sister.

Times changed beyond recall, with the advent of 1914 and all that it brought of suffering and sorrow. Dorothy's fiancé Reg, who was in the Territorial Army, in the 5th Queen's Royal Regiment, was posted at once to India with the whole Regiment and it was nearly six years before he returned. Dorothy herself left photography to work in the Westminster Bank. Charles and Louisa played their part by taking in Belgian refugees, and Helen Billing took up Red Cross nursing, while Chrissie, now a BA, went to teach Latin to the choristers of Wells Cathedral. It was during the dark days of 1916 that Reg's father arrived at 'Waverley' with the sad news of Reg's death on active service. One can imagine the rejoicing when a correcting telegram arrived, declaring him to be wounded in the head and back, but recovering.

In 1917 Dick became engaged and then joined the thousands who went to serve their country. Having trained for the Royal Tank Corps at Bovington Camp, he was commissioned and sent to France, a second lieutenant, and was quickly promoted to captain. Dorothy remembered how proud Charles and Louisa were of their son, yet how they feared for him - and with reason for he met his death on 29 September 1918, aged 26. He was awarded the Military Cross posthumously and is buried at the British Cemetery, Bellicourt, France. I believe that Charles and Louisa never fully recovered from their great sorrow.

Reg Herbert returned from Mesopotamia in 1919 - Company Sergeant Major and holder of the Military Medal. Dorothy recalled that the regiment marched up Guildford High Street, all so thin that they looked like walking skeletons. Dorothy and Reg were married in August 1919 and made their home at 'The Bungalow' (later changed to 'Coate'), South Hill, Guildford. Perhaps the new family which followed brought ease of sorrow to Charles and Louisa and a new interest in their lives.

I now come to my own personal memories of Charles Jefferies, my grandfather. I remember him as a kind and loving man who always greeted us, literally, with open arms, and addressed me affectionately as 'Left-handed Dick'. (I had inherited the left-handed family characteristic and it pleased him to identify me with his lost son.) My great delight was to bury my face in his 'Father Christmas' beard! When we called in at the little Post Office it seemed to me that he was always short of breath, and shuffled rather than walked. My mother explained that he had always been delicate since he had suffered from rheumatic fever. My grandfather kept cards for us at the Post Office, on which he would place penny stamps until there were twelve, and then a shilling would be added to our Post Office books. This example of saving seems to me to be out of character, since my mother told me that my grandmother was obliged to hide around the house little envelopes of money for the paying of various bills, as Charles was a secret gambler (in a small way) and enjoyed an illicit bet on the horses!

When I was seven, in 1930, Grandfather retired and he and Louisa had a small bungalow built at Hashing Lane, Godalming. Sadly, they were not to enjoy their new home together for very long: the summer after they moved in, they took a holiday at Budleigh Salterton in Devon. While they were there my grandmother had her first stroke, and my mother hastened to Devon to arrange for their return. From that time on, Grandmother was confined to bed and a companion was engaged to look after her, until she died in March 1931, aged 70. She is buried in Guildford Cemetery, very near to the graves of Sarah Billing and Aunt Ellen Harrild.

Grandfather came to live with us at Coate, Guildford. He was with us for three years and it was then that I came to know more of him. He had a large room upstairs, over the dining room, with a view of St Catherine's and the surrounding hills. My mother helped him to make it his own, bringing the new furniture from Godalming, the family pictures and photographs and his bookcase (the one given him by Robert Billing) containing some copies of Richard's books which he collected from various sources, including 'Frank Lasham's Library' which had sold up and closed. There was a copy of Besant's *Eulogy* and Salt's biography of Richard and of Courtney Lewis's

*Life and Works of George Baxter*; also a *History of Selborne*, and of Swindon. There were large illustrated leather-bound copies of Dickens, a copy of the works of William Shakespeare, and his precious bibles, the gift of his mother, which contained several souvenirs, including an envelope containing locks of hair from baby Dorothy and baby Dick, and another dated 1881 of Toby', which was Richard Jeff cries' pet name for his son Harold. On the top of the bookcase rested a bust of William Shakespeare, a beautiful case containing Dick's war medals, and a little chest of drawers which Grandfather told me was Richard Jefferies' first piece of carpentry. It is now in the keeping of the Museum at Coate. On the walls, my father hung for Charles two very large photographs of Dick, in uniform, two large framed photographs of Richard Jefferies' memorial in Salisbury Cathedral, a picture of the battle of Waterloo and, over the fireplace, a watercolour dated 1874 - painted the year before her marriage - by Sarah Jefferies (later Billing) of two cows at the gate of a field - a nice picture which now hangs in my front room. There were also two tiny pictures of Coate Farm: a printed one by Fred Gyde, and a pencil sketch, thought to be by John Luckett Jefferies, brother of James.

The books were always at my disposal and I spent many happy hours looking at the wood-cut pictures in the bibles, and the faintly coloured pictures in the copies of Dickens. Grandfather would gladly help me find information in the encyclopaedias, especially regarding myths and history in which I became interested. Usually, I would find him sitting in his chair either smoking his pipe, reading or snoozing. He had a small copy of *The Pocket RJ* which he liked to dip into. When Grandfather went out, down to the town, he always took a little canvas stool with him because he became breathless and needed to sit down. This was my mother's idea, as she had been rather disconcerted to find him one day, sitting on the steps of the old Corn Exchange. On Sundays he liked to go to St Nicholas Church, which was very 'high' and held services in Latin, which he enjoyed. He often quoted from the Bible -short verses such as, 'everything works together for good for those who love God' (Romans 8.28) or 'The Lord will provide' (Genesis 22.8). And from Dickens, he would use the expression 'Barkis is willin' from *David Copperfield*.

Grandfather continued his interest in birds and animals and, in winter, after breakfast, he would cut up bread for the birds and throw it to them from the verandah, and then sit and watch them enjoying their meal. It was while he was with us that I gave my mother no peace until she agreed to buy, for seven and sixpence, a puppy, on sale in the local cake shop! Grandfather became devoted to 'Kim' and one day when I guess I had worn him out with my constant attentions, he disappeared. Grandfather, who was sitting downstairs at the time, watched me searching for about half an hour, and then he said: The puppy is under my chair. He needed a rest. You should not keep on tormenting him.' That was the only time I ever remember him reprimanding me.

When, in January 1934, Grandfather lay dying at one end of the house, I was in bed with a severe case of measles at the other end. Although not a word was said to me on the subject, I guessed when the funeral took place, as my mother came into my room in black, and brought Aunt Nellie to look after me for the day. When I was allowed to

get up and go downstairs, I remember I simply asked my mother how Grandfather was. Her eyes filled with tears -the only time I had ever seen her cry - and she told me he had died. I know she loved him very dearly. He was a good, kind, generous man who loved his family and I am sure when he died aged 73 he also 'believed, with faith and love, in the words contained in the old Book.'

Charles is buried with Louisa in Guildford Cemetery. The commemoration stone includes, with their own names, a tribute to Dick; and the ashes of Dorothy, my mother and Reginald, my father, are scattered there. They were 'lovely and pleasant in their lives' and it pleases me to know that 'in death they are not divided.'

# An Uncomfortable Antiquary: Richard Jefferies and Victorian Local History

*John Chandler*

'It is well to have written thus, provided that no trace of having done so I remains.' Thus Edward Thomas condemned a high-flown passage in Jefferies' Swindon history,<sup>1</sup> and his *bon mot* has been applied, with considerable justification, to Jefferies' strivings in the local history field generally. But traces do remain; some of these juvenilia were published, and they provide legitimate evidence about the author's development. Attempting to view them in context may help to explain why, at a crucial period in his short life, he rejected the sophistry of the contemporary local historians, and allowed his genius free rein to develop in the way which we now celebrate.

Jefferies claimed to have begun collecting materials for a Swindon history in about 1861, when he would just have been entering teenage.<sup>2</sup> In 1867, as a reporter (and still a teenager) on the *North Wilts Herald*, he wrote 21 instalments of a history of Malmesbury, followed by eight on the history and antiquities of the Swindon area. In 1870, he contributed to another local newspaper eleven instalments of a history of Cirencester, which ends abruptly at the civil war.<sup>3</sup> Plans were announced, but not realized, to publish both Malmesbury and Swindon works after their serialization. The newspaper proprietor perhaps scented a marketing opportunity, and in Malmesbury's case the gap was filled in 1876 by a local printer, James Bird. The preface to his history suggests a certain antagonism towards rivals: 'Important information', Bird tells us, 'was promised by several enthusiastic literary friends on their being informed of the proposal for publishing the history; but, alas, when the time came for their proffered assistance, *little* was received from those from whom much was expected, and *none* from several of those who promised little.'<sup>4</sup> Jefferies' Swindon work was eventually published in 1896, and part of the Malmesbury serialization in 1985.<sup>5</sup> The history of Cirencester was rediscovered and described by John Pearson during the 1970s.<sup>6</sup>

During the period of these works, 1867-72, Jefferies was continuing to collect material for a history of Swindon ('itself alone', as he says), and by the end of 1872 was preparing to issue separately that part of it relating to Swindon's leading family, the Goddards.<sup>2</sup> This appeared in 1873, with some financial help from the family, and had nearly sold out by November 1873.<sup>7</sup>

Meanwhile Jefferies was earning money as a journalist, and perhaps drawing occasionally on his Swindon material. In September 1873 he read a paper to the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, entitled 'Swindon: its history and antiquities'. And in 1875, for *Frasers*, he contributed 'The Story of Swindon', describing the recent transformation of the town, and activities within the railway works. But by 1875, or shortly afterwards, his interest in writing conventional local history was pushed to one side. 'I have commenced the second edition, or second

volume as it will in effect be of Goddard,' he wrote in a letter in November 1875, 'but I cannot say at what date it will appear, for my time is now so occupied with literary work.'<sup>8</sup>

Thereafter local history and antiquities took on a different role in his writings. They gave depth to his understanding of his surroundings, and contributed to some of his most memorable passages, such as the 'man in the tumulus'.<sup>9</sup> And as his astute descriptions of contemporary life have matured, they have become key historical documents in their own right. *Hodge* in particular is a remarkable source for social conditions in Victorian rural Wiltshire. But after 1875 the local history establishment of his day could disregard him. *The Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine* did not report his death, and only after 1893, through George Dartnell's enthusiasm, was his importance recognized by the Wiltshire Society.<sup>10</sup> The society's *Magazine* for June 1894 has on the dust-wrapper an appeal for Wiltshire books wanted for the library - it includes 'R. Jefferies. Any of his works'.

Many Jefferies' students have considered how this early 'local history' phase foreshadowed his later development. I propose to turn the discussion around, by looking at the local history context in which Jefferies was working, and seeing how - if at all - he fitted into it.

Today's aspiring local historian has unrestricted access to a range of facilities. Books, including specialist collections, are freely available in public libraries. Many obscure sources are provided on microfilm, computer generated indexes may be consulted, original records are preserved and publicly accessible in county record offices, and many important documents have been translated or described in published editions. Instruction in the techniques of research is provided through extra-mural classes, and local history societies offer an informal support service of fellow enthusiasts. Many teenagers are introduced to locally based historical research techniques in school and college.

None of these encouragements, thus described, existed in Victorian Wiltshire, and it would be absurd to assess Jefferies' efforts in local historiography as one might a modern undergraduate dissertation, or even a popular guidebook. But what did confront a young Wiltshireman such as Jefferies when he tried his hand at local history during the 1860s and 1870s?

A great farrago of intellectual pursuits - archaeology, ecclesiology, genealogy, geology, palaeontology, topography, botany, folklore, local history - had emerged as the proper study of a leisured gentleman; and it was natural that like-minded men (and occasionally women) should form learned societies to discuss their interests, and to show off their prowess in pursuit of arcane truths.

In Wiltshire the impetus to create such a society occurred in 1852, when the important antiquary and topographical writer John Britton intimated that he wished to sell his Wiltshire books and manuscripts.<sup>11</sup> An octogenarian, he correctly envisaged that this move would stimulate the formation of a society to purchase the material and carry on his interests. In 1853 the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History

Society was formed, and rapidly embraced in its museum and library all the appropriate '-ologies' and '-ographies'. Its influence on the direction of most aspects of Wiltshire studies has been incalculable ever since. Venerable now, in Jefferies' day the society was relatively new, and indeed it was not until 1874 (when Jefferies began turning his back on local history), that it moved into the museum and library in Long Street, Devizes, which we all associate with it.

So, one might imagine, such a society was tailor-made to nurture Jefferies' interests and meet his requirements for books, papers and advice. But no. A published membership list exists, as at December 1870,<sup>12</sup> and a cursory examination is enough to determine the social structure of the society at this date. Of 326 members, 266 lived in Wiltshire. Clergymen accounted for 93, and 24 were titled or MPs. Only nine were women. The list may be compared with the then current issue of *Kelly's Directory of Wiltshire*, published in 1867. Kelly's directories divide society into sheep, goats, and not-even goats. Thus the nobility, gentry, clergy and persons of independent means are included in a so-called 'court' directory. Businessmen, professional men, farmers and master tradesmen are listed in a separate sequence for each town and village. Other ranks - employees, most women, and anyone not a householder - are omitted.

Of 266 Wiltshire members 204 appear in the court directory, with another 21 likely candidates had the directory been more current; thus about 85 per cent of the membership was drawn from those echelons of Victorian society above 'trade'. Of the remaining 40 (the goats) more than half occur in the 'trade' section, as successful businessmen, farmers, solicitors, schoolmasters, or surgeons, mostly living close to Devizes. Only about fifteen names are absent, and some of these might have been recent arrivals or accidental omissions.

The name of Richard Jefferies, needless to say, does not occur in the list. The society was not for the likes of him, and he was therefore denied intercourse with fellow-enthusiasts; and, more importantly, debarred access to the tools of the local historian's trade. This is important, because it sets in context his 1873 Swindon lecture.

The society held a three-day annual meeting at a town in or adjacent to Wiltshire. For September 1873 Swindon was chosen,<sup>13</sup> and on the first day the annual business meeting and president's address were followed by two lectures, dinner at the Goddard Arms Hotel, loyal toasts, and a 'conversazione' (symposium), at which further papers were read. The second and third days were devoted to outings and a further conversazione. The programme was arranged by a special local committee, which met during August and proposed six names as possible speakers.<sup>14</sup> Jefferies was not among them, but one committee member was Nelson Goddard, who had corresponded with him over his family. Perhaps it was Goddard who called on Jefferies to give his paper - with a month's notice or less - as a kindly but misguided attempt to further the young writer's reputation, when one of the suggested speakers declined.

Jefferies was down to read the first paper, on 'Swindon, its history and antiquities', after the presidential address (by Ambrose Goddard), thus sandwiched between him and the Rev. A C Smith (a great luminary of the society at this period), who spoke

about 'Certain Wiltshire traditions, charms and superstitions'. With hindsight one might feel that Jefferies would have been more comfortable speaking on Smith's subject, rather than his own. After these papers there was the formal dinner, and then Jefferies attended the *conversazione*.<sup>15</sup>

Intimidated by the occasion no doubt, Jefferies gave a dull lecture.<sup>16</sup> His position was unenviable, because he was painfully aware that, when the society had last met in Swindon, in 1860, the much venerated Wiltshire historian, Canon John Jackson, had filled precisely the same slot with a paper (subsequently published)<sup>17</sup> on 'Swindon and its neighbourhood'. This lies behind Jefferies' opening remark, that he would endeavour, 'as far as possible, to avoid repetition of what had already appeared upon the subject'. Jackson, incidentally, was very probably in the audience.

In essence he gave the society what he thought they were expecting, a few Roman coins and a Roman 'station'; stray references to medieval manorial owners; a guest appearance by Oliver Cromwell (always a great favourite at such gatherings); and a eulogy of the Goddard family. Anticipating perhaps the essentially conservative nature of the gathering, he introduced a political aside - This irresponsible power vested in one man must often have led to great abuses. What a contrast to the ballot box of to-day - when we seem about to err on the other hand, by diffusing power too widely.' As an outsider he was blissfully unaware of the society's rule that no religious or political discussions shall be permitted at meetings of the society;<sup>18</sup> and he compounded his *faux pas* by a closing remark, which must have caused some embarrassed shuffles: 'Irrespective of all party politics, I feel that I may confidently say that there are numbers who at the expected election in the spring will repeat that ancient motto, and say "Goddard's the man". We know that real, that is, constitutional freedom, is his plan.'

My contention, that Jefferies, despite his enthusiasm for the subject, could only have felt estranged from the local history establishment in Wiltshire, is supported by the experiences of two other local historians, a few years his senior.

Edward Kite was born in Devizes, a grocer's son, in 1832.<sup>19</sup> As a young man working in his father's shop he was involved in the movement to found the Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society in 1853. In 1855 the society's honorary officers, feeling overburdened with administrative work, offered him a small salary with the title 'Assistant Secretary'. He became, in effect, the society's part-time dogsbody, and was encouraged in his work, both for the society and as author and illustrator of antiquarian books, by the great Canon Jackson, who was also later to help Jefferies in his researches. Kite had problems with society members, mostly it seems over collecting their subscriptions, and his competence was occasionally doubted.

In 1864 Jackson retired from active involvement in the society, and Kite lost his champion. The new management (still to the fore when Jefferies lectured nine years later) disliked Kite and in December 1866 sacked him, 'having failed for some time past to discharge satisfactorily the duties of Assistant Secretary...' A subsequent letter from Jackson to Kite muses, 'For I had a little surmise that (for various reasons) you might possibly not find the new Pharaohs of Devizes altogether so familiar and easy to



work under, as the old one of Leigh Delamere [i.e. Jackson himself]'. Despite the rift, Kite continued his historical researches for the rest of a very long life (he died aged 98), but published nothing in the society's *Magazine* after 1866. Like Jefferies he used the columns of the local newspaper and other periodicals as his publishing medium, and boycotted the society. Not until 1924 was his antagonism towards the society finally spent. Writing about the events of 1866, his biographer has commented: 'it does not take much imagination to see that dunning respected citizens for overdue subscriptions and chasing books and manuscripts, borrowed but not returned, would be no easy or congenial task to the young grocer...'

A more light-hearted instance of the social gulf between the society and aspiring historians of Jefferies' station is provided by Edward Slow.<sup>20</sup> A Wilton wheelwright and carriage-builder, he was seven years older than Jefferies, and observed the society's three-day meeting at Wilton in 1870. He had begun to write comic dialect verse, and had befriended a Salisbury printer and bookseller, Frederick Blake, who was a member. In consequence Slow wrote and Blake published a poem, 'Tha girt harcheology', which lampoons the society with cruel but perceptive accuracy. Slow noticed that many members seemed to have come for the food, and snored through the lectures. Wherever they went on their outings, 'Nice veasts wur ael spread out; among tha woold anticketies, which thay wur come about.' Inspecting old ruins is fine, concludes the poet, but he has a better suggestion: 'Za-poussin thay wur ael ta meet, Ta renevate tha ruin; of poor vokes houssen that thay zees, wat good ud thay be do-un...' Slew's interest in dialect lay not only in its comic opportunities; like some society members he was concerned to record its variety. He subsequently also wrote a history of Wilton, and eventually became a member, dying in 1925.

The sad truth elaborated here - that the Victorian local history establishment was an elite, tending to show scorn, if not actual hostility, to the efforts of one of Jefferies' background - had its parallel in most, perhaps all, other counties.<sup>21</sup> Such exclusivity was bad for Jefferies as local historian, but it was also bad for the discipline itself. It led to an incestuous preoccupation with the history of squire and parson, church and manor, which continued well into the 20th century. But before returning to this issue, it may be worthwhile to scrutinize Jefferies as historian, noticing his use of available sources.

Whatever sparked Jefferies' local history interest, his method of executing it sprang from his journalistic experience. *Reporting; Editing and Authorship*, his pamphlet published in 1873 while this interest was still active, prescribes that, 'the reporter, while going about the country studying as he goes its topography, antiquities, traditions and general characteristics, will have ample opportunities of amassing materials for original sketches in the paper...'<sup>22</sup>

Another early essay, 'How to read books' presumably describes Jefferies' own methods at notetaking.<sup>23</sup> He urges the writing of short summaries, the more condensed the better. 'Perhaps a hundred volumes may be condensed into one note-book.' He also acknowledges one of the historian's most important skills: The comparison of one

book with another has a most beneficial effect, and should always be done when practicable... Very frequently two authors writing upon the same subject do so with diametrically opposite ends in view, and their conclusions are tinctured with prejudice. By perusing and comparing both, a true conception of the matter is obtained.'

Can we see the fruits of such methods embodied in his serialized histories? When Jefferies wrote about Malmesbury the standard history, by J.M. Moffatt, was sixty years old. Some portions of Jefferies' writing are mere reworkings. Thus his chapter 18, on the Marquess of Wharton and the Poetess of Malmesbury, could be (and doubtless was) derived entirely from Moffatt. 'Though deformed in her person,' wrote Moffatt about the poetess Mary Chandler, 'such was the goodness of her character, that a worthy country gentleman of considerable fortune, took a journey of one hundred miles to Bath to pay her his addresses, which she declined; as she had determined to live single.' And here is Jefferies: 'Her person was unfortunately somewhat deformed, but her mind and morality amply made up for her physical disfigurement; so that she attracted the notice of a gentleman who came from a great distance to offer her his hand, which, however, the poetess declined. She appears to have lived single her whole life.'<sup>24</sup>

In many other passages, too, Jefferies leans heavily on Moffatt ('plagiarism', would be hardly too severe a judgement). And there is another instance of copying, even more barefaced. The final paragraphs of Jefferies' chapter 20,<sup>25</sup> about contemporary Malmesbury, consist almost entirely of a reworking of the Malmesbury entry in *Kelly's Directory of Wiltshire*, 1859. One glimpses the young journalist, a few more column inches to fill and the deadline upon him, grabbing at the nearest book on the office shelf, and trying to make literature out of the Victorian equivalent of a telephone directory.

To have to resort to writing of this kind is soul-destroying for any writer, and Jefferies was profoundly unhappy with the result. The Ed expresses himself very well satisfied with it, 'he wrote to his aunt, 'but I can't say that I am. It is my first attempt at that kind of writing - such is my only excuse.'<sup>26</sup>

Jefferies' serialized history of Swindon is generally regarded as a more satisfactory production. He had already for some years by 1867 been collecting, summarizing in notebooks and digesting relevant information from books which came his way, presumably following his own advice quoted above. Furthermore, no-one had written a full-length history of Swindon before, and so Jefferies was forced to flex his historian's muscles, picking up scraps where he could, evaluating information and reaching his own conclusions. He could not 'crib' from a Moffatt.

An example from 'Ancient Swindon' (the first chapter) illustrates the process.<sup>27</sup> Jefferies is discussing the derivation of the name and Swindon's various Domesday entries. His principal source was Canon Jackson's 1860 paper to the Wiltshire Society;<sup>17</sup> the juxtaposition of ideas and verbal similarities make this certain. The apprentice would naturally defer to the master's judgement anyway, and his was the only connected account of early Swindon which then existed.

Jackson's paper is brief, and Jefferies probably had a printed copy of it (or had made a full transcript of it). This is suggested at one point when he sticks his neck out by writing, '...the fifth was Ulward, the king's prebendary, whatever that may mean.' Surely he would not expose his ignorance, unless quite sure that Jackson did not understand the term either. Jackson does indeed signify this, but only by putting the words in apostrophes. Had Jefferies merely noted the paper in summary form, he would hardly have picked up so insignificant a nuance.

Jefferies undoubtedly embellished Jackson's account with material gleaned from other sources. Edward Thomas tells us that the historian and proprietor of the *Swindon Advertiser*, William Morris, used to lend Jefferies books.<sup>28</sup> He may also have had access to the library of the Swindon Mechanics' Institution through his uncle, William Hall,<sup>29</sup> although it probably then possessed few works of local history.<sup>30</sup> Jefferies, one assumes, scoured borrowed books from whatever source for Swindon references, took notes and returned them. Two embellishments are evidence that Jefferies had seen another of Canon Jackson's works, published in 1862.<sup>31</sup> Here the suggestion that Swindon derives from a personal name Sweyn is first mooted, and Jefferies elaborates on the idea.

The other reference is more telling: 'Under the Bishop of Bayeux,' writes Jefferies, 'there were two tenants: they were named Wadard, hence they were probably related.' Jackson, in his 1860 paper, does not mention Wadard; but in 1862 he states: 'Wadard was the name of one of the two tenants who in the Domesday Survey held land at Swindon under the Bishop of Bayeux.' This is clumsy. There were two tenants, but only one held under the bishop, as would have been apparent to Jefferies had he consulted a new edition of Wiltshire Domesday, published in 1865.<sup>32</sup> But Jefferies takes Jackson at face value, and compresses the information in his notebook. Referring to his notes for the newspaper history he comes away with the erroneous impression that both tenants were called Wadard, and publishes the error accordingly.

Even that does not end the Wadard saga. By 1872 a certain penny has dropped. William in Latin becomes 'Guilielmus', and Walter 'Gualterus'. If Wadard were to be Latinized the result would approximate to Guadardus -or Goddard. Jefferies mentioned this thought to Nelson Goddard in May 1872, and included it in his published *Memoir of the Goddards*.<sup>33</sup> He also commented to Goddard that he had looked through the whole of Wiltshire Domesday Book. In so doing, of course, he discovered his earlier mistake, and silently corrects it in the *Memoir*. 'In Domesday Book...', he writes, 'the Bishop of Bayeux holds Swindune and Wadard under him.' Modern scholarship, incidentally, does not link Wadard and Goddard.<sup>34</sup>

For Jefferies to attempt a history of Swindon was an undertaking fraught with frustration. Access to the few published sources was for Jefferies restricted and selective. And untutored in historical research techniques, he had presumably not acquired the palaeographical and linguistic skills needed for medieval documents. Unlike Canon Jackson, therefore, he was unequipped to connect the great tide of national history, noted from encounters in general textbooks, with its particular

consequences for Swindon. And yet he was aware that the evidence existed, scattered in family muniments, the Wiltshire Society's library, and the British Museum.

The frustration is glimpsed in a letter written to his aunt in 1867.<sup>35</sup> 'Here I have no books - no old monkish records to assist me - everything must be hunted out upon the spot. I visit every place I have to refer to, copy inscriptions, listen to legends, examine antiquities, measure this, estimate that; and a thousand other employments essential to a correct account take up my time. The walking I can do is something beyond belief. To give an instance. There is a book published some twenty years ago founded on a local legend. This I wanted, and have actually been to ten different houses in search of it; that is, have had a good fifty miles' walk, and as yet all in vain. However, I think I am on the right scent now, and believe I shall get it.' The book was *The Abbess of Shaftesbury*, a novel by Mrs May of Liddington; but when he referred to it in print (November 1867) he seems still not to have found it. But he was indeed on the right scent. Francis Goddard, with whom he began corresponding in September 1869, had had the book ever since 1846, and his inscribed copy is now in the Wiltshire Society's library.

Jefferies was a pertinacious researcher, especially for his work on the Goddard family, as is well seen in the series of eighteen letters, written to Francis and Nelson Goddard between 1869 and 1875.<sup>36</sup> Perhaps, had he chosen to continue along this somewhat sterile path, and had he lived, he would eventually have become a respected Wiltshire antiquary and genealogist, worthy to be mentioned alongside Edward Kite and Canon Jackson. But disillusionment at the jejune world of Victorian local history was growing, and the youthful enthusiasms were soon to be laid aside.

In the absence of books, so it appears from the letter quoted above, Jefferies resorted to what we might call fieldwork for his historical and topographical material. As early as 1867 he had realized that the dryasdust papers concocted and devoured by the Wiltshire Society's members were not the only history. 'One part of history', he wrote, 'is in a great measure founded upon tradition: it is that relating to the daily life of men not distinguished as having performed any great feat.' And again: 'Paradoxical as it may appear, the agricultural labourer though living in the present, and rarely careful to provide for the future, yet lives in the past. All his traditions, histories, songs and customs, have been handed down to him from time immemorial, his talk is of his forefathers, and he is himself becoming antiquated and out of date.'<sup>37</sup>

The seeds were germinating, therefore, long before Jefferies reached maturity as a writer. Besant believed that the turning point eventually came during his first year of marriage, 1874-5, when Jefferies 'brushed away the cobwebs from his brain, left the old things behind him for ever, and stepped out upon the greensward.'<sup>38</sup> Maybe, but Jefferies himself twice described the moment and the circumstance.

At some date after November 1875<sup>39</sup> he paid a visit to the British Museum, to research the Goddards. The visit had been mooted in a letter of 1873: 'I would propose to include all that could be learnt in the British Museum Library'; and a later letter

adds that he could not afford to have copies made, so would examine the volumes himself. The predictable result of such naivety can be imagined.

The earlier of two accounts to be published (although the later to be written) is an essay, 'Pigeons at the British Museum', which appeared in 1884. The writer leaves the sunlight and enters the shade of the portico and hall. Under the reading-room dome the half-hearted light is stagnant and dull. He sits at a long desk and tries to read, but soon realises his mistake. The proliferation of books is like a heap of straw continually threshed and spread about, but empty. 'Nothing will ever be found in it. Those original grains of true thought were found beside the stream, the sea, in the sunlight, at the shady verge of woods. Let us leave this beating and turning over of empty straw; let us return to the stream and the hills; let us ponder by night in view of the stars.' And so the writer leaves the library and walks out into the sunlight.

That account has always been part of the Jefferies corpus.<sup>40</sup> But its significance, as the moment when local history, as opposed to book-learning in general, was rejected, only became clear in 1985 when George Miller identified and published an alternative final chapter written for *Round about a Great Estate*, probably in 1880.<sup>41</sup> The chapter is very illuminating. Jefferies describes various techniques of historical and genealogical research -examining manuscript pedigrees, copying inscriptions from tombstones, corresponding with antiquaries. He alludes to the exploits of pioneer Wiltshire archaeologists, Colt Hoare and Cunnington, he describes Cicely's (i.e. his wife Jessie's) scorn for the whole subject, but he decides that the only way to write local history properly is to visit the British Museum - 'The history of Okebourne Wick was in short to be found in London'. Here he encountered the medieval hundred rolls, charter rolls and similar, printed in Latin in huge folio volumes; he also found manuscripts, and spent a whole summer's day looking for a single name, which he eventually found. The enormity of the self-imposed task began to dawn. (Remember those words: '! would propose to include all that could be learnt in the British Museum Library'). There were 80 or 90 folio county histories, weighing some ten tons in total, and thousands of pamphlets, deeds, charters and unindexed documents.

'At the thought', Jefferies continues, 'the dome overhead seemed to descend upon my head like a vast extinguisher, putting out the vital spark of hope... The truth forced itself upon me that it was utterly impossible to write the history of little Okebourne Wick. No mortal mind could achieve it; no mortal patience was enduring enough, nor indeed any life sufficiently long.' Our author, sadder but wiser, caught the train home. He spread out all his antiquarian papers, and conceded defeat. Cicely congratulated him, swept the papers into her lap, and made a bonfire of them. 'With her own white hand she applied a match, the flames arose, and I must candidly own that I watched the blue smoke with a sigh of relief. Then we had a dish of strawberries in the orchard.'

Three comments will suffice. One is obvious, that Jefferies wrote the chapter, but then rejected it. The absolute break was too brutal, too irrevocable, for him to wish it printed. When he adapted it for 'Pigeons at the British Museum', he was facing death,

and he could readily use it for a more mystical or philosophical rejection of book-learning.

Secondly, Jefferies was not rejecting local history itself, but the strait-jacket imposed on it by the gentry and clergy who formed a barrier of exclusivity around it, and who dictated their own agenda. They thus imbued their subject with an aura of musty tedium from which a man like Jefferies eventually recoiled. Perhaps the dead hand of Victorian local historians can even take credit for helping to mould Jefferies' genius, by dissuading him from pursuing their course, and so channelling his energies elsewhere.

Thirdly, speaking personally as a local historian, I believe that Jefferies was a pioneer, inadvertently anticipating the course which sixty years later local history itself would begin to pursue. The discipline has blossomed since the last war, as archaeology, geography, sociology and a host of other subjects have influenced and been incorporated into it. This new local history was championed by a small group of iconoclasts, the best known of whom, William Hoskins, recalled his frustration during 1920s childhood holidays spent trying to interpret the patterns of farms, lanes and villages in the Devon countryside: 'I used to come home from these holidays and get histories of Devon out of the public library, but they never answered my questions or even seemed aware that such questions might be asked... So, forty years later, using various kinds of evidence and not least that of my own eyes (and conversations with farmers on the spot), I have answered some of the questions I used to ask in vain of other books.'<sup>42</sup>

Far from rejecting local history, Jefferies was pushing it in a new direction. Local historians were not ready during his lifetime to listen, but a century and more later we can return to his work with a new appreciation and a new admiration.<sup>43</sup>

## NOTES

(WAM = *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Magazine*)

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2. WAS Library, Devizes: letter to H N Goddard, 25.11.72
3. Described in Miller, George, and Matthews, Hugoe, *Richard Jefferies: a bibliographical study*, 1993, pp.37-40, 65, where their intended publication is also mentioned
4. Bird, James T., *History of the town of Malmesbury...*, 1876, preface
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8. WAS Library: letter to HNGoddard, 23.11.75
9. See collection by Grinsell, Leslie V., in *Trans. Newbury District Field Club*, vol.8(3), 1940, pp.216-26
10. WAM, vol.27,1893, pp.69-99

11. *Wiltshire Archaeological and Natural History Society, 1853-1953: a centenary history*, 1953, pp.5-8
12. Bound into some copies of *WAM*, vol.12
13. The proceedings are described in *WAM*, vol.14,1874, pp.121-55
14. *WAS Library*: *WAS first minute book*, pp.103,105
15. In a letter (*WAS Library*: letter to Francis Goddard, 20.9.73) he discusses a paper given at the conversazione which was not subsequently published
16. *WAM*, vol.14,1874, pp. 180-6
17. *WAM*, vol.7,1861, pp.123-44
18. *WAM*, vol.1,1854, p.x
19. Kite's career, including passages quoted, is described by Bradby, Edward, in *WAM*, vol.78,1983, pp.82-6
20. See Chandler, John (ed.), *Figgety pooden: the dialect verse of Edward Slaw*, 1982
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22. Reprinted in *Richard Jefferies Society Journal*, vol.2,1993, pp.3-12; vol.3, 1994, pp.3-6 (quotation from vol.3, p.3)
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24. Quotations from Moffatt, J.M., *History of the town of Malmesbury...*, 1805, pp.233-4; *Return to Jefferies' land*, 1985, pp.54-6
25. *Return to Jefferies' land*, 1985, pp.72-3.
26. Quoted in Miller and Matthews, op.cit, p.39
27. In *Jefferies' land...*, pp.1-25 (examples from p.9)
28. op.cit., p51
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33. *WAS Library*: letter to H N Goddard, 20.5.72; *Memoir*, p.29
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35. Besant, Walter, *The eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, 1888, pp.68-9
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37. Toplis, Grace (ed.), *The early fiction of Richard Jefferies*, 1896, pp.4,13-14
38. Besant, op.cit., p.108
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41. Jefferies, Richard, *The birth of a naturalist* (ed. George Miller), 1985
42. Hoskins, W.G., *Fieldwork in local history*, 1967, pp.16,18

43. This paper is an abridgement of one read to the Society at Aldbourne on 14 October 1995. I am most grateful to the late Cyril Wright for inviting me to speak and for making the arrangements; and to members of the Society for their comments.



# History and Tradition in Richard Jefferies' 'Three Centuries at Home'

*J B Smith*

When, in 1877, in his essay 'Three Centuries at Home', Richard Jefferies made a plea for events, momentous or otherwise, to be recorded from the lips of ordinary people who had experienced them in person or heard about them from others, he was anticipating by nearly a century the methods of oral history, a discipline that did not evolve until the 1970s. What emerges from the work of other writers who have looked in a similar direction, George Ewart Evans, for instance, or R D Hudson, is that in the accounts of those interviewed the dividing line between reality and imagination is not always a clear one: first-hand experience merges with hearsay and factual with poetical truth, so that at one moment we are in the realm of objective history, and at the next in that of folklore, often without the means of orienting ourselves precisely.

With Jefferies this merging is equally obvious. Right at the outset we see his latter-day Herodotus walking over Bosworth Field, at Battle 'visiting the site of the Saxon's woe', or at White Horse Hill, 'harkening to the shepherd's legend of Alfred the Great, and his horn of stone', this last allusion being presumably to the Blowing Stone, that used to stand upon the Great Ridgeway above the village of Kingston Lisle not far from the Uffington White Horse. What Jefferies does not say and expects us to know is that, when someone blew into the hole at the top of the stone, a loud echoing note was produced from another hole in the side. The tradition, poetically satisfying but beyond objective proof, was that by this note the Saxons of the Vale of White Horse were warned of impending Viking attack. The thanes would then gather their 'fyrd' or militia about them and proceed to their mustering places in order to resist the invader.<sup>2</sup>

Jefferies next gives us an account of how he himself puts to the test the methods he has just described. He sets his sights on the villages that dot the northerly edge of the north-west-facing Marlborough and Lambourn Downs, from Avebury in the south-west to Woolstone about ten miles to the north-east near the site of the Blowing Stone, and he starts at a point we assume to be Aldbourne, roughly mid way between the two and nine miles south-east of Swindon, with a Mr Jonathan Browne, whom we take to be a retired farmer. His grandfather, who died in 1866 at 84, turns out to have known a man who had fought in his youth against Prince Charlie at Culloden in 1745. Much more does not emerge from this, other than that the soldier must have been about 74 when he passed this information on, and that the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle must have been similarly compiled from the sparse reports of old men.

But Mr Browne now acts as a guide to Jefferies, and first of all introduces him to Willis, his 68-year-old shepherd, who possesses a Charles II sixpence, and once found on the Chace - presumably Aldbourne Chase - a cannon ball that was allegedly shot off by Oliver Cromwell. In fact, Jefferies tells us, there had been a skirmish nearby, but before Cromwell had risen to command -factual and poetical truth once more

intermingled! Willis's access to later periods is likewise through physical objects and his own and his family's experience: the mention of George III reminds him of the great copper pennies he found in a rabbit-hole when cutting a hedge; his cousin Thomas helped to dig the Duke of Wellington's coach out of a snowdrift, and his father was pricked by a yeoman's sword while scrambling through a hedge during the machine riots, of which he himself has confused memories.

Following this, Jefferies' interview with a nonagenarian cottage-dweller called Old Betsy, to whom Mr Browne has now led him, is rather more productive, not least because her manners, occupation and surroundings are themselves eloquent of past times. She curtsies to Jefferies, 'with trembling hands and knotted fingers' pulls forward a chair for him, and tells him to keep his hat on, this apparently being seen by old countryfolk as no discourtesy. Her work is at the spinning-wheel, making mops from wool collected in the fields and at the spring sheep-washings, and her cottage has an amazingly thick thatch, by which she computes her age: she can remember it being covered four times at intervals of approximately twenty years, the first when she was perhaps seven and her father fell off the thatching-ladder, breaking his arm, and the last about three years before the date of her meeting with Jefferies.

For him Old Betsy's talk of her only son, now dead, exemplifies the peasantry's strong belief in the efficacy of herbs. He slowly wasted away with an abscess, but she thinks he might have been saved if she could only have walked into Berkshire and seen an old man in a certain village near the river Kennet. He would have given her a water-herb that would have cured her son's complaint. More than this Jefferies does not, and probably cannot, tell us. Even if Old Betsy had visited the wise man, he would hardly have revealed the name of his remedy, but we can hypothesize that it was Water Pepper, *Polygonum hydropiper*, which used to be considered a specific against abscess.<sup>3</sup>

Of history Old Betsy knows nothing, beyond remembering the ringing of the church bells for the victory of Nelson, but when it comes to poetic truth she is better equipped, for she knows songs and stories, and one of these, which she heard from her mother, she proceeds to recount. Unfortunately, however, Jefferies seems not to have noted it down, and all he gives us is a brief summary, to the effect that it is 'the history of a stupid fellow upon whose head his mother rained down raisins from a first floor window, in order to conceal an amour'. Jefferies claims to recognise this as one of the stories of the *Pentamerone* of the Queen of Navarre, and he then speculates briefly on the vagaries of oral transmission and 'the curious appearance of legends among nations apparently quite disconnected'.

Now Jefferies' memory is at fault here. There is an unfinished *Heptameron* by Marguerite de Navarre (1492-1549), which she wrote in imitation of Boccaccio's *Decameron*, but the story to which Jefferies refers is clearly that of the idiot youth Vardiello in the *Pentamerone* of the Neapolitan Giambattista

Basile (1575-1632).<sup>4</sup> In a narrative woven from a number of traditional motifs, Basile tells how Vardiello, left by his mother to look after the house for a while, tries, with predictable consequences, to hatch out by sitting on them eggs left by the brood

hen he has killed by mistake, then, distraught as he is, lets the wine run out of the cask in the cellar and mops up the mess with a bag of flour. In his despair over such catastrophes he swallows preserved walnuts, believing them to be poison, but eventually, in the courtyard of an untenanted house or palace, finds a pot of gold in a statue he has smashed to pieces because he thought it was someone who owed him money but refused to hand it over. Here we come to the episode that Jefferies alludes to:

The mother, seeing the gold, and knowing that her son would soon publish the fact, told him to stand at the door and wait for the curdled milk seller, because she would buy him some. Vardiello, who was a glutton, at once seated himself before the door: and the mother, going upstairs, sent down for more than half an hour a rain of raisins and figs from the window, which Vardiello beholding, he began to cry, 'Mother! mother! put out basins and tubs, and if this rain lasteth, we shall be rich': and as soon as he was well filled, he went upstairs to sleep.

When, as his mother has predicted, Vardiello blurts out news of the treasure he has found and is taken to court, he explains that he found coins 'in a palace, inside a dumb man: and it rained raisins and dried figs'. He is accordingly consigned to the madhouse, whereas his mother now thrives on the wealth that has come her way.

There is one problem here: how are we to explain that part of Jefferies' account according to which the mother rained down figs and raisins 'in order to conceal an amour'? I would say that here Jefferies' memory has once again played him false. In stories of this type, a rain of figs or other improbable objects is generally contrived by a clever person to conceal, not an amour, but the fact that a less clever person, whether husband, wife or son, has found a treasure. Much the same happens in a related tale-type, in which the idiot innocently attacks, not a statue, but a real person, who succumbs and is buried by the idiot and his mother. But she, having secretly exchanged the body for that of an animal, contrives a rain of sausages or the like, which the son gobbles up. When the son confesses his crime, he leads the police to the grave of the animal, and is amazed when this and not the first, human, victim is exhumed. He is further exonerated by his confession that the crime was committed on the day it rained sausages.<sup>5</sup>

There can be no doubt that this tale, like many others of its kind, spread, orally transmitted over the centuries, 'among nations apparently disconnected'. Take for instance a superbly coherent version, narrated quite recently by Jeannie Robertson of Aberdeen, which Hamish Henderson taped and transcribed.<sup>6</sup> In it the rain of sausages has, appropriately, become a rain of porridge, and the animal that is killed and secretly buried by the idiot's mother as a substitute for the human victim is a billy-goat:

So as they were pullin' it oot, the poor fool lookit doon on tap 'o the thing that they were pullin' oot o' the grave - he was expecting to see the deid man, but when he saw the billy-goat comin' oot - he still thocht it was the man, because he said:

'Good God Almighty,' he said, 'mither, he's growed horns and whiskers since we buried him here last.'

So therefore the police says, 'Oh, God bless me,' he says, 'the poor laddie,' he says, 'ye hannaie tae mind him.'

So therefore the case was droppit.

Strangely enough, though, the sequence of events Jefferies claims to remember is to be found in another tale-type, in which a witness's reference to an unnatural precipitation is indeed exploited to conceal an amour. The oldest known version of this, in the Persian *Sinbadnahmeh* of about AD 600, may be summarized as follows: A parrot, having told a husband about his wife's adulterous ways, is ordered by the man to give him, on his return from an impending journey, a full account of what his wife has been up to during his absence. One night, while the husband is still away, the wife and her maid pour water on to the parrot through a hole in the roof, flash mirrors, and imitate the sound of thunder. When the husband returns home in brilliant sunshine, to be told by the parrot of terrible thunderstorms, he is naturally not disposed to believe the bird any more, and he punishes it accordingly.<sup>7</sup>

Having entered European tradition, this jocular tale became very popular during the Middle Ages, and it survives in many languages, including English. Hence the following anecdote, told by Gus Gray at Old Radford, Notts, in 1914:

The cook used to entertain a policeman in the kitchen. The parrot threatened to tell, and the cook got so angry that she threw a dish of beans and bacon over it. Some days later the parrot told the mistress, and she accused the cook. The cook said the parrot was a liar, and asked what day this had happened. 'The day it rained beans and bacon,' said the parrot. 'There, you see,' said the cook.

In this Old Radford tale and the Scottish tale summarized above we have two of the very few examples surviving in English of stories containing the ancient motif of a miraculous rain exploited to support allegations of a witness's unreliability. All the more pity, then, that Richard Jefferies neglected to follow his own precepts and write down word for word Old Betsy's tale of the stupid fellow on whose head his mother rained down raisins. But can we somehow turn back the dock and capture an echo of Old Betsy's words?

Well, some time before 1923, Alfred Williams recorded from a certain Aaron of unknown surname, an old haymaker of Lush Hill near Castle Eaton, Wilts, the story of John and Sally. This is closely related to Old Betsy's tale, and as Old Betsy seems to have lived at Aldbourne, hardly more than a dozen miles from Castle Eaton, her dialect will have been much the same as Aaron's. In 'John and Sally'<sup>9</sup> the old man of the title retires from his work on the road, but is so bored that he goes back to school. Here, however, the children mock him, and he prefers to return to his work, where he finds a leather bag of coins which, ignorant of the ways of the world, like Basile's Vardiello before him, he fails to recognise as such. His wife is more astute and hides the bag, but the gentleman who has lost it comes looking for it, and John is quite happy to oblige:

'Zally, this vella wants to zee the bag what I vound.' Sally produced the bag. 'Looks very much like my bag. How long have you worked on the road, old man?' 'Aw, gwine in vifty year an' more.' 'And when did you find the bag?' 'The vust day I started to work on the rawd.' 'Well, that can't be mine, then,' said the traveller, and took his departure. 'Aa! but 'twas the zecond time I worked on the rawd, Zally, ye zee,' John said afterwards.

Thus Jefferies' *Three Centuries at Home* has brought us nearly full circle, from Aldbourne to Lush Hill in the same county, on a journey that has covered many centuries and has taken in nations as apparently disconnected as Italy, Persia and Scotland. Proof enough of the tenacity and continuity of oral tradition.

## NOTES

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3. Geoffrey Grigson, *The Englishman's Flora* (London & Melbourne, 1987), pp. 232-3.
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7. Aarne & Thompson, op. cit., p. 420, Type 1422, 'Parrot Unable to Tell Husband Details of Wife's Infidelity'; Ranke, op. cit., 3 (1981), 1065-8.
8. Briggs, op. cit., A, 2, 229.
9. Ibid., A, 2, 140-1, quoted from Alfred Williams, *Folk-Songs of the Upper Thames* (London, 1923), pp. 23-31.

# Jefferies and Cassell's Family Magazine

WJ Keith

No one knew of Jefferies' contribution to *Cassell's Family Magazine* until Samuel J. Looker announced his discovery in his introduction to *Beauty is Immortal*:

Among my Jefferies' papers I came across one or two references to *Cassell's Magazine* and naturally curious, at least so far as anything to do with Jefferies was concerned, I looked up the file of that journal. Certain articles were signed by the initials R.J. and concerning these there could be no manner of doubt. There were one or two others more doubtful, but ere long I discovered two of Jefferies' receipts for these, and Mr. Simon Nowell-Smith... was able to confirm, from his study of Cassell's archives, whilst writing a history of the firm, the provenance of two others. Thus the authenticity of these contributions is placed beyond dispute. (13)

This statement is both intriguing and infuriating - infuriating because of its confused vagueness: 'one or two references', 'Certain articles', 'one or two others', 'these contributions'. Surely he should have been able to distinguish 'one' from 'two'? Precisely which 'articles' and 'contributions' does he mean?

He goes on to list ten articles, and reprints four of them. Miller and Matthews note that in fact three articles were signed R.J. and they were able to establish Jefferies' authorship of two others; but they could not find any surviving evidence of pay-slip records (4). Since the articles in question, on such subjects as the inhabitants of the Transvaal and the Victorian servant-problem, do not immediately suggest Jefferies, one can only assume that Looker once possessed firm documentary proof for all ten, proof that has since been lost.

But Looker goes further. He continues: There are also a number of shorter and unsigned contributions to Cassells, which I hope to reprint, with the six omitted now, in a forthcoming work on Jefferies' (13). This hope was never fulfilled, and we have no clues concerning these other contributions. A mystery indeed!

Like Looker, I am also naturally curious as far as anything to do with Jefferies is concerned, so, having access to a file of the journal, I decided to investigate. This led to no sensational discoveries, but my research did produce some interesting insights into Jefferies' procedures as a young writer eagerly seeking remunerative outlets for his work.

It is noteworthy that Jefferies' original reference (or references), according to Looker, was (or were) to *Cassell's Magazine*, since the journal changed its title - and its numbering - with the December 1874 issue to become *Cassell's Family Magazine*. Each issue contained a sentimental or melodramatic serial, a piece of shorter fiction, a few poems (generally illustrated), and articles embracing a wide range of useful and scientific knowledge as well as social advice. While the journal often ran articles dealing with various aspects of the countryside ('Half-Hours with Nature', 'Out with the Keeper', etc.), it is clear that it already possessed a group of regular contributors

for these pieces, many of which are signed. If Jefferies were to break into the magazine, he would have to consider other subjects.

We can see how he did so by examining the topics in the first two volumes with the new numbering. One article is entitled 'Some Triumphs of Plain Women' (Dec. 1875). Just over a year later, one of Jefferies' contributions is 'Some Triumphs of Poor Men' (Apr. 1877). A two-part article appears in July and August 1876 entitled 'Art Furniture and Decorations for Home Use', the second of these appearing in the issue in which Jefferies apparently made his debut with 'How to Read Books'. Ten months later, Jefferies' 'The Story of Furniture' appears. As for his first contribution, 'How to' articles were popular in this journal. Examples include 'How to Get to Sleep at Night' (May 1875), 'How not to Waste' (Dec. 1875), 'How to Become a Freeman of the City of London' (Feb. 1876), and 'How to Become an Architect' (in the same issue with 'How to Read Books'). One of these, 'How I Engage my Servants' (Jan. 1877), takes its place among a number of articles about the problem of hiring servants, and Jefferies' last two contributions, 'The Average Servant' (Jan. 1878) and 'Training-Schools for Servants' (Mar. 1878), are clearly tailored for this particular market. As for 'The Queen's New Subjects' (Aug. 1877), *Cassell's Family Magazine* is filled with articles offering background about various outposts of empire. For example, 'What is the Eastern Question?' and 'How a Lady passes her Day in India' appeared in consecutive issues (Sep. and Oct. 1876) a year before Jefferies' article.

But what of Looker's 'shorter and unsigned contributions'? When the journal changed its name late in 1874, it proudly announced a new regular feature entitled 'The Gatherer'. This appeared each month while Jefferies was a contributor and consisted of a series of unsigned odds and ends, from single paragraphs to short essays, on matters as varied as the interests of the magazine itself - '*literary, scientific, social, and humorous*', as the advertising blurb described them. Since Jefferies' known articles dutifully conform to the standard length of contributions, Looker's 'shorter' can only refer to some of the 'Gatherer' items. Presumably he had evidence proving that Jefferies participated - perhaps even with identification of items - but if so the details are lost.

When I examined these 'Gatherer' columns with Jefferies in mind, the first to attract my attention was one headed 'Railway Accidents', which appeared in October 1875. This was a subject that interested Jefferies (perhaps because he grew up close to the railway works at Swindon). In May 1874 he had advocated 'A Railway Accidents Bill' in *Fraser's Magazine*, which drew attention to the increasing number of accidents, and this he followed up nine months later in the same journal with 'The Ship ton Accident', commenting on a disastrous accident on Christmas Eve. Obviously, the subject was much in the air at that time, and it was certainly a concern of the Cassell's journal. Early in 1874 it had published a full-length article, 'How Railway Accidents Happen. By a Driver', and other 'Gatherer' items were later to include 'Safe Travelling on Railways' (Jun. 1876), 'Continuous Brakes' (May 1878), 'A Chapter of Accidents' and 'Railway Passengers and the Guard' (both Aug. 1878). 'Steam-Engines on Roads' appeared in May 1877, a subject to which Jefferies was to devote an article for the

*Standard* in September 1881, and which he had already mentioned in 'Parliamentary Measures Affecting the Grazier' in the *Live Stock Journal* (also published by Cassell's) in February 1877.

It is also possible, of course, that he was able to contribute short paragraphs on rural and agricultural topics even if other writers had prior claims to full-length articles on these subjects. Such items as 'A New Accommodation for Birds' (Jun. 1875, on nesting boxes), 'Hungry Birds Disappointed' (Mar. 1876), 'A Bold Agricultural Experiment' (Feb. 1877, on land improvement), 'Dairy Farming at Home and Abroad' (Jul. 1877), and especially 'Small Birds in Parliament' (Aug. 1877) treat subjects about which he was writing elsewhere at this time.

I should state at once that I am *not* attributing any of the above to Jefferies. The resemblance in subject-matter and style are far too flimsy to justify any such claim without firm evidence. Some are possible, others decidedly unlikely. Yet Looker *did* seem to possess evidence, and, if we accept his statement as reliable indication that Jefferies contributed some short items, these would seem to figure among the more likely candidates. It is doubtful now if further evidence will be forthcoming, and unless that happens we cannot advance beyond tentative speculation.

But my perusal of the *Cassell's Family Magazine* file was not, I think, in vain. We catch a glimpse here of Jefferies as a highly ambitious, determined, even perhaps desperate aspirant to journalistic fame, aware of his potential, and eager to write anything for which publishers would pay. Cassell's provided him with more regular employment in the *Live Stock Journal* during this period, and he was also beginning his long association with the *Pall Mall Gazette*. As soon as the latter journal began printing the 'Gamekeeper at Home' series, he could afford to give up what were presumably uncertain free-lance submissions to *Cassell's Family Magazine*. In printing him sporadically, however, this popular journal helped him to hang on until he found his true metier as a writer on wild life and the doings of gamekeepers and poachers.

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# Book Reviews

NEARLY OUT OF HEART AND HOPE, Miles Fairburn  
*Auckland University Press, 1995. 275 pp. £23.95.*

First-hand accounts of the lives of people in the last century can be fascinating, probably because, although close enough in time to have been known to our parents and grandparents, their attitudes and life-styles were so very different.

In *Nearly Out of Heart and Hope*, this interest is maintained, but goes much further in its penetrating and revealing analysis of the hard and almost hopeless life of a labourer, who died destitute in 1925, 11,000 miles from his Wiltshire home.

For Jefferies readers the interest becomes compelling when it is shown that the labourer, James Cox, his cousin and youthful companion, was probably Mark, Bevis's friend of the 1882 boyhood epic.

Compiled by a well-known social historian from 38 years of Cox's meticulously kept diaries, the book, sub-titled *The Puzzle of a Colonial Labourer's Diary*, sets out to discover why a middle class farmer's son should adopt such a life, and how he was able to endure its insecurities and hardships so long.

Victorian children of the petit bourgeoisie were profoundly influenced by the ideology of success through self-help, the work ethic, and the diaries show how thoroughly committed Cox was to this. But the principle failed him and he descended deeper and deeper into poverty. Fairburn's painstaking sifting of a large volume of data, investigates the causes of his failure and provides a unique account of a labourer's life and times, almost a century ago.

The book can be enjoyed at several levels. From the early days at Snodhill, just across the road from Jefferies, his adventures around Coate Water and the wild attempt to run away with him to Moscow or America, the emigration to New Zealand and his steady decline in fortune, the story takes the reader along, hoping page by page that his luck will turn. It does, after a fashion, after heartbreaking years.

But the greatest impact of the book is as a masterly example of research into the social and historical factors and precepts, human relationships and responses, which determine an individual's personality and status. Fairburn, in attempting to explain Cox's predicaments and stoicism, postulates and rejects theory after theory, at the same time opening the reader's eyes to the scope, depth and power of modern historical sociology. His conclusions in Cox's case happily turn out to be just what the intelligent layperson might expect.

Readers of *Bevis* who have assumed that Mark was Richard's brother, Harry, will be intrigued with the evidence that he was, more probably, drawn around James Cox. Although two years Richard's senior, this could well be consistent with Cox's character as revealed by Fairburn. On yet another level, there is poignancy in the thought that the companions playing happily by their New Sea were, ultimately, to be so separated by time, distance and great suffering.

Miles Fairburn is senior lecturer in history at Victoria University, Wellington, New Zealand. The book is set in Palatine, contains 14 photographs, comprehensive notes and recommended reading. The cover and inside illustrations suggest the theme of the book admirably.

*Mark Daniel*

THE JEFFERIES CANON. NOTES ON ESSAYS ATTRIBUTED TO RICHARD JEFFERIES WITHOUT FULL DOCUMENTARY EVIDENCE, W J Keith. *Petton Books, Bedwells Heath, Boars Hill OX1 5JE. 1995. Paperback 40 pp. £4.50 post paid.*

In this short but important booklet, Bill Keith reviews all the essays (74 in number) which are said to have been written by Jefferies but without absolute proof of his authorship. For some he is able to confirm that Jefferies was responsible and for others that he was not. For items lying between these degrees of certainty he offers an authoritative opinion based largely on the use of quotations and dialect words in the text. Anyone planning to use or write about the unproven essays would be wise to consult *The Jefferies Canon* before committing themselves to print.

# Cyril Wright 1909 - 1995

Hon. Secretary, Richard Jefferies Society 1974 -1995

We must report, with regret, the death of the Hon. Secretary of the Richard Jefferies Society, Cyril Wright. In any circumstances, this loss would have been a heavy one; for two reasons it is especially so. First, he died unexpectedly, at home; second, and more important, he had been the Secretary for over 20 years and had, during that time, acquired a total familiarity with the work of the Society. In addition to that, though not a native of Wiltshire, he had developed a detailed knowledge of all the places associated with Richard Jefferies, both in Swindon itself and in the country roundabout. His quite tireless service to friends and visitors, much of it on foot or by bicycle, was legendary. Hardly a member of the Society, for he seemed to know us all individually, will be unable to recall occasions when Cyril found us the fact we wanted, took us to the special place we sought, or helped us to make our contribution, however small, to the greater knowledge and appreciation of the writings of Richard Jefferies.

Like all good secretaries, he became a magnet for news - his files and scrap books bulge with press cuttings, radio and TV announcements, new editions of Jefferies, articles, books and poems about Jefferies, and news of the members. He was fierce too in defence of the things and places that, as the years go by, become more and more precious to those who love and enjoy Jefferies' books. Few can rival his efforts over the years to increase respect for Jefferies and his writings in his native place.

Cyril Wright never wrote a book about Jefferies, though he had planned one on Jefferies and London, but he leaves behind booklets, articles, and introductions to other people's books which help us to recall him; he leaves an even better monument in the form of a thriving Society, with a worldwide membership. He would surely have regarded as significant the fact that the last photograph of him was taken on Liddington Hill.