

# RICHARD JEFFERIES AND THE BROWNS OF COATE

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Extracts from the following books by Richard Jefferies are included:

*The Amateur Poacher* 1879

*Round About a Great Estate* 1880

*Field and Hedgerow* 1889

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### THE BROWNS

In "My Old Village", one of Richard Jefferies' last essays, he describes the hamlet of Coate near Swindon and two of the inhabitants, John Brown and his neighbour Job. Job is my great great grandfather; John was Job's eldest son. The books of Richard Jefferies provide much interesting background information to assist research into family history as I hope to illustrate with extracts from his writings.

My story starts in 1764 with the marriage in Liddington church of William Brown and Elizabeth Sherman of Coate. Until 1884, a large part of Coate was in the parish of Liddington, some two miles away from the parish church in Liddington village. In between was the northern part of Chisledon parish. The western boundary of Chisledon followed the Dorcan, the ancient name for the brook running northwards from Coate reservoir; the parish included the farms at Snodshill and Jefferies' home, now known as Coate Farm. Although this arrangement may confuse the modern researcher I wonder if the locals really noticed; for a time from 1783 onwards the Vicar of Chisledon was also incumbent of Liddington and services were held alternately in the two churches.

William was 28 and a record of his birth has not been found; certainly he was not born in the parishes of Liddington or Chisledon. Elizabeth was 29 and born at Coate. Her father Thomas had died when she was one, and so we may assume she was brought up by her mother whose family can be traced living in the parish back to 1632. Three children of the marriage were christened in Liddington church; John in 1765, William in 1768, and Edward in 1777 when Elizabeth was 43.

William died aged 52 in 1788. The entry in the parish register states he was a pauper. Between 1783 and 1794 a stamp duty of threepence was granted to the crown for every parish register entry of a burial, marriage, christening. This would have had to be paid by Elizabeth. As she was exempt from the tax so it is possible that the incumbent kindly classified William as a pauper to save payment of the tax rather than to denote that he was on actual relief.

The eldest son John remained in the village and married Anne Collett in Chisledon church in 1793. Anne's father Robert was born at Kempsford in Gloucestershire but he married Mary Sackley in Liddington church in 1769.

John and Anne perhaps enjoyed greater prosperity than William. There were nine children of the marriage: their dates of birth and christening are recorded in Liddington's parish records;

John	b. 28.1.1796	c.16.3.1796
Obadiah	b. 20.10.1797	c. 1.11.1797
Sarah	b. 7.5.1799	c. 25.12.1799 (Xmas Day!)
Job	b. 11.2.1801	c. 8.3.1801
Elizabeth	b. 11.2.1803	c. 13.3.1803
William	b. 12.3.1805	c. 7.4.1805
Rachel	b. 10.3.1807	c. 12.4.1807
Ann	b. 7.6.1809	c. 16.7.1809
Mary	b. 24.8.1812	c. 27.8.1812

Thus the Job of Richard Jefferies' essay was born in 1801. Job married Maria Hawkins from Great Bedwyn, Wiltshire some time before the year 1830. I have not identified Maria's parents; the parish records show a Maria christened on December 12th 1808, "the illegitimate daughter of Mary Hawkins" but there were many Hawkins families in Great Bedwyn at the time. John was born at Croydon in 1830. It is interesting to speculate what had taken Job and Maria there.

Richard Jefferies wrote to his aunt in 1868 that someone ". . . has set up in the tea, snuff, tobacco and fish line in opposition to old Job Brown, who has enjoyed a monopoly at Coate for the last forty years". So, Job could not have remained in Croydon for long and perhaps returned to Coate in 1830. A detailed census return for 1831 would help, but the first census to show the names of people was the 1841 return. This shows Job and Maria but no children; however it is possible that 11 year old John had already moved away to earn a living.

Two other children of Job and Maria are known for certain; Mary, born in 1846, and James (from whom I am descended) in 1847, the year before Richard Jefferies. The Liddington parish records indicate that it is possible there were other children of the marriage: Sarah christened in 1839 and Ann christened in 1843; but if they were daughters of Job and Maria they may have died young as there is no mention of them in the census returns of 1841 and 1851.

John married Amelia Smith from Bushton in Wiltshire at Clyffe Pypard church on November 17th 1850. He is described as a labourer on the marriage certificate. In his biography of Jefferies published in 1909, Edward Thomas tells us that Richard Jefferies' father James Lockett Jefferies wrote in a copy of Longman's magazine in which "My Old Village" first appeared 'He was my milker and workman for eighteen or twenty years, and was the first man my son could remember. His father was Job Brown.' The twenty year period would be from around 1848 to 1868, since John was born around 1830, James Lockett Jefferies sold his farm in 1878, and Abner Webb became milker after John. The 1871 census lists John as a "farmer and labourer" so this may confirm he was no longer the milker then.

John's children were all born in Coate;

Ann	b. @ 1852
Thomas	b. @ 1854
John	b. @ 1855
Hannah Maria	b. @ 1858
William Job	b. @ 1861
Walter	b. @ 1863
Elizabeth	b. @ 1865
Mary Jane	b. @ 1866
Amelia	b. @ 1868
Fanny	b. @ 1871

The Richard Jefferies Society have a Primitive Methodist Hymnal belonging to Fanny, dated 30th January 1888. This was the year that the chapel was built in Coate; prior to that services had been held in the cottages of Messrs. Webb and Gregory. The Society also have a bible which has the names of Thomas and Hannah on a slip of loose paper. Coate Museum contains on oak gate-leg table on loan to the Society which is said to have been presented to John and Amelia by Jefferies' parents when they moved from Coate to Bath in 1878.

John died around 1885, two years before the publication of "My Old Village". Amelia lived until March 11th 1905. A paragraph in one of the local newspapers recorded her passing:

#### COATE

The death is announced in our obituary column of Mrs. Amelia Brown, widow of John Brown, at the ripe age of 75 years. Deceased and her late husband were well known to an older generation of visitors to Coate reservoir. John Brown died suddenly some 20 years ago. Incidents of his life are recorded in one of Richard Jefferies' last works, "My Native Village". The old couple were well known to Jefferies.

Job Brown died on 13th June 1873, of phthisis (tuberculosis of the lungs), ironically a similar illness to that of which Richard Jefferies died in 1887. The death certificate is signed by Elizabeth Walters; she had witnessed the marriage of his son James the year before. Maria died three years later, in 1876.

James was working as an agricultural labourer and living at home when he married Elizabeth Whale Matthews in 1872. Elizabeth was employed as a general servant to William Gosling at Farm House, Coate in 1871. As we will see from the tithe map later, Job's cottage and Farm House were more or less next door to one another, so James would not have had far to go whilst courting! It is thought possible that Jefferies stayed with the Goslings from time to time and may have written his letter on the condition of agricultural labourers to the Times in 1872 from there.

As with so many others in Swindon, James later left the uncertain income from labouring on the land for the regular wages paid by the Great Western Railway in Swindon. Jefferies comments on this trend in the chapter "Swindon in 1867" in "Jefferies' Land" published in 1896. James was employed as a labourer, working on clearing the embankments at the side of the track. I get the impression that James was not the most reliable of their employees and the family story is that he was fired for drunkenness (following

in uncle John's footsteps?). There were 11 children of the marriage; their names are recorded in the family bible now in the possession of the family of the youngest child listed below:

Urania Maria	1872 - ?
William Isaac James	1874 - 1938
Elizabeth Sarah Ann	1876 - 1879
Alice Maud Mary	1878 - 1940
John Lewis	1880 - 1909
Elizabeth Sarah Albert	1882 - 1935
Ernest George Job	1885 - 1948
Arthur	1887 - 1952
Walter Septimus	1889 - 1950
Orlanda Albert Theodora	1891 (died at birth)
Oliver Charles Stanley	1893 - 1966

Like his great grandfather William, James died penniless (in Marlborough) in 1914. We have a letter written for him by the local policeman in Cirencester a few years before. It was addressed to my grandfather Walter Brown:

James Brown to Walter Brown

Will you please send 6s. on to Faringdon Post Office by Saturday morning as I shall be there by then as I have no shoes on my feet. Will Maud send a pair of trousers razor and brush and two collars as I cannot wear this muffler now its got warmer also two small neck-ties. I am pretty well but I still have *no* work. I am going up country again but now the weather is a little better the work will again be looking up. Some times I have food and some times none but hope to be able soon to get some work.

From your father.

Elizabeth had died in 1900 at the age of 49 and I suspect the children were left to fend for themselves; Oliver was packed off to Maud who had just got married, and Walter was also looked after by one of his sisters.

I am unable to explain why my grandfather was called Septimus when he was neither the seventh child nor the seventh son; it is possible there were other children who died young. Walter started work in the Great Western works in Swindon and became a boilermaker. Alfred Williams describes their work in "Life in a Railway Factory", written in 1915;

In point of real usefulness and importance the boilermakers stand second to none at the works. Though they may not be as highly skilled as are the fitters individually, collectively they form a much more imposing and vigorous body, and one that is far more essential to the absolute needs of the firm. To whatever extent the forger or fitter may be done without, or unskilled men put in place of them, that is not possible in the case of the boilersmith. His labour, as well as being very important, is distinct from that of all others at the factory; his is an exclusive profession. In the making of locomotives for the line the boiler is by far the greatest item, and it is very difficult and expensive to construct. The work must be performed with exquisite care and everything must be conscientiously well done. There must be no shoddy work in a boiler; no "nobbling over," concealment of flaws, or deception of any kind, or disastrous consequences would be inevitable...

...The boilermakers are a bold and hardy class, sturdy in their views and outlook, and very independent. As in the case of the fitters, smiths, and other journeymen, they have travelled far and wide and become acquainted with many workshops and sets of conditions. Very often they have tramped the whole country, from end to end, in search

of employment, for though as a class they are indispensable their ranks are often overcrowded, and when trade is slack the services of many are dispensed with.

Whether this was true for Walter I do not know, but he certainly left the railway works for the shipyards of Glasgow and Birkenhead. He settled in Birkenhead and married Florence Thomas there in 1916. Florence also came from Swindon; her father was a labourer for the Great Western. Their first child was my father, Alec Walter Brown. Alec became an engineer in the aircraft industry and moved from Birkenhead to London and then to Nottingham where he married in 1942. I have done my own travelling; I was married in Surrey and my two children were born there before we returned to my native county.

#### RICHARD JEFFERIES

The books of Richard Jefferies give us an insight into the characters of Job and John and provide a description of working class life in a small village in the nineteenth century. The lives of our rich ancestors are chronicled in some detail; it is less easy to fill out the lives of the common man. I am therefore fortunate to find so many references to the Browns in Jefferies<sup>1</sup> books.

The news of John's death is the starting point for "My Old Village":

'John Brown is dead', said an aged friend and visitor in answer to my inquiry for the strong labourer.

'Is he really dead?' I asked, for it seemed impossible.

'He is. He came home from his work in the evening as usual, and seemed to catch his foot in the threshold and fell forward on the floor. When they picked him up he was dead.'

I remember the doorway; a raised piece of wood ran across it, as is commonly the case in country cottages, such as one might easily catch one's foot against if one did not notice it; but he knew that bit of wood well. The floor was of brick, hard to fall on and die. He must have come down over the crown of the hill, with his long slouching stride, as if his legs had been half pulled away from his body by his heavy boots in the furrows when a ploughboy. He must have turned up the steps in the bank to his cottage, and so, touching the threshold, ended. He is gone through the great doorway, and one pencil-mark is rubbed out. There used to be a large hearth in that room, a larger room than most cottages; and when the fire was lit and the light shone on the yellowish red brick beneath and the large rafters overhead, it was homely and pleasant. In summer the door was always wide open. Close by on the high bank there was a spot where the first wild violets came. You might look along miles of hedgerow, but there were never any until they had shown by John Brown's.

. . . Now, the way they made the boy John Brown hardy was to let him roll about on the ground with naked legs and bare head from morn till night, from June till December, from January till June. The rain fell on his head, and he played in wet grass to his knees. Dry bread and a little lard was his chief food. He went to work while he was a child. At half-past three in the morning he was on his way to the farm stables, there to help feed the cart-horses, which used to be done with great care very early in the morning. The carter's whip used to sting his legs, and sometimes he felt the butt. At fifteen he was no taller than the sons of well-to-do people at eleven; he scarcely seemed to grow at all till he was eighteen or twenty, and even then very slowly, but at last became a tall big man. That slouching walk, with knees always bent, diminished his height to appearance; he really was the full size, and every inch of his frame had been slowly welded together by this ceaseless work, continual life in the open air, and coarse hard food. This is what makes a man hardy. This is what makes a man able to stand

almost anything, and gives a power of endurance that can never be obtained by any amount of gymnastic training.

I used to watch him mowing with amazement. Sometimes he would begin at half-past two in the morning, and continue till night. About eleven o'clock, which used to be the mowers' noon, he took a rest on a couch of half-dried grass in the shade of the hedge. For the rest, it was mow, mow, mow for the long summer day.

John Brown was dead: died in an instant at his cottage door. I could hardly credit it, so vivid was the memory of his strength. The gap of time since I had seen him last made no impression on me; to me he was still in my mind the John Brown of the hayfield; there was nothing between then and his death.

He used to catch us boys the bats in the stable, and tell us fearful tales of the ghosts he had seen; and bring the bread from the town in an old-fashioned wallet, half in front and half behind, long before the baker's carts began to come round in country places. One evening he came into the dairy carrying a yoke of milk, staggering, with tipsy gravity; he was quite sure he did not want any assistance, he could pour the milk into the pans. He tried, and fell at full length and bathed himself from head to foot. Of later days they say he worked in the town a good deal, and did not look so well or so happy as on the farm. In this cottage opposite the violet bank they had small-pox once, the only case I recollect in the hamlet - the old men used to say everybody had it when they were young; this was the only case in my time, and they recovered quickly without any loss, nor did the disease spread. A roomy well-built cottage like that, on dry ground, isolated, is the only hospital worthy of the name. People have a chance to get well in such places; they have very great difficulty in the huge buildings that are put up expressly for them. I have a Convalescent Home in my mind at the moment, a vast building. In these great blocks what they call ventilation is a steady draught, and there is no 'home' about it. It is all walls and regulations and draughts, and altogether miserable. I would infinitely rather see any friend of mine in John Brown's cottage. That terrible disease, however, seemed to quite spoil the violet bank opposite, and I never picked one there afterwards. There is something in disease so destructive, as it were, to flowers.

The hundreds of times I saw the tall chimney of that cottage rise out of the hill-side as I came home at all hours of the day and night! the first chimney after a long journey, always comfortable to see, especially so in earlier days, when we had a kind of halting belief in John Brown's ghosts, several of which were dotted along that road according to him. The ghosts die as we grow older, they die and their places are taken by real ghosts. I wish I had sent John Brown a pound or two when I was in good health; but one is selfish then, and puts off things till it is too late - a lame excuse verily. I can scarcely believe now that he is really dead, gone as you might casually pluck a hawthorn leaf from the hedge.

We have a photograph of John's cottage, taken around the turn of the century. An old lady stands at the gate; could this be Amelia? Two other ladies stand by the cottage. One, standing by the door with a bowl in her hands, may be in her twenties. Could this be Fanny, John's youngest daughter?

We also have a photograph taken outside the Spotted Cow which is thought to be of John. The man has a full white beard and wears a smock. However, John was 55 when he died, but the man looks older, and he does not really fit Jefferies' description of the strong, tall labourer.

One of John's ghosts would have been found at Pipers Corner, the junction of Marlborough Road and Broome Manor Lane. The corner is said to be haunted by the ghost of a woman carrying a head in her hands.

*Round About a Great Estate* includes descriptions of "young Aaron" and "old Aaron", characters thought to be based on John and Job. Here are some descriptions of young Aaron:

. . . There was an old oak table in the centre of the room - a table so solid that young Aaron, the strong labourer, could only move it with difficulty.

. . . One afternoon Cicely came quietly through a gap in the hedge by this particular corner, thinking to laugh at Aaron's voice, for he milked there and sang to the cows, when she saw him sitting on the three-legged milking-stool, stooping in the attitude of milking, with the bucket between his knees, but firm asleep, and quite alone in his glory. He had had too much ale, and dropped asleep while milking the last cow, and the herd had left him and marched away in stately file down to the pond, as they always drink after milking. Cicely stole away and said nothing; but presently Aaron was missed and a search made, and he was discovered by the other men still sleeping. Poor "young Aaron" got into nearly as much disgrace through the brown jug as a poaching uncle of his through his ferrets and wires.

. . . It seems there were two Aarons - uncle and nephew: old Aaron was the arch-poacher of the parish, young Aaron worked regularly at Lucketts' Place. This young labourer was one of the best of his class - a great, powerful fellow, but good natured, willing, and pleasant to speak to. He was a favourite with many, and with reason, for he had a gentleness of manner beyond his station; and, till you knew his weakness, you could not but take an interest in him. His vice was drink. He was always down at Lucketts' Place; and through him I made acquaintance with his disreputable uncle, who was at first rather shy of me, for he had seen me about with Hilary, and between the two there was a mortal feud. Old Aaron could not keep out of Okebourne Chace, and Hilary was "down" upon him. Hilary was, indeed, keener than the keepers.

Hilary is thought to be based on Jefferies' father and his father-in-law.  
For a more detailed description of Job, we will turn first to "My Old Village":

The next cottage was a very marked one, for houses grow to their owners. The low thatched roof had rounded itself and stooped down to fit itself to Job's shoulders; the walls had got short and thick to suit him, and they had a yellowish colour, like his complexion, as if chewing tobacco had stained his cheeks right through. Tobacco juice had likewise penetrated and tinted the wall. It was cut off as it seemed by a party-wall into one room, instead of which there were more rooms beyond which no one would have suspected. Job had a way of shaking hands with you with his right hand, while his left hand was casually doing something else in a detached sort of way. "Yes, sir,<sup>1</sup> and 'No, sir," and nodding to everything you said all so complaisant, but at the end of the bargain you generally found yourself a few shillings in some roundabout manner on the wrong side. Job had a lot of shut-up rooms in his house and in his character, which never seemed to be opened to daylight. The eaves hung over and beetled like his brows, and he had a forelock, a regular antique forelock, which he used to touch with great humility. There was a long bough of an elm hanging over one gable just like the forelock. His face was a blank, like the broad end wall of the cottage, which had no window - at least you might think so until you looked up and discovered one little arrow slit, one narrow pane, and woke with a start to the idea that Job was always up there watching and listening. That was how he looked out of his one eye so intensely cunning, the other being a wall eye - that is, the world supposed so, as he kept it half shut, always between the lights; but whether it was really blind or not I cannot say. Job caught rats and rabbits and moles, and bought fagots or potatoes, or fruit or rabbit-skins, or rusty iron: wonderful how he seemed to have command of money. It was done probably by buying and selling almost simultaneously, so that the cash passed really from one customer to another, and was never his at all. Also he worked as a labourer, chiefly piecework; also Mrs. Job had a shop window about two feet square: snuff and tobacco, bread and cheese, immense big round jumbles and sugar, kept on the floor above, and reached down by hand, when wanted, through the opening for the ladder stairs. The front door - Job's right hand - was always open in summer, and the flagstones of the floor chalked around the edges; a clean table, clean chairs, decent crockery, an old clock about an hour slow, a large hearth with a minute fire to boil the kettle without heating the room. Tea was usually at half-past three, and it is a fact that many well-to-do persons, as they came along the road hot and dusty, used to drop in and rest and take a cup - very little milk and much

gossip. Two paths met just there, and people used to step in out of a storm of rain, a sort of thatched house club. Job was somehow on fair terms with nearly everybody, and that is a wonderful thing in a village, where everybody knows everybody's business, and petty interests continually cross. The strangest fellow and the strangest way of life, and yet I do not believe a black mark was ever put against him; the shiftiness was all for nothing. It arose, no doubt, out of the constant and eager straining to gain a little advantage and make an extra penny. Had Job been a Jew he would have been rich. He was the exact counterpart of the London Jew dealer, set down in the midst of the country. Job should have been rich. Such immense dark brown jumbles, such cheek-distenders - never any French sweetmeats or chocolate or bonbons to equal these. I really think I could eat one now. The pennies and fourpenny bits - there were fourpenny bits in those days - that went behind that two-foot window, goodness! there was no end. Job used to chink them in a pint pot sometimes before the company, to give them an idea of his great hoards. He always tried to impress people with his wealth, and would talk of a fifty-pound contract as if it was nothing to him. Jumbles are eternal, if nothing else is. I thought then there was not such another shop as Job's in the universe. I have found since that there is a Job shop in every village, and in every street in every town -that is to say, a window for jumbles and rubbish; and if you don't know it, you may be quite sure your children do, and spend many a sly penny there. Be as rich as you may, and give them gilded sweetmeats at home, still they will slip round to the Job shop.

It was a pretty cottage, well backed with trees and bushes, with a south-east mixture of sunlight and shade, and little touches that cannot be suggested by writing. Job had not got the Semitic instinct of keeping. The art of acquisition he possessed to some extent, that was his right hand; but somehow the half-crowns slipped away through his unstable left hand, and fortune was a greasy pole to him. His left hand was too cunning for him, it wanted to manage things too cleverly. If it had only had the Semitic grip, digging the nails into the flesh to hold tight each separate coin, he would have been the village rich. The great secret is the keeping. Finding is by no means keeping. Job did not flourish in his old days; the people changed round about. Job is gone, and I think every one of that cottage is either dead or moved. Empty.

We have a photograph of Job's cottage, taken some time after 1903 by the Swindon photographer William Hooper. Just to the left of the cottage can be seen the stump of a tree, presumably the elm whose bough used to hang over the gable.

We have already met "the arch poacher" in *Round About a Great Estate*. Edward Thomas notes that "Job Brown and others set him (Jefferies) thinking about snares for fish, feathers, and fur". A nice description of a character based on Job concerns Luke, the Rabbit Contractor, in *The Amateur Poacher*:

... First came an old man, walking stiffly - not so much from age as rheumatism - and helping his unsteady steps on the slippery sarsen stones with a stout ground-ash staff. Behind him followed a younger man, and in the rear a boy. Sometimes there was an extra assistant, making four; sometimes there was only the old man and one companion.

Each had a long and strong ash stick across his shoulder, on which a load of rabbits was slung, an equal number in front and behind, to balance. The old fellow, who was dressed shabbily even for a labourer, was the contractor for the rabbits shot or ferreted in these woods.

He took the whole number at a certain fixed price all round, and made what he could out of them. Every evening in the season he went to the woods to fetch those that had been captured during the day, conveying them to his cottage on the outskirts of the village. From thence they went by carrier's cart to the railway. Old Luke's books, such as they were, were quite beyond the understanding of any one but himself and his wife; nor could even they themselves tell you exactly how many dozen he purchased in the year. But in his cups the wicked old hypocrite had often been known to boast that he paid the lord of the manor as much money as the rent of a small farm.



One of Luke's eyes was closed with a kind of watery rheum, and was never opened except when he thought a rabbit was about to jump into a net. The other was but half open, and so overhung with a thick grey eyebrow as to be barely visible. His cheeks were the hue of clay, his chin scrubby, and a lanky black forelock depended over one temple. A battered felt hat, a ragged discoloured sloop, and corduroys stained with the clay of the banks completed his squalid costume.

A more miserable object or one apparently more deserving of pity it would be hard to imagine. To see him crawl with slow and feeble steps across the fields in winter, gradually working his way in the teeth of a driving rain, was enough to arouse compassion in the hardest heart: there was something so utterly woe-begone in his whole aspect - so weatherbeaten, as if he had been rained upon ever since childhood. He seemed humbled to the ground - crushed and spiritless.

Now and then Luke was employed by some of the farmers to do their ferreting for them and to catch the rabbits in the banks by the roadside. More than once benevolent people driving by in their cosy cushioned carriages, and seeing this lonely wretch in the bitter wind watching a rabbit's hole as if he were a dog well beaten and thrashed, had been known to stop and call the poor old fellow to the carriage door. Then Luke would lay his hand on his knee, shake his head, and sorrowfully state his pains and miseries: 'Aw, I be ter-rable bad, I be,' he would say; 'I be most terrable bad: I can't but just drag my leg out of this yer ditch. It be a dull job, bless 'ee, this yer.' The tone, the look of the man, the dreary winter landscape all so thoroughly agreed together that a few small silver coins would drop into his hand, and Luke, with a deep groaning sigh of thankfulness, would bow and scrape and go back to his 'dull job.'

Luke, indeed, somehow or other was always in favour with the 'quality.' He was as firmly fixed in his business as if he had been the most clever courtier. It was not of the least use for any one else to offer to take the rabbits, even if they would give more money. No, Luke was the trusty man; Luke, and nobody else, was worthy. So he grovelled on from year to year, blinking about the place. When some tenant found a gin in the turnip field, or a wire by the clover, and quietly waited till Luke came fumbling by, and picked up the hare or rabbit, it did not make the slightest difference, though he went straight to the keeper and made a formal statement.

Luke had an answer always ready: he had not set the wire, but had stumbled on it unawares, and was going to take it to the keeper; or he had noticed a colony of rats about, and had put the gin for them. Now, the same excuse might have been made by any other poacher; the difference lay in this - that Luke was believed. At all events, such little trifles were forgotten, and Luke went on as before. He did a good deal of ferreting in the hedges outside the woods himself: if he took home three dozen from the mound and only paid for two dozen, that scarcely concerned the world at large.

If in coming down the dark and slippery lane at night someone with a heavy sack stepped out from the shadow at the stile, and if the contents of the sack were rapidly transferred to the shoulder-sticks, or the bag itself bodily taken along - why, there was nobody there to see. As for the young man and the boy who helped, those discreet persons had always a rabbit for their own pot, or even for a friend; and indeed it was often remarked that old Luke could always get plenty of men to work for him. No one ever hinted at searching the dirty shed at the side of his cottage that was always locked by day or looking inside the disused oven that it covered. But if fur or feathers had been found there,

was he not the contractor? And clearly if a pheasant was there he could not be held responsible for the unauthorised acts of his assistants.

The truth was that Luke was the most thorough-paced poacher in the place - or, rather, he was a wholesale receiver. His success lay in making it pleasant for everybody all round. It was pleasant for the keeper, who could always dispose of a few hares or pheasants if he wanted a little money. The keeper, in ways known to himself, made it pleasant for the bailiff. It was equally pleasant for the under-keepers, who had what they wanted (in reason) and enjoyed a little by-play on their own account. It was pleasant for his men; and it was pleasant - specially pleasant - at a little wayside inn kept by Luke's nephew, and, as was believed, with Luke's money. Everybody concerned in the business could always procure refreshment there, including the policeman.

There was only one class of persons whom Luke could not conciliate; and they were the tenants. These very inconsiderate folk argued that it was the keepers' and Luke's interest to maintain a very large stock of rabbits, which meant great inroads on their crops. There seemed to be even something like truth in their complaints; and once or twice the more independent carried their grievances to headquarters so effectually as to elicit an order for the destruction of the rabbits forthwith on their farms. But of what avail was such an order when the execution of it was entrusted to Luke himself?

In time the tenants got to put up with Luke; and the wiser of them turned round and tried to make it still more pleasant for him; they spoke a good word for him; they gave him a quart of ale, and put little things in his way, such as a chance to buy and sell faggots at a small profit. Not to be ungrateful, Luke kept their rabbits within reasonable bounds; and he had this great recommendation - that whether they bullied him or whether they gave him ale and bread-and-cheese, Luke was always humble and always touched his hat.

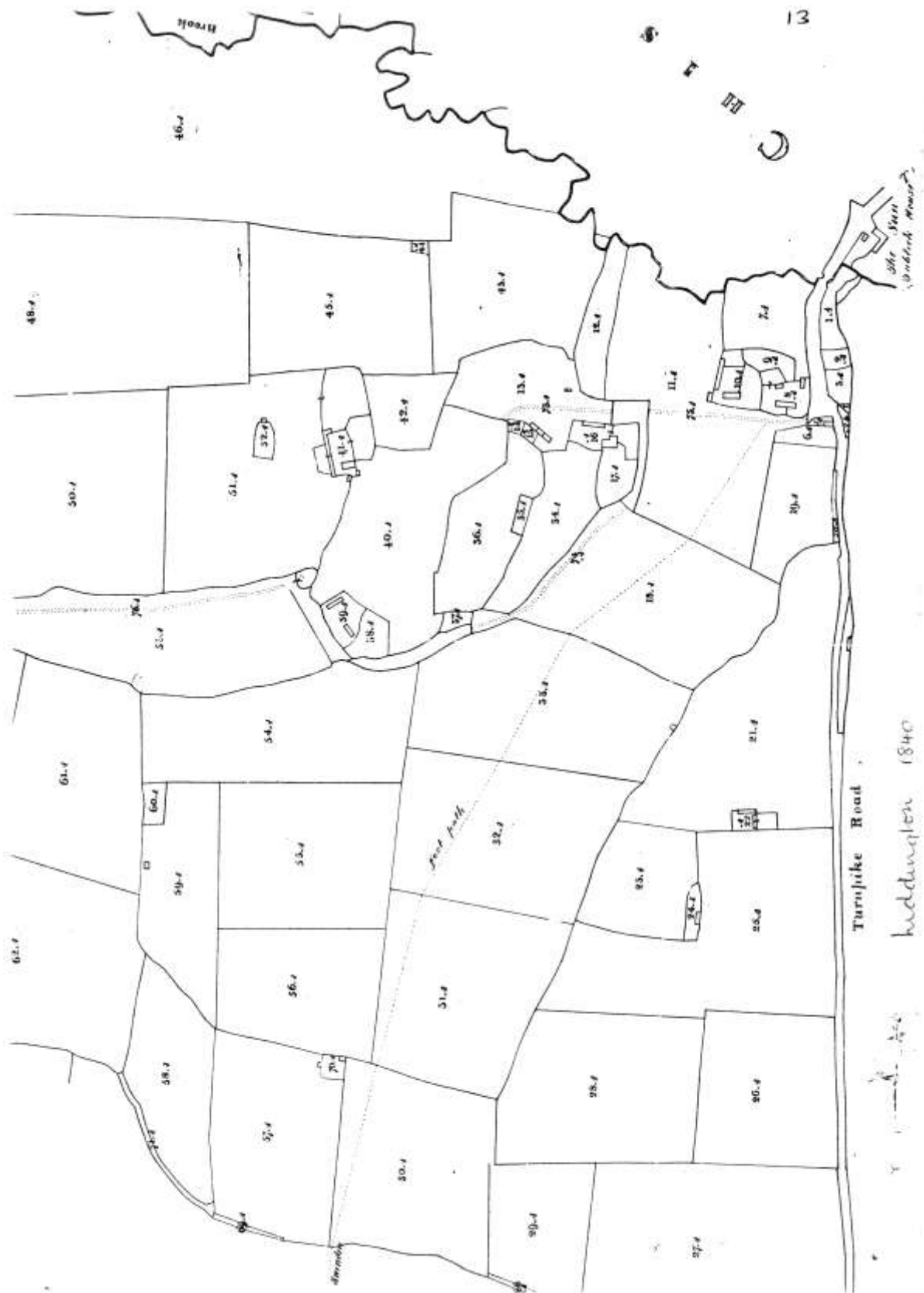
His wife kept a small shop for the sale of the coarser groceries and a little bacon. He had also rather extensive gardens, from which he sold quantities of vegetables. It was more than suspected that the carrier's cart was really Luke's - that is, he found the money for horsing it, and could take possession if he liked. The carrier's cart took his rabbits, and the game he purchased of poachers, to the railway, and the vegetables from the gardens to the customers in town.

At least one cottage besides his own belonged to him; and some would have it that this was one of the reasons of his success with the 'quality.'<sup>1</sup> The people at the great house, anxious to increase their influence, wished to buy every cottage and spare piece of land. This was well known, and many small owners prided themselves upon spiting the big people at the great house by refusing to sell, or selling to another person. The great house was believed to have secured the first 'refuse' of Luke's property, if he ever thought of selling. Luke, in fact, among the lower classes was looked upon as a capitalist - a miser with an unknown hoard. The old man used to sit of a winter's evening, after he had brought down the rabbits, by the hearth, making rabbit-nets of twine. Almost everybody who came along the road, home from the market town, stopped, lifted the latch without knocking, and looked in to tell the news or hear it. But Luke's favourite manoeuvre was to take out his snuff-box, tap it, and offer it to the person addressing him. This he would do to a farmer, even though it were the largest tenant of all. For this snuff-box was a present from the lady at the great house, who took an interest in poor old Luke's infirmities, and gave him the snuff box, a really good piece of workmanship, well filled with the finest snuff, to console his wretchedness.

Of this box Luke was as proud as if it had been the insignia of the Legion of Honour, and never lost an opportunity of showing it to every one of standing. When the village heard of this kindly present it ran over in its mind all that it knew about the stile, and the sacks, and the disused oven. Then the village very quietly shrugged its shoulders, and though it knew not the word irony, well understood what that term conveys.

In 1897, P. Anderson Graham wrote "Round About Coate". He describes Coate Water "on which Job Brown once kept his cranky boat with its ill-assorted oar on one side and scull on the other". I have been unable to trace this reference in Jefferies' own writing, but in 1856 (before he was 8) he wrote to his aunt to say 'I have rowed the boat from one end of the water to the other with Mama and two others' so it is not unreasonable to picture Job rowing young Master Jefferies around the lake.

## THE VILLAGE OF COATE



The tithe map of 1840 shows the parts of Coate that were in the parish of Liddington. The Sun public house is shown in the bottom right hand corner and provides a reference point to compare this map with the modern map of Swindon.

Job's cottage stood on the plot marked 5A, facing towards The Sun Inn and the watersplash were the brook crossed the turnpike road. Long established residents of Coate can still remember the steam engines stopping at the watersplash to take on water. The Gosling's Farm House is probably 8A. The name "Coate Farm" has come to be widely used to describe Jefferies birthplace, but it was not so called in Jefferies day. Farm House disappeared in the road widening scheme of the 1950's and a large roundabout covers the site.

As Jefferies describes in "My Old Village", Job's cottage stands at the meeting place of two paths, one of which leads away to Swindon over the fields; is this the path described in 'My Old Village'? It is almost certainly the path Jefferies would have followed to school in Swindon:

There used to be \* footpaths. Following one of them, the first field always had a good crop of grass; over the next stile there was a great oak standing alone in the centre of the field, generally a great cart-horse under it, and a few rushes scattered about the furrows; the fourth was always full of clover; in the fifth you could scent the beans on the hill, and there was a hedge like a wood, and a nest of the long-tailed tit; the sixth had a runnel and blue forget-me-nots; the seventh had a brooklet and scattered trees along it; from the eighth you looked back on the slope and saw the thatched houses you had left behind under passing shadows, and rounded white clouds going straight for the distant hills, each cloud visibly bulging and bowed down like a bag.

Queens Drive now sets off from Coate roundabout in the direction of this path.

John's cottage stood on the turnpike road to Swindon, now Marlborough Road, and is perhaps the cottage standing in unmarked ground opposite field 21A.



Village resident thought to be John Brown



John Brown's Cottage, Coate (Beasant's Hill) (page 10)





Job Brown's Cottage, Coate. (Page 10)



Job Brown's Cottage (painting, Kate Tryon)