



CHERRYBURN TIMES

The Newsletter of The Bewick Society



AN AMERICAN WOOD-ENGRAVER

by Abigail Rorer

On October 26, 2005, I had the honor of being invited to speak to the Bewick Society about my work and how I wood-engage. The invitation came about through the efforts of Society member John Caffrey who, along with his interest in Bewick, is also a devotee of Henry David Thoreau, the great American naturalist and philosopher. I, too, am a devotee of Thoreau, having illustrated four books of his writing and read much of his work. I met John the previous year in America at the Thoreau Society Gathering in Concord, Massachusetts and we found that we had much to talk about and talked continuously during a Society-sponsored nature walk. I mentioned to John that I was traveling to England the following year to attend the Oxford Fine Press Book Fair in November and could I visit him; he graciously said yes. Knowing that I

was a wood engraver, John thought the Bewick Society might be interested in seeing how a modern American engraver worked and the talk was arranged.

Thomas Bewick's work is, I believe, studied by anyone interested in the art of wood engraving and I am no exception. I was familiar with his birds, quadrupeds, vignettes of rural life, and his wonderful trees. John sent me a copy of *Thomas Bewick* by Glendinning, Flowers & Flowers, Tyne Bridge Publishing, which I avidly read, learning more of Bewick's life. I became familiar with Cherryburn through the book, but I wasn't prepared for how beautiful it is in reality. Visiting Cherryburn felt like going back in history to a more serene, peaceful, and creative time, where time stands still. I am very grateful to have had the opportunity to experience it.

I began my talk with slides of my very small (Pop: 1100) hometown of Petersham, Massachusetts, USA, trying to give a taste of my life there. I then proceeded to show my engraving process step by step. I will go through it again here. The engraving process has not really changed much since Bewick's time; I transfer the sketch just as he would have, I engrave with the same tools he would have used, I print the block as he would have printed it. What has changed, at least for me, are some of the materials I use. Instead of endgrain boxwood, I use Corian, a synthetic resin developed by Dupont and used for kitchen-counter tops. Boxwood, now scarce, continues to be used by many engravers as also other hardwoods



such as lemon, pear and maple. There is also another synthetic engraving material called Resingrave, which I've tried without much success. I've used all of these materials but prefer the Corian. I came upon this material somewhat by accident. I had a carpenter from my small town cut my wood blocks for me and he also installs Corian kitchens. One day he gave me a scrap of the material and said I should try engraving on it. I was skeptical but did as he suggested. It turned out to be wonderful; it allowed me to engrave without the edges of the lines chipping or being too soft to make a nice, clean line edge. I could get much more detail than I could with any other material, it didn't wear down from the pressure of the printing press, and I could use any solvent on it without worrying about oils seeping into the block, making it difficult to ink properly. But best of all, I could work out my drawing directly on the block because it is white, like a sheet of pristine drawing paper. So here I diverge from Bewick, but doesn't the end justify the means? Perhaps Bewick would not have used this material – there are many wood engravers who are purists – but I would think that he would not have shunned modern materials and conveniences. We live in our own times.

I now use Corian blocks exclusively. My carpenter friend, Jon, mounts the blocks on medium density fiberboard by gluing them, then vacuum-sealing them. The blocks are almost type high; they need just a small shim to bring them up to .918 type high. The best part of all this is that I trade prints for the blocks. So I have unlimited blocks in almost unlimited sizes; I could do a block 4 feet by 8 feet if I desired. Bewick's efforts to make large blocks suggest he might have enjoyed this freedom!

The tools that I use for engraving are: prescription reading glasses with a jeweler's magnifying glass attached, five gravers – a spitzsticker (my main tool) and four different-sized flat gravers. There are a number of other, different tools, such as round gravers and lining tools, but

the above five are the ones that work for me. To clear large areas I use a Dremel press which is a Dremel routing tool mounted on a stationary device that can be moved up and down. I use a 12" x 12" pillow with a book on top to rest my block on as I'm engraving.

I begin an engraving by working out the composition of the sketch for the block on a sheet of paper. I then take this very rough sketch and transfer it to the block by covering the back of the sketch with graphite, putting the graphite side on the block and tracing the edges of the sketch. This is a very simple and basic method that Bewick may have used. I will then work out the drawing on the block, first in pencil then with a crowquill pen and black acrylic ink for the final drawing.

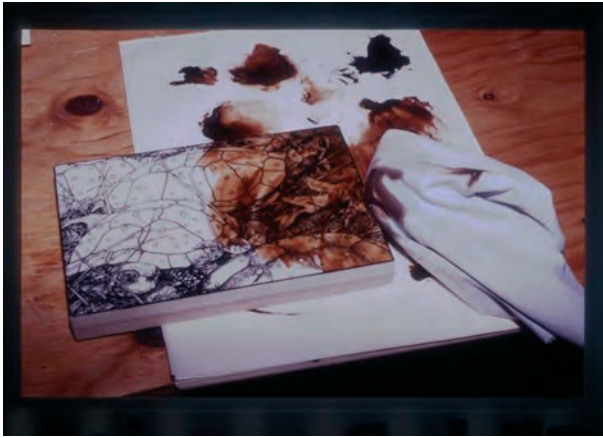
I then erase the pencil with a kneaded eraser and tone the block with a sepia block-printing ink diluted with paint thinner. I like to engrave from a very finished drawing because I don't like to leave a lot up to chance.



The only unknowns that I will encounter when engraving a block are the different techniques to use for certain areas and tonal effects. This is where experiment and chance comes in, but with a finished drawing this is a controlled experiment.

I then proceed to enter my meditative, zoned-out engraving mental state, listening to books on tape and shutting out the world. I enjoy this very much.

When the block is completely engraved I clean off the drawing, lock it into my press, a Vandercook #4 Proof Press, and take a proof. This is when the engraving



becomes difficult and tedious because I now need to get the engraving to the point where I think it is done. This may take 10 to 15 reworkings, or states, before I get it right. I will take a proof or two, study it, perhaps do a little engraving in the wet ink on the block, then I will roll ink on the block, let it dry overnight and go back to engraving it some more the next day. Sometimes it is difficult to know when you are done and you get to a point where there is nothing further you can do, so you hope what is there will work. You can lose a sense of perspective on something you have been immersed in and need to step back, put it away and come back weeks or months later to really see what you have. I've had engravings that I didn't really see until years later but, unfortunately, ruined them in the meantime by over-cutting and deleting areas that should have remained. Ah, well...



When the block is finally where I want it, I will edition it with usually 50 prints and 10 artist's proofs per print. The best paper I've found for engravings is Zerkall Book Smooth, a lovely soft paper that takes the ink very well. The most difficult aspect of printing is doing the make-ready. This is critically important because it is a major factor in getting a good print. Make-ready is the building up or lowering of certain areas of the block and the tympan, the packing material which applies pressure to the upper surface of the block. This is not the easiest thing to explain. When the block is inked and pressure is applied on top of the paper, resting on the block, by the press to pick up the ink, there will usually be areas that will initially print too dark or too light. You will need to either apply very thin pieces of paper to certain areas to add more pressure, or take away a thin layer of paper to lighten the pressure. This will make all the difference in

printing a well printed block or a poorly printed block. Make-ready also enables you to play around with lights and darks, making an area even lighter than you were able to get it with the graver. There will be some blocks whose make-ready will take me all day to make; I don't enjoy those days. It is such a slow and tedious process but you just can't get frustrated or angry because there is nothing you can do about it; kicking the press will only injure you and throwing things will probably set you back hours. Every printer I know is a very patient person.

It is my belief that most engravers are essentially self-taught and to become an engraver, I believe, you must have a little bit of instruction as to what tools and blocks to use; in my case a walk down the street with Barry Moser, the American wood engraver, telling me the basics. Then you must go home and experiment, practise, experiment, look at other work, practise, experiment again. Every now and then, when you are totally stuck, call up an engraver for some helpful hints or consult a book, but then go back to practising. It seems that every engraver has their own method of working, be it the way they hold their tools, the tools they use, how they print the block, etc. Whatever works for you is the right way as long as you get the results you want.

There are three books out now that anyone interested in wood engraving might want to read. Two are on how to engrave: Simon Brett's *Wood Engraving: How to Do It*, Primrose Hill Press, London and Barry Moser's *Wood Engraving: The Art of Wood Engraving & Relief Engraving*, David R. Godine, Publisher, Boston. The most important book, I feel, is Simon Brett's *An Engraver's Globe*, Primrose Hill Press, London; this book has the work of 225 engravers working world-wide and shows a complete range of engraving possibilities and techniques, from the simple to the complex, from black & white to color. This book is invaluable to anyone doing engraving today; as an inspiration and as a tool for learning technique. This book shows what I feel to be the state of wood-engraving today – that there is a renaissance of engraving taking place. You could say that Thomas Bewick was the forefather of this Renaissance.



The Vandercook No.4 Proof Press in the author's workshop.

Editorial note: The Committee of the Bewick Society is very pleased to thank Abigail Rorer for supplying the text and photographs for this article.

Thomas Bewick in Jail in Texas

by *Barney Holland*

In 1967, when still in grammar school, my classmates and I were in the process of printing an ephemeral literary magazine that I had founded at Trinity Valley School when Lorrie Goggans, a local artist, showed me the then just-published Dover Press edition of *1800 Woodcuts by Thomas Bewick and His School*. The printing quality was not crisp, but I was smitten with his work and, like Jane Eyre, spent hours with the volume:

With Bewick on my knee, I was then happy: happy at least in my own way. I feared nothing but interruption, and that came soon enough. The breakfast room-door opened...

We lifted some of Thomas Bewick's vignettes and birds to illustrate our short-lived magazine.

In 1970 I traveled to Northumberland to see the venerable poet, Basil Bunting, and went on a tour of interesting sites that he suggested including the late 7th Century Anglo-Saxon Bewcastle Cross, the 1675 Quaker Meeting House, Briggflatts, the Holy Island of Lindisfarne, and the Chillingham Cattle.

For a brief period I 'ran' the Grolier Bookshop in Cambridge, Massachusetts for Gordon Cairnie when he was in hospital and after reading a good deal about Bewick I learned how rare *The Wild Bull* print is and began looking for one in old book and print shops, but had no luck. I found a few Bewick items, but never the elusive *Wild Bull*.

Twenty five years went by and in 1995 I was visiting an old family friend, the late Elton Hyder, Jr., and I told him of my search for *The Wild Bull*; through him I got the name of David Howard, of Heirloom & Howard in Wiltshire, to whom I wrote in June of that year, saying what I was looking for and asking for his help. Months went by before I got a letter from him, on October 17:

I'm afraid I am only now answering your letter of June 21st about the Chillingham Bull - in fact, it doesn't mean I have done nothing in the interim. I tried various print dealers who either said they didn't know of this Bewick woodblock or that they had never seen a copy (except referred to in reference books).

So I wrote to the present owner of Chillingham Castle who is an old friend, and asked for his help. He said that he had only ever seen two prints, both of which he had bought at a very considerable price. He said however, that as he had two, he would be prepared to sell one to you.

Having thus finally acquired my *Wild Bull*, in the ensuing years I got serious about adding to my modest Bewick collection and have acquired several editions of Bewick's natural histories, additional prints, and a few wood blocks. I have been very fortunate and found these through collector friends who know of my interest, corresponding with museums and libraries, internet searches, and the generosity of my wife, Anne, who has found several Bewick items on eBay, including a beautiful print of The Tiger. When visiting with Margaret Blagg, Executive Director of the Old Jail Art Center in Albany, Texas, I mentioned our small collection and she asked me if we would consent to exhibit our Bewick prints and

books at her museum. I was flattered because Bewick is not generally known hereabout and does not elicit much excitement when the subject is broached. After agreeing to loan our Bewick collection to the Old Jail Art Center I called Sir Humphry Wakefield and learned that he was to be in this country during the exhibition. It turned out that he was also traveling to Texas so we invited him to attend the opening. He accepted and, *mirabile dictu*, all the pieces and persons fell into place perfectly and got along famously. On the day Humphry and his son, Jack, arrived, we hosted a small cocktail party at the Martha Hyder's beautiful manse overlooking the Trinity River Valley and had a small dinner party at Lanny Lancarte's Alta Cocina Restaurant. I had made arrangements with our very generous friends, the Brittinghams, to stay at the storied Lambshead Ranch near Albany, which is 120 miles west of Fort Worth. We drove out on the Saturday morning of the Opening, met with Bob Brittingham and Ms George, who escorted us to the ranch headquarters where they had arranged for a wonderful lunch to be served at Lambshead's 'Cook Shack', which is the social hub of the ranch head-quarter compound. We stayed in the cottages of the various branches of the Matthews and Reynolds families that encircle the Cook Shack, which was built with substantial fireplaces at each end of the building but, as this is Texas, it also has windows that run the length of the long sides so that on summer days cooling breezes can waft through. After lunch we toured parts of the Lambshead Ranch, which covers about 60 square miles, visiting several of the restored houses of the pioneer Reynolds and Matthews families whose heirs still operate the Ranch. Thomas Lambshead, who must have been a very brave man, came to Texas from Devon and settled in the area circa 1848. He managed a stagecoach station for several years and then all mention of him in local records ceases.

We went to the Opening, which was held in conjunction with a sizeable showing of modern sculpture by Texas artists. The Bewick exhibit was beautifully displayed in one room of the original 1877 Old Jail. Albany is a town of only 6,000 souls, but their museum and the collections that they have acquired are remarkable. The web address is at: oldjailartcenter.org The generous hospitality we were shown was warm and most genuine. After a wonderful dinner with delicious wines (each table had a bottle of Stag's Leap wine with a Bewick print on the label), I gave a short talk to the assembled patrons on how, in Fort Worth, Texas of all places, I got interested in collecting Thomas Bewick's work forty years ago. I then invited Sir Humphry Wakefield to the podium to answer questions about the Chillingham Cattle. Whereupon, he launched into a talk on the herd's Roman antecedents, the early Scots' raids, the Tunstall regime, and brought, with great élan and wit, the story to the present day. He completely won the crowd which gave him a well deserved ovation for a bravura performance.

The weekend was an amazing confluence of art, events, and people, all of whom had a wonderful time, brought together by the enduring appeal of the great Thomas Bewick, who left the Old Jail on May 21, 2006.



The marble bust of Thomas Bewick by E H Baily, RA, 1825, in the Literary & Philosophical Society, Newcastle. (Photo: Ian McKie)



The bronzed bust of John Clare by Henry Behnes, 1828, in the Northampton Public Library. (Photo: Peter Moyses, A. R. P. S.)

T. BEWICK (1753-1828) & J. CLARE (1793-1864): TWO ROOTED MEN

By R. K. R. Thornton

In the 1820s two men at different ends of their careers set about writing their memoirs: Thomas Bewick in his late sixties, a large athletic figure at the height of his powers as an engraver; John Clare in his late twenties, a slight figure who had recently made a sensational debut as a poet on the London scene.

In the introduction to Gordon Williams's edition of *Bewick to Dovaston: Letters 1824-1828* (1968), Montague Weekley writes that Bewick 'belongs with Burns and Millet, to the inevitably small company of genuinely peasant genius' (p.13). Clare belongs with him, and I want to highlight some parallels which may begin to suggest why they are members of this select few.

Most quotations are taken (lightly edited) from *A Memoir of Thomas Bewick Written by Himself*, edited by Iain Bain (O.U.P., 1975) and *John Clare By Himself*, edited by Eric Robinson and David Powell (MidNAG/Carc Janet, 1996).

My title is Yeats's phrase to describe J. M. Synge, who found in the Aran Islands a place, a language and a fund of traditional stories which came together in his plays. Bewick and Clare similarly found a language, a traditional set of stories, music, landscape, custom, song, wildlife and other specificities, fostered by their particular place.

I will assume a knowledge of Bewick's biography but give a brief account of John Clare. His parents were just as loving as Bewick's but less educated and far less well off.

'Both my parents was illiterate to the last degree', he records, and

My mother knew not a single letter and superstition went so far with her that she believed the higher parts of learning was the blackest arts of witchcraft and that no other means could attain them. My father could read a little in a bible or testament.

Clare's first book, *Poems Descriptive of Rural Life and Scenery* (1820), went into four editions in its first year. In March of the same year he married his pregnant lover Patty and their first child was born in June. The two-volume *The Village Minstrel* was rather too quickly rushed out in 1821 to catch the wave of popularity. His next book, completed only after severe wrangles with the publisher and depression for Clare, came out in 1827 as *The Shepherd's Calendar*. His last volume was *The Rural Muse* (1835). His behaviour led him to be certified insane and sent in 1837 to a private asylum in Essex, where he stayed for four years. He 'escaped' and took the road North back home. But by the end of the year (1841) he was again certified insane and sent off to Northampton General Lunatic Asylum, where he remained until he died in 1864. Although Bewick makes no mention of Clare, Clare knew of Bewick's work. Margaret Grainger in her *Natural History Prose Writings of Clare* (Oxford, 1983) lists natural history books in the Fitzwilliams' library at Milton, which Clare might have been able to consult, including Bewick's

Quadrupeds and Birds; and Clare's memoranda concerning books and periodicals relating to natural history which he had lent to friends or which he wished to borrow make reference to Bewick's *Birds*. His friend Henderson, on 11 May 1825 wrote in a letter to Clare:

I do not know any person who has got Bewick's Birds, there is a copy of it at the Buck society's library at Peterborough, but it could only be obtained through a member and I believe even they are not allowed to lend them. (Natural History Prose Writings xxxviii-xxxix).

Bewick's *Birds* was a book Clare could not afford. He could scrape together a shilling for Thomson's *Seasons*, but was unlikely to fork out the guinea and a half for the *Birds*. Guineas were rich men's prices.



Thomas Bewick's engraving of John Bewick's 1781 drawing of their birthplace at Cherryburn, Mickley, near Prudhoe, Northumberland.

Both men were pampered as children. Bewick reports that his Grandmother, to whose care he was largely entrusted, 'indulged me in every thing I had a wish for'. Clare says he was 'such a silly shanny boy that I dreaded leaving home where I had been coddled up so tenderly and so long.' Both had an upbringing and education which fixed their interest in books and developed their skills with a fierce independence. They were remarkably self-motivated.

Clare was the more assiduous scholar. His mother 'never lost the opportunity when she was able to send me [to school], nor would my father interfere till downright necessity from poverty forced him to check her kind intentions.' When he could get to school he made full use of it:

never a year passed me till I was 11 or 12 but 3 months or more at the worst of times was luckily spared for my improvement, first with an old woman in the village and latterly with a master at a distance from it. . . . my master was always surprised to find me improved every fresh visit, instead of having lost what I had learned before for which to my benefit he never failed to give me tokens of encouragement (By Himself, pp.4-5).

Bewick's experience was rather different, being put to school, 'not so much with a view to my learning as it was to keep me out of "harm's way"'. It wasn't until the appointment of a new teacher, James Burn, that Bewick began to take to schooling, and his later experience under the Reverend Christopher Gregson left him with a lifelong regard for his former schoolmaster.

Both men were fascinated by woodcuts in the books of poetry that were available. Bewick felt he could outdo them. Clare simply admired them, remembering an old

book of Pomfret's which his father used to read to him. He remembers best that

it was full of wooden cuts and one at the beginning of every poem, the first of which was two children holding up a great letter. These pictures lured me to make an end of the book for one day I made use of an opportunity to cut them out and burnt the rest to avoid detection (By Himself, p.15).

Both Bewick and Clare were great readers of whatever they could get hold of. The way keen readers got hold of reading matter is instructive. Bewick was allowed by his master's servant girl to read his books before work in the morning, and he could read the books of the gentry in his friend William Gray's bookbindery (*Memoir*, pp. 46-7). Clare contrived to find things to read, alongside Thomson's *Seasons* and Milton's *Paradise Lost*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Vicar of Wakefield*:

I used to be uncommonly fond of looking over catalogues of books and am so still. They [are] some of the earliest readings that opportunities allowed me to come at. If ever I bought a penny worth of slate pencils or Wafers or a few sheets of Paper at Drakard's they were sure to be lapt in a catalogue and I considered them as the most valuable parts of my purchase and greedily looked over their contents and now in cutting open a new book or Magazine I always naturally turn to the end first to read the book list and take the rest as a secondary pleasure (By Himself, pp.56-7).

Important books which the men have in common are the Bible and James Thomson's *The Seasons*. Bewick calls Thomson 'The naturalist's Poet' (*Memoir*, p.205), quotes him at least twice in the *Birds*, and obviously takes him for granted. Bewick made engravings for an edition of Thomson in 1805, unfortunately to another artist's designs. Clare's familiarity with Thomson dates from about the age of 13, when he was shown a fragment of Thompson's *Seasons* by a young weaver. He always remembered how the opening lines of 'Spring' 'made my heart twitter with joy' (*By Himself*, p.10). Thomson's *Seasons* was from its first publication in the 1720s a popular book and inaugurated a new era of sentiment for nature in literature.

Both men were characterized by an independence of spirit. Bewick writes:

I am conscious that I never sought a quarrel with any one, but when insulted I found it very hard to bear and mostly in the most secret or hidden manner contrived to fight it out (Memoir, p.14).

Early in his apprenticeship, Bewick mucked his ticket with his new master by getting into a brawl. Clare was also quite aware that

I have one fault which had ought to be noticed, a heated spirit that instantly kindles in too hasty bursts of praise or censure (By Himself, p.26).

He too could respond with fire to insults, as in his experience in the Militia, when, continually teased by a bumptious corporal, he

could stand it no longer but threw my gun aside and seizing him by the throat I twisted him down and kicked him when he was down (By Himself p.95).

Alongside their love of nature, both Clare and Bewick showed early commitment to their future art. Bewick was always drawing – on his school slate, the margins of his

books, grave stones, the floor of the church porch, the flags of the floor and the hearth stone. Someone finally bought him paper, pen and ink, and he graduated to brush and colours (*Memoir*, pp.4-5). Clare was just as obsessive a scribbler, not merely of poetry:

every leisure minute was employed in drawing squares and triangles upon the dusty walls of the barn. This was also my practice in learning to write. I also devoured for these purposes every morsel of brown or blue paper (it mattered not which) that my mother had her tea and sugar lapt in from the shop. But this was in cases of poverty when I could not muster three farthings for a sheet of writing paper (By Himself, p.7).

Clare would cover all spare corners of pieces of paper, including the borders of newspapers.

Both were committed to accuracy of description. Bewick refused Dovaston's flowery offer to 'rewrite the whole of the birds', 'alleging that his descriptions, whether original, copied, or compared, were unimpeachably accurate; and that was enough' (*Dovaston*, p. 137). Bewick scorned 'Garret naturalists' (*Dovaston*, p. 62), just as Clare made fun of the Londoners whom he saw

listening very attentive by the side of a shrubbery and when we came up we heard them lavishing praises on the beautiful song of the nightingale which happened to be a thrush but it did for them and they listened and repeated their praise with heartfelt satisfaction, while the bird seemed to know the grand distinction that its song had gained for it (Natural History Prose Writings, p.36-7).

Bewick's description could do for both:

To obtain all the information in my power, respecting Birds – in younger Days I prowled about the fields and woods night or day – Summer or Winter – to hear their cries as they passed in the Night to their retreats or to get a peep at them in day light (Dovaston, p. 91).

Clare's observations in his poems resemble a bird book, but there is an important difference. Bewick describes the physical aspects of the bird, its nest, eggs and some habits, but often goes on to write of how to hunt and even cook it, reminding us that the book was aimed at the 'huntin' shootin' and fishin' fraternity who were beginning to learn to observe rather than kill the objects of their interest. The vivacity of Bewick's book is the engravings. Clare enlivens with actions the things which Bewick makes vivid with pictures. The interested reader might read Clare's 'The Yellowhammer's Nest' to see how he rounds out ornithological detail with action, observation and association.

Both speak their own language. Dovaston says of Bewick that he omits

his peculiar dialect, as difficult to express on paper, and awkward to those who knew him not; though, to my ear, it always seemed to give point, potency, and a sort of Doric beauty to his aphoristic truths (Dovaston, p.138).

Clare also writes his own language, his own grammar, his own spelling, his own dialect.

Both men called the thing what it was and so came up against censorship. Dovaston remembered Bewick wishing to see the cavern called The Devil's Arse i'th'Peak, and notes that 'his healthy mind was disgusted by the ridiculous, squeamy, and mawkish affectation of calling it "Peak's Hole."' Similarly Clare would not flinch from plain talking when writing his adaptation of Cowper's tender

'My Mary' to a more down-to-earth country wench. Clare's patrons had 'My Mary' and 'Dolly's Mistake' removed from later editions of the book.

Both men loved tales, though Bewick reserved these for conversation and 'tale pieces'. Clare wrote both long story poems and exact miniatures. Both men were great walkers. One thinks not only of Bewick's 350 mile tour of Scotland or Clare's 80 mile journey out of Essex, but of the day to day business of going about the countryside. The walker in the countryside sees much more and in much more detail than those who ride.

Both men loved traditional song. Bewick relaxed with songs, particularly Scotch ballads, of which 'he is passionately fond' (*Dovaston* p.52). Clare was not only a lover but a collector of folk song, becoming 'probably the earliest collector of the songs people actually sang in Southern England' (*Deacon*, p.21). Bewick's son played the Northumbrian pipes, while Clare played the fiddle.

Neither man liked the publicity their fame caused. Bewick avoided recognition at all costs. Dovaston had to call him the 'old gentleman' to avoid being known (*Memoir*, xxiii). Clare frequently escaped from his cottage in Northborough by observing a would-be visitor at the front and rushing off down the garden at the back..



Cowen's engraving of Clare's birthplace at Helpston, just north of Peterborough.

Both Bewick and Clare had a moment of revelation of their opinion of animals in an experience with a hare. Bewick tells how he learnt to be 'impressed with the feelings of humanity' by an experience with a hunted hare, which he tried to save from the dogs (*Memoir*, p.6). Clare learned a similar lesson also with a hare, when an old gun he and his friends were using exploded in their faces:

was not this an alarm to tell our conscience that we were doing wrong and whether it was chance or providence that interfered it was a narrow escape. I felt the warning for once and never was caught on the same errand again (By Himself, p.52).

Fame took both men to London. Bewick's experience simply culminated in his rejection of London in favour of his native places. 'I was delighted beyond measure when I turned my back on the place'. Clare's response was mixed: delight in its variety, and pleasure in his gallivantings with Rippingille, but much apprehension about the possibilities of being robbed or killed. In the end, his tendency too was to seek his native fields.

Both men agree in their attitude to Enclosure and the nobility. Bewick praises the late Duke of Northumberland for his generous provision of land for the peasantry:

If the Lands commonly attached to townships, had been continued as such, or let in small portions, to mechanics and labourers, (as the late Duke had done) instead of dividing them by Act of parliament, among those who had already too much, the good effects to the community at large would have soon been felt (Memoir, p.33).

When praising the incorruptibility of the Highlanders, he turns indignantly to the self-seeking of the landlords:

have not agricultural improvements taught the Landlords or chieftains, to whose forefathers they owed so much, to turn numerous farms into one? and by that means banished thousands of these hardy descendants of the Ancient Britons—these brave race of men, to seek an Asylum in foreign climes, and in exchange for whom, they have peopled the country with sheep. Property in every country ought to be held sacred, but it ought also to have its bounds, and (in my opinion) to be in a certain degree held in trust jointly for the benefit of its owners and the good of society of which they form a part — beyond this is despotism, the offspring of misplaced aristocratic pride (Memoir, p.65).

Clare, growing up in the years when Helpston was enclosed (1809-1820), registered more feelingly than the town-based Bewick, the effect on the peasantry. He castigated Enclosure in angry poems like 'Remembrances':

*Enclosure like a Bonaparte let not a thing remain;
It levelled every bush and tree and levelled every hill
And hung the moles for traitors — though the brook is running still
It runs a naked brook cold and chill.*

And he got himself into trouble with his patron Lord Radstock, for opinions expressed in 'Helpstone' about 'accursed wealth' being the cause of all evils:

*Victims of want, those wretches such as me,
Too truly lay their wretchedness to thee.*

Lord Radstock thought these were 'radical and ungrateful sentiments' and demanded that Clare 'expunge – expunge'. The attitude to aristocracy in both men was to praise the good aristocrat and to blame the selfish one.

In religion both men favoured a simple Bible-based Christianity, though they both experimented with different paths. Bewick found himself in 'a labyrinth, bewildered with dogmas creeds and opinions' (Memoir, pp.46-7) while Clare for a time joined the Ranters, impressed by their sincere faith. But both were by habit country Christians.

In summary, both men were self-taught, self-motivated, spoilt as children, committed to their family, lovers of folk-song, -music and story, immersed in the country, its animals and birds, respectful of Christianity, against Enclosure, shy of publicity but wanting recognition. It is men's 'innate power', wrote Bewick,

drawn forth and acted upon by observation and industry, that enables the Poet, the philosopher, the painter and the Musician, easily to arrive at excellence (Memoir, p.147).

Both men use their 'observation and industry' to make the most of the little they began with, and their skill was nurtured by being rooted in their own place.

But, similar as they might have been, they were not the same. Clare spent years in the asylum, while Bewick, with his trade, his circle of friends, his family, his apprentices, his growing reputation, survived and prospered. To explore that difference would be another paper.

A Matter of Policy for the Society

In November 2004 the Bewick Society was approached by Tyne & Wear Archives to ask if we would consider making a donation towards the cost of acquiring a major collection of Bewick letters. Extensive confidential fund raising had already taken place and six sevenths of the five-figure cost had been raised. The letters had originally belonged to the Ward family, collateral descendants of Thomas Bewick and the residual legatees of his daughter Isabella. After division into about five tranches in the following generation, one tranche had descended to the recently deceased vendor. There was for a while a good deal of anxiety that they might be sold at public auction before the funds to secure them for the Archives could be found. After much discussion, the Committee of the Society decided to make a contribution of £1000, which was done in March 2005.

The letters are in fact extremely important. There were 115 of them (including 17 draft letters from Thomas Bewick and 87 letters to him) in addition to 15 minor related fragments and ten other documents including a partial early draft of Thomas Bewick's Memoir and various business records and family memoranda. The collection undoubtedly makes a major contribution to the rich archives of Bewick material in Newcastle and strengthens our position as the most important place to undertake research on Bewick, his family and his colleagues.

Not long afterwards the Society contributed to the purchase of a copperplate engraving of Close House and its grounds, by Beilby and Bewick, for the Cherryburn collection. Another important item came up for sale auction, at rather short notice, in March 2006. This was a set of the Figures of the Birds and Vignettes, published without letterpress in 1825-27, selected by the Bewick family for George Clayton Atkinson and bound by him with his notes and anecdotes of Bewick's comments and of his own observations of birds. There was also a separate copy of the 1824 Figures of the Quadrupeds. More importantly, bound into one volume was a long and informative (and rather delightfully uninhibited) early draft of the memoir that Atkinson published as his 'Sketch' of the life and work of Bewick in the Transactions of the Natural History Society in 1830. On this occasion the Bewick Society decided not to contribute, but by good fortune the Natural History Society of Northumbria was able to purchase it with the help of a private donation.

We must expect other similarly important items to come up for sale from time to time, and the Society may occasionally be able to help to secure them for public access, to aid research on Bewick. At its meeting at the end of March, the Committee decided to set aside a contingency fund for this purpose. Clearly the conditions for using this money, and the amount to be set aside, will need further discussion at the Annual General Meeting.

Cherryburn Times is normally published twice a year. Contributions are invited particularly (but not only) from members of the Bewick Society.

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