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Sarah Houghton-Walker
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THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO JOHN CLARE

The fascinations of John Clare's life are manifold. A labouring-class poet and naturalist, he was lionized in the early 1820s but spent his final decades incarcerated in asylums. In this *Companion*, leading scholars illuminate Clare's rich life and writing, situating each within a range of critical contexts. Essays rooted in discourses as diverse as ecocriticism, aesthetics, religion, health, and time are accompanied by explorations of the construction of the *idea* (including the self-identity) of Clare through writing and images. The collection also traces influences upon Clare and considers the ways in which he has influenced subsequent poets in turn. The volume includes a chronology and an invaluable guide to further reading and provides students with a firm grounding in Clare's writings and his critical reception: this is an indispensable guide to the poet and his work.

Sarah Houghton-Walker is a fellow of Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge, a founding director of the Centre for John Clare Studies, and the author of three monographs: *Wordsworth's Poetry of Repetition: Romantic Recapitulation* (2023), *Representations of the Gypsy in the Romantic Period* (2014), and *John Clare's Religion* (2009).

A complete list of books in the series is at the back of the book.

THE CAMBRIDGE
COMPANION TO
JOHN CLARE

EDITED BY
SARAH HOUGHTON-WALKER
Gonville and Caius College, Cambridge



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FIONA STAFFORD is Professor of English at Somerville College, Oxford. She specializes in Romantic literature, including Clare, and also writes non-academic books about place and nature. Her latest book is *Time and Tide* (2024). Other recent books include *The Long, Long Life of Trees* (2016), *The Brief Life of Flowers* (2018), *Reading Romantic Poetry* (2012), and editions of *Archipelago*, *Lyrical Ballads* (2013), and *Stories of Trees, Woods and the Forest* (2012). She is a fellow of the British Academy and the Royal Society of Edinburgh and leads the Environmental Humanities Programme at the Oxford Research Centre for the Humanities.

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CHRONOLOGY

1788	George Gordon Byron born.
1792	Percy Bysshe Shelley born.
1793	John Clare born 13 July in Helpston, Northamptonshire; his twin sister, Bessy, dies a few weeks later. Louis XVI executed; war declared between France and Great Britain; William Blake, <i>Visions of the Daughters of Albion</i> ; <i>America</i> .
1795	John Keats born.
1798	Clare begins sporadic attendance at schools in Helpston and then Glinton. William Wordsworth and Samuel Taylor Coleridge, <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> .
1800	Robert Bloomfield, <i>The Farmer's Boy</i> ; Wordsworth, 'Preface' to second edition of <i>Lyrical Ballads</i> .
1804	Napoleon crowned emperor.
1805	Battle of Trafalgar.
c. 1805	Clare begins a period of working at various jobs including as a ploughboy, as a gardener, and as a labourer.
1807	Slave Trade Act passed; Wordsworth, <i>Poems in Two Volumes</i> .
1809	Enclosure Act for Helpston is passed, though the process of enclosure is not complete until 1820. Charles Darwin born; Alfred Tennyson born; Byron, <i>English Bards and Scotch Reviewers</i> (published anonymously).
1811	Prince of Wales declared Regent; Luddite movement begins; Jane Austen, <i>Sense and Sensibility</i> .
1812	Clare enlists in the local militia. Charles Dickens born; prime minister Spencer Perceval assassinated; US declares war on Britain.
1813	Austen, <i>Pride and Prejudice</i> .
1814	Napoleon abdicates.
1815	Battle of Waterloo; Corn Law passed, leading to riots.

CHRONOLOGY

- 1817 Clare works as a labourer in the gardens at Burghley Park. Austen dies; Keats, *Poems*; Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria*.
- 1818 Clare works as a limeburner in Casterton and Pickworth; he meets Martha Turner (known as ‘Patty’); Clare writes a proposal for publishing a volume of poems by subscription, which is printed by J. B. Henson and subsequently noticed by Edward Drury, cousin of the publisher John Taylor. Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein*; P. B. Shelley, ‘Ozymandias’; Keats, *Endymion*.
- 1819 Clare meets John Taylor, who agrees to publish his poems. Peterloo Massacre.
- 1820 Clare marries Patty Turner, and the first of the couple’s children is born; *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* is published; Clare visits London for the first time, and his portrait is painted by William Hilton. George III dies; George IV proclaimed king; Keats, *Lamia*, *Isabella*, *The Eve of St Agnes*, and other *Poems*.
- 1821 Clare’s second volume of poetry, *The Village Minstrel*, is published. Keats dies; Napoleon dies; P. B. Shelley, ‘Adonais’.
- 1822 Clare visits London again; he meets Lamb and other prominent cultural figures. Clare begins writing *The Parish* around now. P. B. Shelley dies.
- 1824 Clare visits London again; he meets Coleridge, William Hazlitt, and Thomas De Quincey, and consults Dr Darling about his ‘nervous illness’. Byron dies in Missolonghi.
- 1825 Taylor and Hessey (Clare’s publishers) dissolve their partnership. Hazlitt, *The Spirit of the Age*.
- 1827 Clare’s *The Shepherd’s Calendar, with Village Stories and Other Poems* appears after significant delays.
- 1828 Clare visits London for the fourth time and consults Dr Darling again about his mental health. The artist Henry Behnes takes Clare’s bust.
- 1829 James Hogg, *The Shepherd’s Calendar*.
- 1830 Swing Riots; death of George IV; William IV succeeds to throne; Tennyson, *Poems*, *Chiefly Lyrical*.
- 1832 Clare and his family move from Helpston to Northborough. Reform Act passed.
- 1833–4 Clare is frustrated that he cannot get a projected volume, *The Midsummer Cushion*, into print. Slavery Abolition Act passed 1833; Coleridge dies 1834.

CHRONOLOGY

1835	Publication of <i>The Rural Muse</i> .
1837	Clare enters High Beach Asylum as a voluntary patient under the care of Dr Matthew Allen. Death of William IV; accession of Queen Victoria.
1838	Mary Joyce dies. Dickens, <i>Oliver Twist</i> (monthly, Feb. 1837–April 1839).
1841	Clare walks out of High Beach in July, walking home to Northborough; in December, he is admitted to the Northampton General Lunatic Asylum.
1850	Wordsworth dies, and <i>The Prelude</i> is published; Elizabeth Barrett Browning, <i>Sonnets from the Portuguese</i> ; Tennyson, <i>In Memoriam</i> ; Dickens, <i>David Copperfield</i> .
1864	Clare dies on 20 May in Northampton and is buried five days later in Helpston.

ABBREVIATIONS

Unless otherwise stated, all quotations from Clare's poetry in these essays will be taken from the following edition, with volume and page numbers given in the text. The edition presents a 'primitive' text and gives detailed information regarding textual variants and the publication history of each poem. Volumes will be abbreviated as follows:

- EP *The Early Poems of John Clare 1804–22*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)
- MP *John Clare: Poems of the Middle Period 1822–37*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and P. M. S. Dawson, 5 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996–2003)
- LP *The Later Poems of John Clare 1837–1864*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell, and Margaret Grainger, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)

Other standard abbreviations used in this volume are as follows:

- Critical Heritage* *John Clare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Mark Storey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)
- JCBH* *John Clare by Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Ashington: MidNAG; Manchester: Carcanet, 1996)
- Letters* *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)
- Natural History* *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)
- Prose* *The Prose of John Clare*, ed. J. W. and Anne Tibble (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951)