

We might want to drive out the gloomy skies and have wall to wall sunshine instead but there's a beauty to be found here in this place and people, which is part of the gift which comes from stability, which in turn becomes part of us. This is a further reflection on the words of John Clare, spoken at a recent day here exploring his and our rootedness in the landscape and in one another:

*Yer skies may be gloomy and misty yer mornings,
Yer swampy vallies unholosome may be
Still refuse of nature wi'out her adorning
Yere as dear as this heart in my bosom to me.*

(‘Song’)

So attuned was he to the one place and people of Helpston that when financial restraints encouraged a move to Northborough, just a few miles further north in the Fens, his mental health took a drastic turn for the worse. His poetry and prose from then on, were always a looking- back to his primitive ideal, symbolised in his remembrance of his first real love, Mary of Glinton, the neighbouring parish to both Helpston and Northborough, the spire of which could be glimpsed from both. It's a very small world but universal in meaning, primitive but not unsophisticated, primal because primary to us all.

Perhaps there's something here of Turvey, too, and our own occupation of this small patch of land between All Saints and Station End and, particularly, its importance to us in our formation as people – here, not for our own selves only, but for others, sharing a stability in Christ which is foundational to all. The biblical metaphors are of flow as well as stone; of individual as well as collective strength; of death as well as life. The mystery of it all is how such flawed individuals as we are, every bit as vulnerable as John Clare, I venture to say, can be used to further God's purposes, to speak truth to this generation and the next; to be a temple, not because of, but despite, our failings and individual idiosyncrasies. John Clare dies in poverty and social exclusion, for a long time forgotten by the world in general but rediscovered now as a prophet for our times because he spoke truly. As we die in Christ, so may this be true of us too.

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