The John Clare Society Journal

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the life and work of the poet John Clare.

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From the epic poem 'The Bounty' by Nobel laureate Derek Walcott, to the English secondary school national curriculum; from the 'I hate John Clare' group on social networking website *Facebook*, to the opening pages of Christopher Hitchens' controversial polemic *God is Not Great: the Case Against Religion*—Clare seems to be everywhere in contemporary culture. His legacy is of continuing interest to creative writers: poets have always been keen to respond to their fellow traveller but, of late, there has also been regular attention paid to Clare in prose works. Adam Foulds' novel *The Quickening Maze* is the latest response to Clare's life and joins a fascinating set of texts, including Iain Sinclair's *Edge of the Orison*, and Alan Moore's *Voice of the Fire*. Alan Moore is arguably Northampton's most globally significant living writer, so I am delighted to re-publish his Clare chapter here: I thank the author and Top Shelf Productions for their kind permission to do so. Originally published in 1996, *Voice of the Fire* is about to be reprinted in paperback (ISBN 9781603090353).

In this issue, Moore's creative piece is joined by four spirited scholarly articles, and the first publication of a newly-uncovered Clare letter, which continues the 'miscellanies' section launched last year. I thank all members of the Advisory Board for their scholarly refereeing, and welcome its new members. This year I owe much to the expertise and advice of art historian Christiana Payne, and poet and critic Gregory Leadbetter, both colleagues at Oxford Brookes. The unflagging support of John Goodridge and Bob Heyes has been vital. Finally I would like to thank Simon Sanada, who provided an invaluable last-minute proof read.

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Simon Kövesi

‘The prospect far and wide’: An Eighteenth-Century Drawing of Langley Bush and Helpston’s Unenclosed Countryside

Ian Waites

It has often been noted how visual John Clare’s poems are. The twentieth-century critic John Middleton Murry, for instance, stated that ‘Clare’s faculty of vision is unique in English poetry’.[1] The poet Edmund Gosse complained that Clare ‘was a camera, not a mind’.[2] More recently, Misty Beck has sensitively examined the nature of Clare’s perceptual and visual world in some detail.[3] A few lines from ‘A Sunday with shepherds and herdboys’ clearly demonstrate how Clare could succinctly visualise a scene:

> the landscape spreading around
> Swimming from the following eye
> In greens and stems of every dye
> O’er wood and vale and fen’s smooth lap
> Like a richly colourd map
> Square platts of clover red and white
> Scented wi’summer’s warm delight[4]

To paraphrase Cezanne’s opinion of Monet, Clare might indeed have been only an eye, but what an eye! Clare uses but one word—‘swimming’—to immediately set his vision of the landscape in motion, producing images as evocative and alive as any artistic representation of the English landscape. As such, it is rather surprising that no-one has looked for the real visual equivalents—any contemporary paintings, drawings or prints—to the unenclosed Helpston that Clare so vividly visualised and celebrated in his poems.

My research focuses on the representation of open fields and commons in eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century English landscape art. Knowing of Clare’s attachment to the unenclosed Helpston countryside, I naturally kept a weather eye open for any pictures of this landscape but nothing came to light until

Figure 1. Peter Tillemans, *View of Langdyke Bush & Country Adjacent taken upon Helpston Heath near the Hedge 29 Aug't 1721*, Pen and Wash, 44 x 27 cm, British Library

recently, when I came across a portfolio of various views of Northamptonshire, dating from the 1720s and largely made by the landscape painter, Peter Tillemans.[5] This portfolio includes what I believe to be the only artistic representation of the unenclosed landscape of Helpston, a drawing entitled *View of Langdyke Bush & Country Adjacent taken upon Helpston Heath near the Hedge 29 Aug't 1721* (Figure 1). More remarkably still, the drawing provides us with a direct likeness of one of the most important landmarks in Clare's poetry, Langley Bush, so hauntingly described in his famous anti-enclosure elegy, 'Remembrances'. *View of Langdyke Bush* is one of over 200 drawings that were commissioned as illustrations for a projected history of Northamptonshire being prepared by John Bridges, of Barton Seagrave, near Kettering. Bridges did not live to see his project through the press and it was not until the 1790s that his manuscripts were finally edited for publication, at which time only a handful of the Tillemans illustrations were used. The complete portfolio of these drawings thus represents a great though underused resource for Northamptonshire historians. The views show not only the main towns, houses, their gardens, churches, monuments of the county, but also the landscapes around them. Together, they offer us some of the earliest representations of the unenclosed countryside of England.[6]

Peter Tillemans (1684-1734) was a Flemish artist who came to England in 1718. Subsequently, in 1719, John Bridges commissioned Tillemans to provide a set of topographical drawings for his proposed history of the county. Tillemans worked on these in the summer months of 1719 and 1721, and the results are delicate monochrome, pencil, pen and wash studies. As we can see with his *View of Langdyke Bush*, and others, such as the *Western View of the Town of Northampton taken above Kingsthorpe July 1721* (Figure 2), which shows the village of Kingsthorpe almost stranded in the middle of vast, empty, unenclosed fields, Tillemans had a remarkably fresh and intuitive eye for the Northamptonshire countryside, particularly across the county's unenclosed expanses. Bridges' commentary for Tillemans' view of Langdyke Bush refers to the medieval court of the Hundred of Nassaburgh that was:

> formerly kept at *Langdyke*-bush: and within the memory of man hath been summoned there [...] *Langdyke*-bush stands about two furlongs to the left of the warren-house, or of the great road between *Stamford* and *Peterburgh*, upon a high ground, that overlooks the country to the

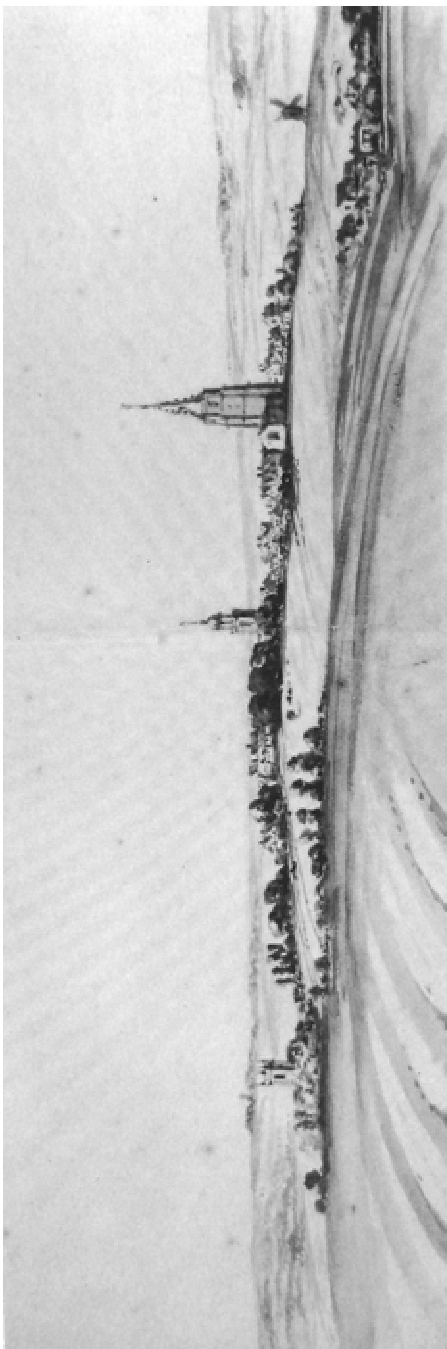

Figure 2. Peter Tillemans, *Western View of the Town of Northampton taken above Kingsthorpe July 1721*, Pen and Wash, 42 x 24 cm, British Library

> north-west, near the corner of a hedge in the open field called *Helpston*-heath, with a white thorn tree on the other side.[7]

This largely correlates with the foreground detail of the drawing: on the left is the 'hedge' while the 'great road' is presumably the shallow (and therefore somewhat out of proportion) 'dip' to the right of this. In the drawing, however, Tillemans has reduced the distance across the heath between the site of the bush and the villages of Helpston and Glinton seen in the background (to the left and right of the bush respectively) when, in reality, the villages are much further away from the site (Figure 3).[8] There is also some topographical confusion here on Bridges' part as he appears to assume that 'Langdyke Bush' relates to the whole area or plantation rather than specifically to the 'white thorn tree' itself, which can be clearly seen growing upon a circular mound which is visible towards the right of the drawing. Both the deeper history hinted at here, and Clare's knowledge of this site, are well documented. As well as being the site of the Nassaburgh Hundred court, the mound is considered to have previously fulfilled two other functions throughout its history: a Bronze-Age barrow, and a Roman shrine.[9] Clare's sonnet, 'Langley Bush', describes the place as a communal landmark by evoking a local, commonly held version of this past, with its reference to 'Langley Court' being 'kept beneath thy boughs'.[10] More personally, Clare's autobiographical writing particularly refers to Langley Bush when he states how 'fondly attached' he was to certain 'spots around the fields'.[11] In 'Remembrances', he recalls 'Summer pleasures […] by Langley Bush I lay […] when I used to shout and play / On its bank'.[12] For the first time ever, we can look upon Tillemans' drawing and see what this special place must have looked like when Clare played here as a child.

View of Langdyke Bush therefore accentuates our knowledge of Clare's deep-rooted attachment to a seemingly unassuming place. Tillemans has drawn what appears to be nothing more than a loose, somewhat ragged, clump of trees and shrubs, but the white thorn tree itself stands tall upon its hill and it has a name, one among many other individually named trees found upon reading Clare's descriptions of the unenclosed landscape: Lea-Close Oak and Round Oak, for instance, both of which were felled at enclosure.[13] The consideration of communal attachment to a locality as denoted by named landscape features is but one aspect of the

unenclosed landscape and habitat that has been widely assessed in relation to Clare and his work. The source of this type of analysis is John Barrell's *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare*. One of the most significant aspects of this study lay in how Barrell identified 'a characteristically open-field sense of space [...] which seems to be particularly important in relation to the idea of landscape we find expressed in Clare's poems.'[14] Through an assessment of various eighteenth-century maps and plans of Helpston and the surrounding area, Barrell noted how the open fields there were 'simply blank spaces.'[15] He also pointed out how this openness appalled certain Northamptonshire-based pro-enclosure propagandists of Clare's time, such as the Revd James Tyley who, in 1823, complained that 'No shady grove relieved the desolate fields with its beauty'.[16] However, our sight of the Tillemans drawing shows us at least one 'shady grove' (or the 'shepherd's sacred shade' as Clare described the spot in the sonnet 'Langley Bush'[17]) within an attractive landscape, which is by no means as desolate in its unenclosed state as the likes of Tyley would have it.

Barrell also highlighted the difficulties Clare could experience in organising his feelings towards his life at Helpston and his attachment to the landscape there, both in terms of the past (childhood memories), and of the present and future (in relation to the enclosure of the parish). In particular, he questions Eric Robinson and Geoffrey Summerfield's suggestion that as Helpston was being 'cruelly altered by enclosure' it became, in Clare's eyes, a 'landscape of Eden before the fall':

> as far as we can see from the examples Robinson and Summerfield have so far produced to substantiate their theory, the imagery of Eden seems to be applied to the landscape of Helpston indifferently whether it is still open or enclosed.[18]

On the face of it, Barrell is criticising Robinson and Summerfield's selection and interpretation of Clare's poetry. But he is also implying that Clare himself selectively 'applied' the enclosure of Helpston and the subsequent loss of the open field landscape as he struggled to manage his own emotional responses to both the impermanence of nature and the transience of youth within the development of his poetry: 'Clare would have still been able to see the landscape with the careless eye of childhood had the enclosure never taken place.'[19]

The emergence of Tillemans' depiction of Langley Bush and its surrounding common heathland emphasizes Barrell's concerns here. Another aspect of the site's history is that it was also once a place where executions were carried out. Tillemans' drawing was completed in the summer of 1721, within months of a gibbet being dismantled and the base removed to Helpston.[20] It only takes a small leap of the imagination to look at the elevated isolation of the tree in the drawing and envisage the spot as a site of a gibbet. Clare surely must have known about this, but he does not appear to refer to it at all in any of his poems, journals or autobiographical writings that otherwise celebrate that particular spot. Simon White also misses this point in his otherwise thorough discussion of the relationship between the site and the local community.[21] That a gibbet was used at one point in Langley Bush's history undermines White's argument that the white thorn 'symbolized popular resistance to remote centralized authority'[22] and shatters the notion of an unenclosed 'landscape of Eden before the fall'. Even so, Barrell's argument that Clare's poetry would have still been defined by a 'careless' eye of childhood whether the enclosure had taken place or not seems unnaturally sweeping. In *The Song of the Earth*, Jonathan Bate rightly argues that even if we doubt Clare could properly co-ordinate his own sense of grief with the consequences of enclosure, we should not 'conclude from this

Figure 3
Photograph of Helpston from the site of Langley Bush, taken by the author

that Clare's personal sadness is not part of a general sorrow at the enclosure'.[23] If we examine the references Clare makes to Langley Bush in his work, in relation to the landmark's historical context, we can explore several other factors which might account for any perceived uncertainties or inconsistencies of tone and meaning in the way Clare uses the enclosure of Helpston as a central motif in his poetry.

'Remembrances' is justifiably known as one of Clare's most direct and powerful 'anti-enclosure' elegies. In this poem, Langley Bush is but one place which disappears as a consequence of enclosure: 'the bush', he laments, 'hath left its hill' in a parish where 'Inclosure like a Buonaparte let not a thing remain'.[24] Barrell once more questions Clare's motives in writing this poem, wondering whether it is 'for a vision of Helpston which has inevitably left him as he has grown older, or for a Helpston which has undergone the concrete change of being enclosed.'[25] We do have Barrell to thank for pinning down the chronological process of Helpston's enclosure. The act to enclose Helpston was passed in 1809 but it was not finally awarded until 1820; Barrell states that the actual work of enclosing began in 1813, and was 'more or less' completed by 1816.[26] 'Remembrances' was written around 1832, over a decade after the enclosure award was published, and nearly a quarter of a century after the whole process began. One simple explanation for any uncertainty as to whether 'Remembrances' is meant to be an anti-enclosure elegy or just a nostalgic treatise on aging, loss and alienation is that, by 1832, the enclosure itself had happened such a long time ago. The Helpston which had 'undergone the concrete change of being enclosed' would have long become conflated in Clare's mind with the Helpston that had 'inevitably' left him as he had grown older, years after the enclosure had taken place.[27]

Clare's publisher John Taylor visited Clare at Helpston in mid to late 1821, and he recalls Clare regretting that Langley Bush 'was fast hastening to utter decay [...] from unintentional as well as wanton injury'.[28] In the 'Autobiographical Fragments', Clare elaborates further, stating that the bush was vandalised: 'broke up by some wanton fellows while kidding [cutting] furze on the heath'.[29] Then, in a journal entry for Wednesday, 29 September 1824, Clare recorded that a stile had been taken away from 'a favourite spot'. He went on to state that 'it hurt me to see it was gone for my affections claims a friendship with such things but nothing is lasting in this world last year Langley Bush was destroyd an old whitethorn that had stood for more than a century'.[30] This

suggests that the bush finally 'left its hill' sometime in 1823, and at the end of a protracted period of 'wanton injury'. Chronologically, all of this confirms that the bush was not directly destroyed as part of the enclosure process, because it happened three or so years after the final award for the enclosure of Helpston was published, and seven years (according to Barrell) after the work on physically enclosing the land had been completed, back in 1816. On the other hand, the way Clare describes the bush being vandalised raises further questions: if these 'wanton fellows' were cutting furze 'on the heath' then he appears to think that the heath was still in existence and that the common rights (in this case, 'estovers', the right to cut and take materials such as bracken and furze from commonly held land) were still extant. Were these 'wanton fellows' somehow refusing to acknowledge that the enclosure took place, even after the enclosure award was made in 1820?

If this is so, then the vandalism could be viewed as a deliberate act, typical of the covert protest against enclosure which took place in Northamptonshire during the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. As such, the vandalism would have been directed towards those who had acquired that part of the heath, and who would have been party to the extinguishing of the common rights that formerly went with it.[31] The enclosure of the heath would have also transformed Langley Bush from being a communal landmark to a mere component within the newly privatised landscape. It also seems from Clare's description that three (or more) years after the enclosure had been completed and the common rights extinguished, the proprietor of the heath had not even begun to improve or cultivate it. The physical transformation of enclosing land in some parishes could be protracted and piecemeal: Barrell's chronology for the enclosure of Helpston is but one case in point. The dividing and fencing-off of newly enclosed land, and the ploughing up of large expanses of heathland, which was highly labour-intensive, might not occur at all until several years after an award was made.[32] Parliamentary enclosure was overpowering in its organisation, its design, and in terms of the social-legal power structure which backed it. We might ask how Clare could have had any close knowledge of the changes that were taking place in Helpston during the long period of enclosure there. He certainly had no control over the process. Under these circumstances, it is perhaps understandable that his responses to the enclosure of Helpston were confused and uncertain. He knows that Helpston Heath has been enclosed, yet he cannot see any change, other than

‘decay’ and wanton vandalism. Bate notes that ‘Clare’s world-horizon was the horizon of the things—the stones, animals, plants, people—that he knew first and knew best.’[33] Clare most effectively rationalises the consequences of enclosure through the effects it had on particular elements of the landscape—as Barrell has it, ‘the simple fact that the trees [or in our case here, Langley Bush] were there, where they were […] caused Clare’s attachment to them, and causes him to regret their destruction now.’[34] The destruction of Langley Bush and the enclosure of Helpston overall however was clearly protracted, and this only served to prolong and distort Clare’s own distress.

My discovery of the Tillemans drawing not only necessitates a re-examination of the historical circumstances of Langley Bush and of Clare’s relationship to the site; it also begs further analysis of the visual and art-historical contexts here, of how artists like Tillemans in the early eighteenth century and those in Clare’s time viewed and represented the unenclosed landscape. Overall, we should not be surprised by any apparent inconsistencies or uncertainties in Clare’s recollections and evocations of the Helpston landscape in its unenclosed state because they are, in any case, clearly mirrored in the work of a number of landscape artists contemporary to Clare, such as Peter DeWint (1784-1849) and John Crome (1768-1821). By the time Clare had published his first volume of poems in 1820, these artists had already produced a number of paintings which demonstrated an aesthetic interest in the open spaces of unenclosed arable fields, commons and heaths, seemingly depicting it in recognition of its disappearance or imminent loss. Clare’s attachment to Peter DeWint’s work in particular has been well documented,[35] but the similarities between Clare’s vision of an unenclosed landscape and DeWint’s own aesthetic and landscape preferences are worth reaffirming here. The following is an excerpt from Harriet DeWint’s memoir of her husband:

> at Lincoln and the neighbourhood [he] found new beauties and new subjects, and what a common-place observer would consider flat and unmeaning was in his eyes picturesque. The long extensive distances with their ever varying effects […] the cornfields and hayfields […] afforded him unceasing delight.[36]

This observation of the artist and his work could easily be used in relation to Clare, for instance to the way John Taylor once referred to Clare’s ‘skill in finding poetic material in what he considered to be a dull, flat countryside’.[37] The phrase ‘long extensive distances’ correlates with our knowledge of what a Midlands open field landscape could look like and, indeed, with the two Tillemans drawings of open fields reproduced here. It is also remarkably similar to Clare’s description of Helpston’s open fields in ‘The Mores’ as ‘plains that stretched […] far away’.[38] DeWint’s *Lincolnshire Landscape (near Horncastle)* of around 1813 (Figure 4) demonstrates the artist’s aesthetic and landscape-type preferences, in that it shows the wide, open spaces of what appear to be the unenclosed uplands of the Lincolnshire Wolds. The painting certainly accords with Clare’s preference for this type of landscape when, for instance, in his unpublished notes for an ‘Essay on Landscape Painting’, he refers particularly to the beauties of ‘undiversified plains […] in the poetry of light and sunshine so void of all trick and effect’.[39]

Figure 4
Peter DeWint, *Lincolnshire Landscape (near Horncastle)*
c. 1813-26, Oil on Canvas, 106 x 171 cm, Usher Gallery Lincoln

DeWint was one of a new generation of landscape painters to emerge in the first two decades of the nineteenth century, who rejected the ideal, classicised view of nature and the countryside, in favour of a more 'naturalistic' approach, based on methods of direct observation.[40] As such, artists like DeWint were more inclined to choose scenes on the basis of their own personal artistic and aesthetic principles, including a preference for the open, unenclosed landscape, primarily because it provided them with the same expressive qualities, such as extremes of light and space, that Clare was sensitive to, and which are exploited to the full by DeWint in his *Lincolnshire Landscape*. This preference was also motivated by a growing awareness of change and subsequent loss in the landscape as the Enclosure process continued to eradicate the open field landscape and its way of life. When we come to examine the historical background to paintings such as DeWint's *Lincolnshire Landscape* however, certain anomalies, similar to those raised by Barrell in the case of Clare, begin to emerge. Notable art historians such as Michael Rosenthal have generally taken the line that artists such as DeWint are painters of the unenclosed landscape: *Lincolnshire Landscape* for instance is 'a DeWint of the open fields in Lincolnshire'.[41] By 1813 however, most of Lincolnshire had been enclosed with only a few unenclosed parishes surviving. All the parishes in the Wolds area that this painting represents had been enclosed by Parliamentary act some thirty or more years before *Lincolnshire Landscape* was painted, yet it shows no sign of any enclosure having taken place.[42]

Christiana Payne's analysis of early nineteenth-century artistic representations of open fields and gleaning explains how painters like DeWint painted the unenclosed landscape in response to the changes that were taking place in the English countryside. Payne claims that artists 'sometimes chose to make studies of open fields which had not yet been enclosed; or else they deliberately painted the landscape as it had been, rather than in its existing state.'[43] Once again, this presents obvious parallels with our understanding of Clare and his work, which can be pursued further by looking at the work of another painter, John Crome. While it is recognised that DeWint was the painter to whom Clare personally felt most attached, Crome's depictions of the Norfolk landscape are closer to Clare's vision than those of any other contemporary landscape painter.[44] *Mousehold Heath, Norwich* of *c.* 1818-20 (Figure 5) is one of Crome's masterpieces: an important, large-scale example of the direct observation of the natural world from this period, and a

magnificent depiction of common heathland under an immense sky. Crome was born in Norwich in 1768 and remained there throughout his life. In its unenclosed state, Mousehold Heath was a massive tract of uncultivated waste which extended north-east for up to ten miles out of Norwich and across at least ten parishes. Even until the very late eighteenth century, Norfolk's landscape was dominated by numerous commons and heaths. William Faden's 1797 map of the county clearly attests to this, showing the vast extent of Mousehold and of other heaths, such as that at Poringland to the south-east of Norwich, the subject of perhaps Crome's most famous painting, *The Poringland Oak* (*c.* 1818, Tate Britain). Crome also produced a number of other views of unenclosed land in the county, including paintings and etchings of commons at Hardingham, Pockthorpe and Hautbois, an unidentified *Heath Scene* (Tate Britain) as well as several further studies of Mousehold Heath, such as the evocative *Boy on Mousehold Heath* (1812-15, Victoria and Albert Museum).

Figure 5
John Crome, *Mousehold Heath, c.*1818-20
Oil on Canvas, 110 x 181 cm, Tate Gallery London

Taken collectively, these naturalistic and direct evocations of the common field landscape show how the historical and geographical circumstance of commons and heaths in Norfolk had a significant cultural influence upon artists like Crome, comparable to how the unenclosed landscape around Helpston dominated Clare's poetic world. Crome's painting of Mousehold, for instance, has been analysed in much the same terms as that of Clare's poetry: 'Open heath still extends as far as the eye can see and appears to be unbounded […] the whole composition transmitting a powerful feeling of empty space, timelessness, and freedom'.[45] Local pressure to enclose Mousehold began in the 1780s and the majority of the heath had been enclosed by the end of the eighteenth century. Crome's picture, painted nearly two decades into the nineteenth century, gives no hint of any enclosure having taken place. His *Poringland Oak* was painted thirteen years after the parish had been enclosed in 1805, yet it still depicts what appears to be open and unimproved heathland surrounding the oak tree at the centre of the painting. Like Clare, Crome expresses an aesthetic preference for the old, open, unenclosed countryside: in spite of the extensive consequences of the Parliamentary enclosure movement in his time, he paints this landscape how he remembers it or how he would prefer it to remain. One art historian sums up this position by suggesting that Crome's painting of Mousehold is a visualization of 'a landscape as archaic and nostalgic as his aesthetic conception is contemporary'.[46] The same could be said for Clare's poetry.

It is no coincidence that the period of 'The Agricultural Revolution' ran parallel to the development of an English landscape genre in painting: aesthetic notions of 'a landscape' emerge at the same time that land is becoming more of a commodity.[47] Peter Tillemans' views of Langley Bush and Kingsthorpe referred to here show how the early examples of English landscape painting were characterised by a need to topographically 'record' a place, town or particular landscape. The extensive, 'prospect' composition of these landscape studies was based on an idea that an elevated view (especially of someone's landed property) was also, by extension, a sign of elevated social and cultural status. Aesthetically, the prospect formula was 'part of the neo-classical belief in the truth of the generalized, the idealized, the elevated.'[48] This view of nature and landscape was enshrined later in the eighteenth century by Sir Joshua Reynolds who believed that art should imitate nature in the general rather than the particular in order to acquire true perfection and beauty.[49] The detail of the natural world was considered too

lowly, too base, and always needed to be sacrificed to a greater, more idealised whole. When Taylor and Hessey exhorted Clare to 'raise your views generally & Speak of the Appearances of Nature […] more philosophically',[50] they would be doing this in response to the more conventional tastes of their customers (many of whom might be 'improving' landowners) which were shaped by Reynolds's pronouncements on nature and, in particular, by the on-going popularity of poems such as James Thomson's *The Seasons*, first published in 1730, but which went through some 250 editions between 1790 and 1830.

Barrell compares Thomson's poetry with Clare's in some detail, arguing that Thomson's descriptions of natural detail only went so far in using terms such as 'the verdant field' which might be 'included in a passage of landscape-description only insofar as they reinforced the general idea of the design'. Terms such as 'scene' or 'prospect' were used in the eighteenth century to suggest a generalised visual relationship with the landscape that was nonetheless still kept at a distance—'that it is over there'.[51] It is this more conventional (and highly successful, in Thomson's case) 'philosophical' distance that Taylor and Hessey wanted Clare to adopt, to 'let' as they put it, 'your descriptions come in incidentally […] subordinate to higher objects.'[52] But such attitudes were already out of step with the newer, naturalistic ways of looking at the natural world as exemplified by the foreground of Crome's *Mousehold Heath*, which has been described as 'a micro-panorama of thistles, weeds, burdocks and grasses'[53] and, by comparison, Clare's detailing in 'Emmonsales Heath in Winter' of how he loves 'to see the old heath's withered brake / Mingle its crimpled leaves with furze and ling'.[54] An early eighteenth-century prospect drawing such as Tillemans' view of Kingsthorpe is typical of the time: lofty, far-ranging, but essentially unidirectional and generalised in its representation of the landscape. Tillemans' *View of Langdyke Bush*, however, is exceptional: resolute in its ground level perspective, and in its concern with local and individual natural detail, it coincides remarkably with Clare's own intimate vision of the unenclosed countryside of Helpston and its environs. Clare's more meticulous nature poetry placed his work at the forefront of new aesthetic thinking of the time. He shares, with the likes of John Crome, a commitment to the 'localization of the spaces of his intimacy with the world.'[55] On the other hand, like Crome, he did retain an attachment to the prospect which was defined in both cases by a life-long devotion to the unenclosed,

open, and therefore panoramic landscapes of youth. A poem such as 'The Flitting' for instance, simply states:

> I miss the prospect far and wide
> From Langley Bush, and so I seem
> Alone and in a stranger scene[56]

By the time Clare wrote this in 1832, the land around Langley Bush would have been changing into something similar to what we can see today—there is still a 'prospect' but it is clearly demarcated and screened off by privately enclosed, hedged-off, cultivated fields and woodland. But Clare's unenclosed landscape is restored for us now, via Tillemans' limpid and evocative drawing. For the first time, we have an authentic visual reference point of Helpston's open fields for us to gaze upon and further empathise with Clare's situation and his poetry, and to contemplate while considering the visual nature of his work. From this small sketch we can see exactly what Clare saw in those youthful years before 'the enclosures came'—the heath, the bush itself, those 'grasses that never knew a scythe', the 'unbounded freedom' that he felt under 'nature's wide and common sky'—and it shows just how Clare's senses were finely attuned to this landscape. For all the critical analysis—of how Clare struggles in balancing his personal grief with that felt by the landscape after enclosure, or of the anomalies in his comprehension and retelling of the changes brought about by enclosure—his identity as a poet was formed both by places like Langley Bush, and by his memory of such places. To paraphrase Bate, Langley Bush was a temporal as well as a spatial landmark; it was there when he was a boy and so it guarantees the continuity of his own life.[57] Finally, I would argue that Tillemans' drawing also guarantees the continuity of Clare's significance today because it is entirely at one with both the actuality of Helpston in its unenclosed state, and with Clare's vision of that landscape.

NOTES

1. Quoted in John Barrell, *The Idea of Landscape and the Sense of Place 1730-1840: An Approach to the Poetry of John Clare* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972), p. 130.
2. Quoted in Edward Storey, *A Right to Song: The Life of John Clare* (London: Methuen, 1982), p. 17.
3. Misty Beck, 'Visual Mimesis in Clare's Open Fields', *JCSJ*, 21 (2002), 24-32.

4. *John Clare, Selected Poetry*, ed. by Geoffrey Summerfield (London: Penguin Books, 1990), p. 93.
5. British Library Add MSS 32467.
6. All the drawings found in the portfolio are collected and reproduced in *Northamptonshire in the Early Eighteenth Century: The Drawings of Peter Tillemans and Others*, ed. by Bruce A. Bailey (Northampton: Northamptonshire Record Society, 1996).
7. Quoted in Bailey, p. 108.
8. Tillemans' depiction of the villages is more akin to the closer view from the crossroads to the north of where Langdyke Bush is currently situated, where the former King Street and the current Stamford-to-Peterborough road intersect.
9. Jonathan Bate, *John Clare, A Biography* (London: Picador, 2003), p. 53.
10. *John Clare, Major Works*, ed. by Eric Robinson and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), p. 30.
11. *By Himself*, pp. 41-2.
12. *Major Works*, p. 258.
13. *Major Works*, p. 492.
14. Barrell, pp. 103-4.
15. Barrell, p. 104.
16. James Tyley, 'Inclosure of open fields in Northamptonshire' (1823), translated from the Latin by D. Halton, *Northamptonshire Past and Present*, I (1951), 36.
17. *Major Works*, p. 30.
18. Barrell, p. 113.
19. Barrell, p. 112.
20. Avril M. Morris, 'The Langdyke Bush', *The Helpston, Etton and Woodcroft Chronicle*, September 2000, <www.botolphsbarn.org.uk/TheLangdykeBushbyAvrilMMorrisMA.pdf> (online version unpaginated).
21. Simon J. White, 'Landscape Icons and the Community: A Reading of John Clare's "Langley Bush"', *JCSJ*, 26 (2007), 21-32.
22. White, p. 24.
23. Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth*, (London: Picador, 2000), p. 165.
24. *Major Works*, p. 260.
25. Barrell, p. 175.
26. Barrell, p. 106.
27. Clare also wrote 'Remembrances' after he had moved for the first time in his life from Helpston, to Northborough, some three miles away. See Bate, *John Clare: A Biography*, pp. 360-4 for a description of the circumstances behind this move, and an account of Clare's reaction to it.
28. *Critical Heritage*, pp. 158-9.
29. The actual date of this is uncertain, although it is known that these fragments were written between 1821 and 1828. *By Himself*, p. 42.
30. *By Himself*, p. 179.
31. See Jeanette Neeson's *Commoners: Common Right, Enclosure and Social Change in England, 1700-1820* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993). When Clare states that he would beg 'the *noble* proprietor' (my italics) of the land where Langley Bush stood to protect the bush, he is surely referring to the main instigator of enclosure in this area, the Lord of the Manor, Earl Fitzwilliam, whose estate spread out over all six parishes included in the Helpston Enclosure Act. See *By Himself*, p. 42 and Barrell, p. 106.

32. Binbrook in Lincolnshire was enclosed by parliamentary award in 1740. Half the land was not fenced in until 1747, and a large area of common pasture was not enclosed and improved until 1806, sixty years after the common rights themselves had been extinguished. *Occasional Papers in Lincolnshire History and Archaeology 2: Labouring Life on the Lincolnshire Wolds*, ed. by R. J. Olney (Sleaford: Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology, 1975), footnote 29, p. 38.
33. Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 153.
34. Barrell, p. 115.
35. For instance by Hammond Smith in *Peter DeWint* (London: F. Lewis, 1982), pp. 26-37.
36. Harriet DeWint, *A short memoir of the life of Peter DeWint and William Hilton R.A.* (London: privately printed, *c.*1900), pp. 20-22.
37. Hammond Smith, *Peter DeWint*, (London: F. Lewis, 1982), p. 30.
38. *Major Works*, p. 167.
39. *Prose*, p. 211.
40. The pioneering work on this is John Gage's *A Decade of English Naturalism: 1810-1820* (Norwich: Norwich Museums Service, 1969).
41. Michael Rosenthal, *Constable: the Painter and his Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), p. 97.
42. See Ian Waites, 'Peter DeWint and the Lincolnshire Landscape' in *Peter DeWint 1784-1849: 'For the common observer of life and nature'*, ed. by John Lord (London: Lund Humphries, 2007), pp. 29-39, which deals with this subject in more detail.
43. Christiana Payne, 'Boundless Harvests: Representations of Open Fields and Gleaning in Early Nineteenth Century England', *Turner Studies*, 2:1 (1991), 14.
44. Timothy Brownlow, *John Clare and Picturesque Landscape* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), p. 112.
45. Trevor Fawcett, 'John Crome and the Idea of Mousehold', *Norfolk Archaeology*, 38:2 (1982), p. 176.
46. David Blayney Brown, Andrew Hemingway and Anne Lyles, *Romantic Landscape: The Norwich School of Painters* (London: Tate Gallery, 2000), p. 62.
47. Malcolm Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1999), pp. 20-21.
48. Brownlow, p. 23.
49. Joshua Reynolds, *Discourses on Art*, ed. by Robert Wark (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), p. 44.
50. *Critical Heritage*, pp. 197-8.
51. Barrell, p. 136.
52. *Critical Heritage*, p. 195.
53. Brownlow, p. 112.
54. *Major Works*, p. 212.
55. Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 155.
56. *Major Works*, p. 256.
57. Bate, *Song of the Earth*, p. 173-4.

Abbreviations

BY HIMSELF *John Clare By Himself*, ed. Eric Robinson and David Powell (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1996)

COTTAGE TALES *John Clare, Cottage Tales*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1993)

CRITICAL HERITAGE *Clare: The Critical Heritage*, ed. Mark Storey (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)

DEACON George Deacon, *John Clare and the Folk Tradition* (London: Sinclair Browne, 1983)

EARLY POEMS (I–II) *The Early Poems of John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989)

HAUGHTON Hugh Haughton, Adam Phillips and Geoffrey Summerfield (eds), *John Clare in Context* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994)

JCSJ *The John Clare Society Journal* (1982–)

LATER POEMS *The Later Poems of John Clare*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and Margaret Grainger (two volumes, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984)

LETTERS *The Letters of John Clare*, ed. Mark Storey (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985)

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MIDSUMMER CUSHION *John Clare, The Midsummer Cushion*, ed. Kelsey Thornton and Anne Tibble (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, revised edition, 1990)

NATURAL HISTORY *The Natural History Prose Writings of John Clare*, ed. Margaret Grainger (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983)

NORTHBOROUGH SONNETS *John Clare, Northborough Sonnets*, ed. Eric Robinson, David Powell and P.M.S. Dawson (Ashington and Manchester: Mid-NAG and Carcanet, 1995)

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PROSE *The Prose of John Clare*, ed. J.W. and Anne Tibble (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1951, reprinted 1970)

SHEPHERD'S CALENDAR *John Clare, The Shepherd's Calendar*, ed. Eric Robinson, Geoffrey Summerfield and David Powell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, revised edition, 1993)

SUMMERFIELD *John Clare, Selected Poetry*, ed. Geoffrey Summerfield (London: Penguin, 1990)