

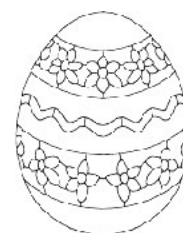
# Steeple Ashton WI Newsletter



## Happy Easter to all our members!

During this Corona Virus pandemic, I thought I'd practice using parts of our computer that I was not familiar with! So I'm using a template for a Newsletter! It might keep my old brain active so that it's ready for when we return to normal!

I thought I'd begin by writing a bit about my journey into gardening. The photo above is our wildlife pond area beginning to come to life. At the start of February, the garden was an absolute mess and the thought of all the work needed felt overwhelming. But it's amazing how a few days of an hour or so here and there can make such a difference.



## Garden Memories...

I have always lived in a house with a garden, but I have not always gardened...

When I was small, I remember the huge long garden my Mum & Dad had on a newly built council estate just outside Woking in Surrey. We moved there when I was 3 (1954!) and the thinking then was that the working man would want to grow vegetables for his family and so all the houses on the council estate had very large gardens.

Of course, what they forgot to factor in was that the working man was doing just that - working - and in my Dad's case, it was 7 days a week so there was no time for gardening! So the garden I remember there was made up of a square of grass near the house and then a large area of weedy soil from there on to the end.

When I was 12, we moved 'up the hill' to a semi-detached (going up in the world!) which had a slightly smaller, squarer garden. That too ended up with two areas of lawn, surrounded this time by borders, in which were planted, each and every year, Dahlias of all shapes and sizes!! Dahlias were extremely popular then and I well



remember the colours, as well as the 'Eary-wigs' that fell out of them when you brought them indoors!

From there, I was married at 21 and went to live in South Africa for 4 years, in a flat which had a communal garden. When we returned home, we bought our first house in Berkshire. That too had a long garden, which I managed as best as I could, but having my first baby meant that I still didn't get properly into gardening.

Since then, with a few moves, another baby and different gardens, I have gradually learnt more about gardening, plants and what joy it all can bring. And the best garden of all is our started-from-scratch little cottage garden in Steeple Ashton!

## THE LOG STORE

I had no idea how much delight a log store would bring!! Sounds strange I know, but I'd never had a logburner: when we were children, we had coal fires and there was no romance in the coal shed - just lots of black dust and Mum on her knees in front of the fire holding a piece of paper over it to 'draw' it into life! But moving to Wiltshire in 2011 to an old cottage meant that we had to have a log burner - and I love it! Once delivered, the logs have to be placed in the log store, but not just any old how, - it's become a bit of a work of art to get them all in nicely and I love putting all the round ones in this little log store at the end of the garden! A certain artistic beauty I think!





# JOHN CLARE

1793 -1864

## A potted History



John Clare was an English poet. He was the son of a farm labourer and became known for his celebrations of the countryside and sorrows at its disruption.

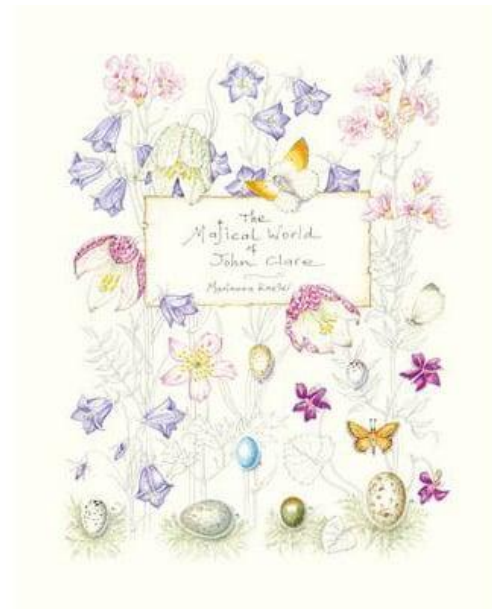
He was born in Helpston, in what was then Northamptonshire & became known as 'The Peasant Poet'. He became an agricultural labourer while still a child, although he attended school until he was 12.

As a young adult, he became a potboy in a public house, a gardener at Burghley House, enlisted in the militia, tried camp life with Gypsies & in 1817 worked as a lime burner. In 1818 he had to accept Parish Relief and malnutrition in childhood may have contributed to his 5 foot stature & his poor physical health in later life.

In an attempt to stave off his parents' eviction from their home, he offered his poems to a local bookseller who sent them to a publishing firm. They were published in 1820. The book, 'Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery', was highly praised and he went on to write more, becoming much admired.

However, having married Martha Turner in 1820, he was constantly torn between the two worlds of literary London and his often illiterate neighbours; between the need to write poetry and the need for money to feed and clothe his children. His health began to suffer, he had bouts of severe depression and eventually, he went voluntarily into an asylum, where he was encouraged to write. He died of a stroke there in 1864.

His poetry underwent major re-evaluation in the late 20th Century and he is now often seen as a major 19th Century poet.



I had never heard of John Clare until I went on a WI visit to Exbury Gardens! You may remember the day - lovely, but there was a sudden huge downpour and many umbrellas were purchased from the shop! I still have mine, not bad at £4!

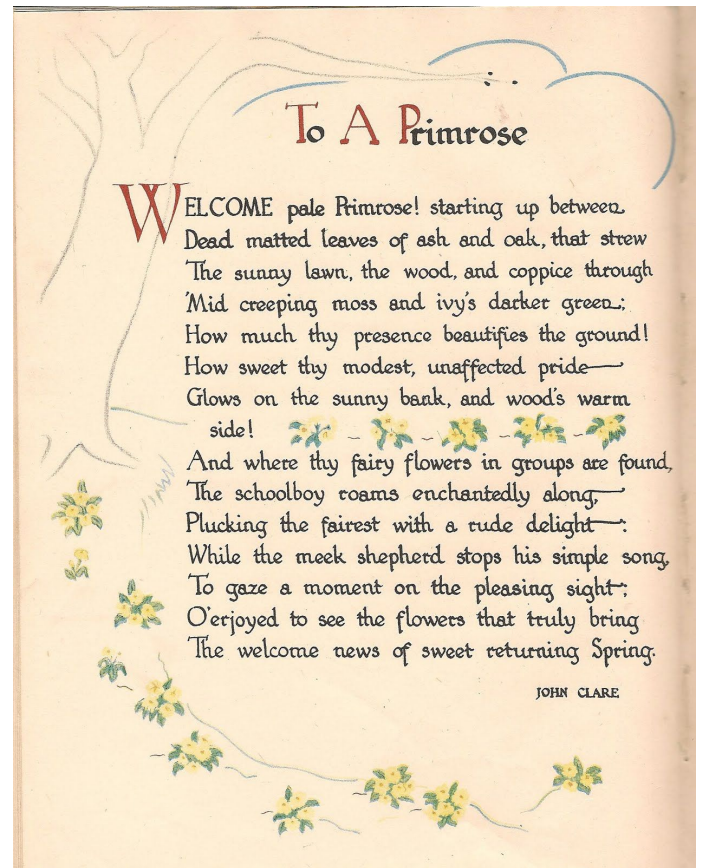
While walking round, my friend and I went into the small building that held an exhibition. Artist and author Marianna Kneller was there showing her beautiful book called 'The Magical World of John Clare'.

Both my friend and I bought one of these books for each other and Marianna wrote inside them for us.

The book contains a selection of John Clare's writings, from his unique observation of rural life depicted in his masterpiece 'The Shepherd's Calendar'. It also includes extracts from his Journal 1824 - 25 to which is added poems, sonnets, Essays & Letters.

Despite his tragic and tormented life, John Clare wrote the most beautiful poetry which so clearly depicts nature and the changing seasons, you can see the flowers and landscape in your mind's eye as you read. It is also a social record of the times.

But this book is also full of the most fabulous and botanically accurate watercolour paintings by Marianna, that surround the poems and writings and bring them to life in the most colourful and sensitive way. It is one of those books that you can leave on your coffee table and pick up at any time. It goes through the seasons so there is something to resonate throughout the year.



**Well, I hope you've enjoyed reading my first attempt at a Newsletter! It's been interesting to learn how this computer works!**

If you have any photos of things in your gardens that you'd like to share, I could try putting them into another Newsletter in a week or so. It may be nice for us to see how we are all getting on - or not! - in our gardens. Also, any other ideas for things to include would be most welcome! Just email me at [mazlittle51@gmail.com](mailto:mazlittle51@gmail.com).

**Meanwhile, enjoy the sunshine, your garden, walking around our lovely village and remember to stay a safe distance from people and keep well.**

*Marian*