



Jefferies Land Conservation Trust

ANNUAL REPORT 2010

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Saturday 19 March 2011
commencing at 2pm**

**Richard Jefferies Museum
Marlborough Road, Coate.**



The great variety of dragon flies listed at Coate Water is one of the reasons why it is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest

The **objects** of the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust shall be to promote, for the benefit of the public, the conservation and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Jefferies Land near Swindon and to advance the education of the public in the study of literary landscapes – with particular reference to the role played by Richard Jefferies – and environmentally sustainable lifestyles.

The JLCT was founded on 13 September 2005. A constitution was formally adopted on 10 December 2005. It is managed by a Committee of seven Trustees. The organisation is a registered charity [Number 1112836], a registered Environmental Body, a member of the National Council for Voluntary Organisations and it reclaims tax paid by registered members on subscriptions and donations under the Gift Aid scheme.

The Annual Report is produced by the Trustees. The accounts cover the period from 1 December 2009 to 30 November 2010. The published accounts are included at the end of this report along with the agenda for the Annual General Meeting that will be held on Saturday 19th March 2011 at the Richard Jefferies Museum at 2pm. The main matter to discuss will be the proposals to build nearly one thousand houses and an industrial park at Coate/Badbury Wick.

MISSION

To promote the most environmentally sustainable use of the countryside between Coate Water, the M4 motorway, the Great Western Hospital and the Marlborough Downs that adds value to the ecological, literary, educational, recreational and historic quality of the landscape.

COMMITTEE

The following Trustees and Honorary Officers were re-appointed to serve the JLCT Committee at the last Annual General Meeting held on 27 March 2010.

| | |
|-----------|-----------------|
| Chair | Felicity Cobb |
| Secretary | Jean Saunders |
| Treasurer | Marilyn Beale |
| | Sue Birley |
| | Simon Bridewell |
| | Brian Burrows |
| | Steve Nethercot |

MEMBERSHIP

Thanks to those of you who responded quickly to the renewal of membership fees for 2011. The membership fees are still held at the original rate: £2 unwaged, £8 single, £10 families/organisations.

We shall be reviewing Membership fees for the 2012 membership year at the AGM.

DATA PROTECTION ACT

Members' names and addresses are held on a computer data base purely for administrative purposes. We are required by the Data Protection Act 1998 to inform Trust members that they have the right to object to information being held in this way.

SAVE COATE CAMPAIGN

The Trust submitted objections to the planning application submitted by Redrow Homes and Persimmon Homes in June 2010. Thanks to all of you who sent in your own representation. Felicity Cobb ploughed through the responses – there were over 100 objections; a good result considering that we have had to ask the public to write in at least 20 times about plans for this area. The response from Natural England was pretty strong – the government agency now has the remit to cover landscape matters (i.e. development that has an impact on the North Wessex Downs Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty) as well as conservation issues related to Coate Water Site of Special Scientific Interest. Natural England was highly critical of the likely impact of the development on views from Liddington Hill and the Downs; they had concerns about the height of buildings, loss of mature trees, and the lack of information in the planning application as to what the development would look like. Least of all, Richard Jefferies is actually mentioned – at last!!! It says: “The significance of cultural associations with Richard Jefferies are under-estimated; it was the landscape in the vicinity that prompted much of his work, and much of that work was related to envisioning a future, changing environment (notably ‘After London’).”

With regard the potential impact on Coate Water, their main objection relates to the impact of development on the D-shaped field that is not within the country park and is outside the planning application area. This field is boggy (it is part of Day House farmland) and is much used by over-wintering and breeding birds. Those who know it will be aware that there is a footpath that runs through the middle that currently attracts very few walkers. Natural England makes much of the fact that this field and footpath would become a main corridor for dog-walkers etc (as the other main footpaths run alongside the noisy M4) whilst their concerns about cat predation is flagged up as a major worry.

Largely to satisfy Natural England, and on Christmas Eve, Swindon Borough Council received a revised planning application from the developers reducing the number of new houses from 960 to 890 and the density of homes proposed close to Coate Cottages. There was also a reduction in height and layout of some of the buildings. A statement made by Swindon Borough Council’s Cabinet Member for strategic planning proved that he was behind the scheme –“it’s not next to Coate Water, it’s next to the hospital” he kept repeating on a BBC radio interview.

The submission of the revised planning application was closely followed by the news that Swindon Borough Council was bringing forward a new planning policy for the area that made it even easier for the developers to get planning permission. It was also apparent that SBC was trying to play down the concerns raised by over 52,000 citizens who signed the Save Coate! petition.

We have objected to the revised planning application and are delving more deeply into the housing figures to ascertain whether there is a proven need for nearly 900 houses at Coate, given the recession and the low house-build rate.

The Government's new Localism Bill offers little hope that there will be more community involvement in the decision making process.

Despite another approach to the Horton family, who own Day House Farm, they are still not interested in selling farmland to the Trust. It is clear to us that if planning permission for offices and houses is granted, it won't be long before the development spreads to the fields around Coate Water.

The Swindon Core Strategy will be available for public consultation soon. It is important that people object to the new proposed policy for development of the Coate area. We also need as many people as possible to turn up to the planning meeting when Swindon Borough Council meet to decide the fate of the current planning application. The date of the planning meeting may be Tuesday 8 March but there is no certainty. We will try to inform as many of you as possible (those on e-mail at least) when the date is confirmed. If you can, please keep an eye on our News pages at jefferieslandtrust.org.uk.

RICHARD JEFFERIES MUSEUM

The saga about what may or may not happen to the Richard Jefferies Museum at Coate continues. Swindon Borough Council still want to be shot of it and the new development trust is still in a formative stage. Mike Pringle of Forward Swindon is heading up this group that has been given the go ahead by Swindon Borough Council to prepare for the management of the Museum whilst the Council retain ownership of it until such time as a sustainable project and programme might be agreed. It is still hoped that a possible Community Asset Transfer arrangement with the Council will allow the new development trust to either lease or take ownership of the Museum. Our own Trust is ideally constituted to take over the management of the Museum but concerns have been expressed that Swindon Borough Council might not wish to deal with a body deeply involved in the Save Coate campaign. Our own Committee has discussed how our organisation might be "adapted" (a small change to the Constitution would be required to flag-up the Museum as part of the Jefferies Land area covered by it) to take on board management of the Museum, should the museum development group support the idea. The proposed alteration will be debated at our next AGM.

It is more likely that the new trust might await new legislation, anticipated by the end of this Spring, to set up a Charitable Limited Company. The group has a solicitor who will be exploring the best model.

The Coate Reservoir System

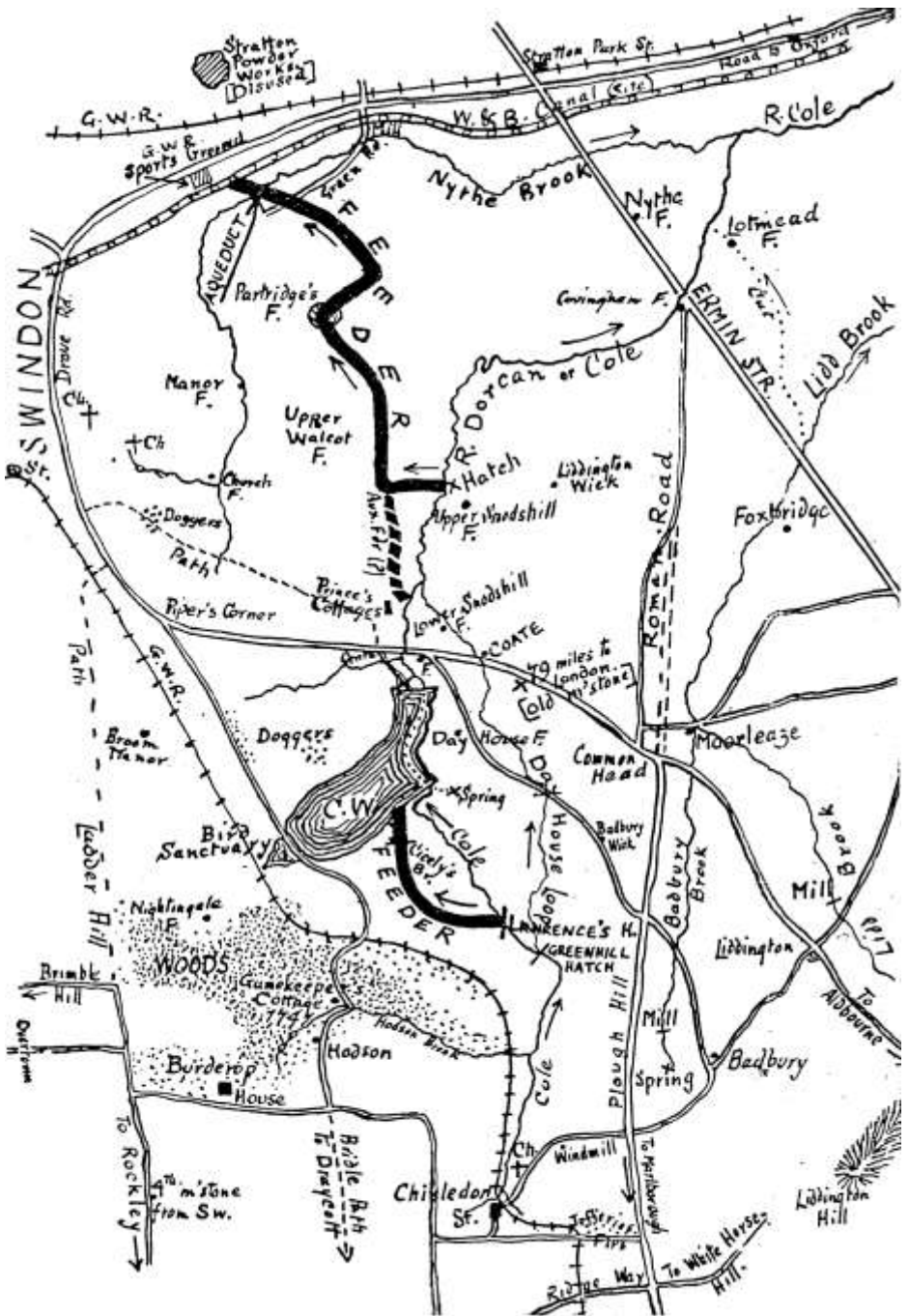
By J B Jones, November 1944

It is always good to hear about campaigners who have fought for what they believe to be worth saving. J B Jones, a Swindon schoolmaster and scholar, was such a man. He was a regular critic of Swindon Council. Pulling down historic buildings and degrading Coate Water were common subjects in his letters to the Swindon Advertiser. The following article by him is of interest as many people are unaware of how Coate Water was created. The pictures were included in the published article.

The River Cole, or Dorcan, born of the union of springs rising in Chisledon village and Burderop Park, passes underneath Coate Reservoir which its own waters create, flows past the Roman Ermin Street station whose lost name may be disguised in modern Covingham, and joins the Thames just below Lechlade. An insignificant stream to boast associations historical, literary and engineering! [Richard] Jefferies had its windings by heart, and thought of it mournfully as he lay dying in distant Sussex—“I have not forgotten the brook, but the brook has forgotten me.” What it meant to the poet [Alfred] Williams is well-known to readers.

Curious that Williams, passing strange that Jefferies, should have slighted so striking a name as Dorcan for the stream they both loved. At least neither ever mentions it, nor even its charming alternative Doreen, which I have heard used quite recently in Coate lower fields by a man mending barbed-wire fences. For Jefferies, it is just the “brook,” and once the “Roman Brook.” Yet the old terminology was there; has remained alive in that quiet countryside from Anglo-Saxon times till now. Beside Doreen, I have also heard During; both this year. Other variants for it are as numerous as odd, Dorca, Dorcyn, Dorterne, Dorceri, but these occur in old charters only; a source, it may be remarked, which gives Lidd and Lynt as Cole’s Liddington and Bishopstone tributaries.

Coate Reservoir was originally intended to supply the neighbouring Wilts and Berks Canal, now long disused. Communication was not by pipe-line, but by a long open ditch in the Walcot fields, east of Swindon. Straight segments follow one another disjointedly across the two-mile stretch of low meadowland between Coate and the canal, and midway, at Partridge’s Farm, through which the “cut” passes, describe a formidable double bend as a motorist would say. If the Great Western killed the canal before the latter could get into its traffic stride — a dated keystone on the reservoir lower dam is inscribed 1822, and the railway reached Swindon by 1840—yet Coate could supply the Stratton powder (ammonium nitrate) works in 1915, and even in 1944 fills a large static water tank standing in the canal bed.

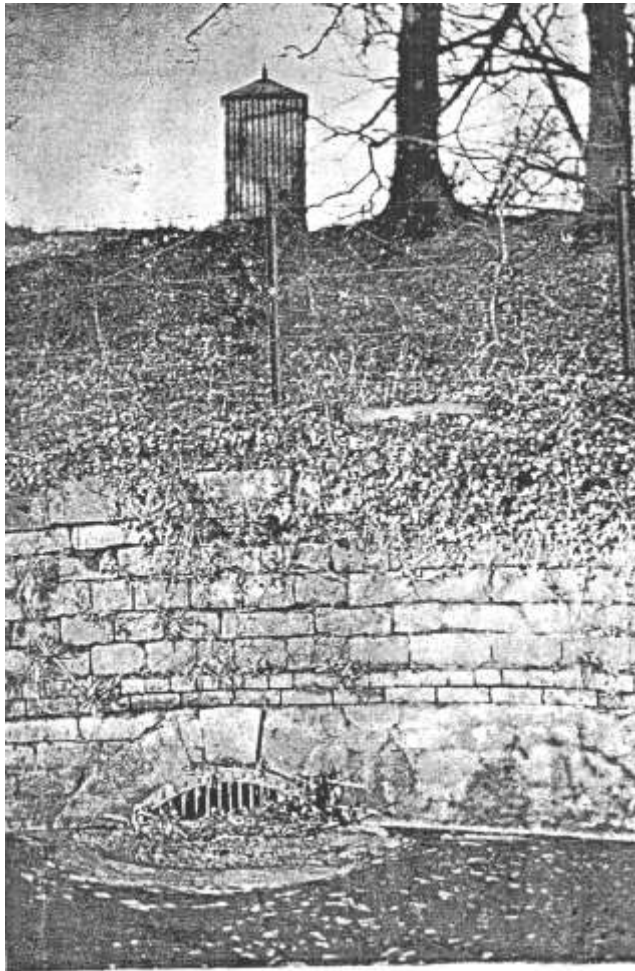


An open brick conduit, some 10 feet high and 130 yards long, carried the reservoir water over the intervening Church Farm rivulet, or Nythe brook, which here bends east close to the canal to join the Cole at Lotmead Farm. I recently stood on this bijou aqueduct garishly reconstructed in concrete in 1915, and watched it still contributing a trickle from distant Coate. As I tracked the lowly feeder from its mock-grandiose termination on the derelict canal to its commencement at the big hatch in the Cole under Upper Snodshill Farm, there was the same spell, if in almost unrecognisable miniature, as had accompanied me along many miles of Wiltshire's deserted Fosse Way. What is this fascination? How could such be possible near Swindon? Skill had traced, sweat had dug this hedge-darkened slit. Were these the human factors whose memory yet lingers in that lush grassland? Will both, plentiful on the site of the Swindon Railway Works, exhale a like aura when the factory is long dead and gone?

A last word on Walcot. The bridges across its deep trough have been replaced by thick shapeless slabs of concrete, dumped down on the decayed piers. "Rocks" they are termed locally; you may hear yourself directed to "cross the feeder by that rock yonder." Irrigation trenches and sluices abound, and an auxiliary feeder (?) leaves the Cole behind Prince's Cottages at Coate to enter the main where this comes westward from Upper Snodshill hatch. Happily the big wet ditch is without history. But had some brutal Wilts and Berks foreman been liquidated here by an avenging shovel, the gloomy tradition would haunt today the booby-traps of outrageously twisting Dorcan. But it is time to cross the Marlborough Road and look at the southern and far more important member of the Coate Reservoir system.

Two miles from Chisledon in the course of the Cole is Greenhill hatch. From here starts Day House loop which, missing the Reservoir and dawdling through Coate hamlet, links up with Cole at Lower Snodshill in time for Walcot. A quarter of a mile below Greenhill is the chief sluice of all, which, until now nameless, may with justice be called Lawrence's. At this critical point the Cole is split; one part is allowed to follow its natural runway; the other, destined to fill the reservoir half-a-mile still lower down, has had a bed made for it. The two lead roughly parallel courses not far apart, but the gradient for the new "brook," as Jefferies always poetises this feeder, is constructed so that the supplanter arrives at the reservoir at a higher level than the true Cole close by. All the way from Lawrence's hatch, the "cut" can be recognised by its Walcot-like straight lines, by its banked-up sides at first, and by more or less fragmentary brick bridges and tunnels.

Cicely's Bridge, which is in fair preservation, is the one nearest the reservoir.¹



CULVERT INLET WITH SLUICE

Two earthen embankments, with trees on their ridges and outer slopes, enclose the impounded Cole water. The lower, or northern dam, near the Swindon Road, hinders the stream from flowing Thamesward; the farther one, about one mile to the south, prevents the imprisoned water flooding back up the valley in the direction of Chisledon. Broom Manor Lane, by the Bird Sanctuary, may be looked

¹ See *Round about a Great Estate* by Richard Jefferies.

on as forming a third embankment. Altogether the lake had an area of nearly 80 acres.

Riparian rights, the authentic though wizened Cole, and presence of a small but persistent spring thrown out by the limestone bastion against which the Day House end of the Upper dam abuts, provided the reservoir builders with some pretty complications of an already stiff problem. They handled them ingeniously, the last two items uniquely. A civil engineer of wide reputation says he has not met with the like during the whole of his long experience.

To provide a single underwater passage for both spring and Cole, a brick culvert of circular section, 44 inches in diameter, was built along the bottom of the reservoir site, following for the most part the old river bed. The Swindon Corporation boundary fence descending steeply from high ground at the Upper dam indicates precisely the position of both source and culvert-inlet. Here the low-lying Cole is seen to be deflected from its head-on approach to the dam by a short artificial willow-lined channel which hugs the foot of the dyke to join the spring. The fate of the latter is odd. It emerges from a rocky cave whose size would admit a biggish dog, then after no more than a few seconds of daylight, is engulfed with the Cole in the black darkness of the culvert. A sluice-box standing gauntly on the dam points out the tragic spot; a similar box on the main embankment marks the culvert's end. Jefferies must have suffered from claustrophobia or he would have made his Bevis seek adventure in this tunnel. There is a legend that someone tried to crawl through, but lost his life as the result. An iron grating at the inlet, framed pleasingly by masonry, keeps out floating rubbish. The lower end is left plain: Jefferies has seen coots and moorhens enter here.

This brick tube has cracked more than once. Closing the hole or holes is a troublesome matter; on an early occasion, bales of hay were used by water-bailiff Lawrence, and used successfully it appears; on another, in 1931, bags of cement. The culvert is generally leaking, but it must be remembered that it is considerably over 100 years old, and so may be regarded as having worn well. With the thorough-going restoration of the main embankment due by 1948, centenary of Jefferies' birth, the engineer must include the question of the culvert, essential feature of the Coate system.

The reservoir is evacuated, when desired, by the main sluice near the turnstiles. Here also is the keystone bearing the date of opening, 1823. Silting is an unusually great nuisance, for the feeder from Lawrence's hatch runs over a stratum of gault, and splays the black mud as sediment upon the bed of the lake. At this end of Coate Water, the filth is 5 or 6 feet thick; should it happen to be exposed, it cakes over deceitfully, but never dries up. Cows breaking through the hard

crust have had to be dragged out by horses or lorries. A man attempting to make a short cut in front of the Upper dam was halfway across when he promptly sank in up to his knees. Fortunately he threw himself at once on his face, and by distributing his weight, just managed to crawl to firm ground. As he pulled his legs out to start, the ooze let them go with a sickening pf . . . ew! All these cases occurred as late as 1944.

One cannot leave this subject without reference to the Genius of the Place, Richard Jefferies, not however to repeat the facts of his life, nor to extol again his inimitable literary achievements. Jefferies was a poet, not a Dryasdust. In his early, hastily-written *History of Swindon* he suggests that the spring behind the Upper dam was the only reason for the Coate culvert, and seems quite to forget that the River Cole, shrunken though it was, was the main item to be considered. His carelessness here had unfortunate results for Alfred Williams. Writing of the Reservoir, Williams pokes gentle fun at the local folk for imagining that an actual stream ran under the Tezzievoy, as some of them called it, and “kept its waters unmixed with those of the lake.” Yet they were entirely correct and the poet of South Marston was the one in the wrong. Had he supplemented Jefferies’ incomplete description by the use of his own feet and eyes as was his wont, he would not have opened Chapter II as he has done in his *Wiltshire Village*.

Edward Thomas, Richard Jefferies’ biographer, looks on the reservoir “cut” below Lawrence’s hatch as an ordinary rivulet. Certainly, frequent impenetrable hedges like those often shrouding the Walcot feeder may mask its real character. None the less, Thomas’ misplaced lyricism is amusing where he dilates on “the brook that enters the reservoir; its bed is of the narrowest, and is among willow-herb and calthropped sedge, and under the overhanging briar and thorn which the delicate white bryony climbs over.” Jefferies, of course, could distinguish between the two Coles, but failing to do so in the printed word, misled Thomas who consequently took the “brook” of “Sport and Science” and of *Round about a Great Estate*, as a child of Nature.

A few geological facts may be assembled here. Walcot: is entirely Kimmeridge Clay. The reservoir area belongs to Kimmeridge, Portland, and Greensand strata, the two former much eroded, with the latter overlying them unconformably. From this red capping, lumps of black carstone are often kicked out by rabbits. The Portland limestone forming the lakeshore cliffs rests on Swindon Clay, thus causing the spring behind the Upper dam. Kimmeridge “doggers” are plentiful on the south and west margins of the mere. Except for a brief band of

Greensand by the rear gate, the course of both Coles (real and feeder) is over Gault: molehills, red to black in quick succession, give the facts away. The geological section at the “precipices” — Jefferies’ term — is of such scientific value that no “development” should be permitted to obscure it. It must remain rough.



COATE “PRECIPICES”

The future of Coate Water has engaged considerable attention of late. The Reservoir became the property of the Swindon Borough in 1914. When the main dam was reported by Government inspectors to need reconstruction, the Corporation’s remedy, instead of rebuilding, was to allow a large amount of water in the lake to run permanently to-waste. By this lowering of the level, Coate Pond, or better, Jefferies’ Pool, soon became a fetid swamp for half its area, and Swindon lost an important source of water supply in case of drought. It goes without saying that owing to the lip let into the dyke, the Reservoir can never fill again until the gap is sealed.

After many years of this, a movement for the restoration of Coate Water to its former status of beauty spot began in 1944; and 1948, *terminus ad quern* of the thrice repeated Government ultimatum on the subject, should see the completion of this indispensable work. According to official assurance, July 1944, “there is no insuperable obstacle, legal or engineering, to prevent the restoration of the original

water level in Coate Reservoir, and in due course the Town Council will give full and sympathetic consideration to the carrying out of the requisite works to bring about this restoration.”

In other words, we may soon see Swindon’s charter of hope to the Longpond translated into fact. The whole Guild of Friends of Coate Water must watch and work to speed this fruition. How heartening to behold again the old Reservoir as Richard Jefferies saw it when he wrote: —

“It is a beautiful sheet of water, approaching a mile in length, and has so much the appearance of being natural that it is difficult even upon examination to consider it the work of man. The illusion is kept up by the numerous trees and the romantic scenery around.”



J B Jones at the Trig Point, Liddington Hill

Swindon Advertiser, 1st August 1944

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING

**Saturday 19 March 2011 commencing at 2pm
Richard Jefferies Museum, Marlborough Road, Coate.**

1. Welcome and apologies
2. Minutes of AGM dated 27 March 2010 (see pages 17-20)
3. Matters arising
4. Acceptance of Annual Report 2010 as a true record of activities.
5. Treasurer's Report (see pages 15-16)
6. Appointment of Trustees and Officers
7. Motions (see next page)
8. The Save Coate! Campaign
9. Land Fund
10. The Richard Jefferies Museum
11. Any Other Business

4 pm Meeting ends

New Trustees and Officers are appointed at the AGM. The current Trustees listed on page 2 of this report are due to stand down but can be re-elected if prepared to stand again. Any motions or resolutions for debate should be sent to the Hon. Sec. (Jean Saunders) before 15th March, as should nominations for Trustees and Honorary posts. Both should be proposed and seconded.

The entrance to the **Jefferies Museum** is opposite the petrol station/Holiday Inn on the Marlborough Road and next to the Sun Inn public house next to Coate Water roundabout. The Sun Inn allows museum visitors to use their car park and there is some limited parking at the Museum.

From Swindon town centre, there are several bus services that stop next to Coate roundabout. These include: Monday to Saturday - daytime: Numbers 13, 14, 16, 19, 24, 46, 47 and 70.

Agenda Item 7 – proposed motions

1 Proposed Changes to the Constitution

The Council for the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust proposes that Members should consider minor changes to the Constitution and Mission/Policy Statement adopted on 10 December 2005 to include a specific mention of the Richard Jefferies Museum. The suggested additional wording is underlined and would read as follows:

CONSTITUTION: Clause 3 The Objects:

The objects of the Charity shall be to promote for the benefit of the public the conservation and improvement of the physical and natural environment of Jefferies Land including the Richard Jefferies Museum near Swindon and to advance the education of the public in the study of literary landscapes [with particular reference to the role played by Richard Jefferies] and environmentally sustainable lifestyles.

MISSION/POLICY/ORGANISATION/STRUCTURE: Clause [1] MISSION:

To promote the most environmentally sustainable use of the Richard Jefferies Museum and the countryside between Coate Water, the M4 motorway, the Great Western Hospital and the Marlborough Downs that adds value to the ecological, literary, educational, recreational and historic quality of the landscape.

Clause [2] POLICY: The Charity will seek to provide a sustainable use of the land and the Richard Jefferies Museum in order to meet its mission and work with others who share this aim.

2. Proposed changes to Membership subscriptions

The Council for the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust proposes that Members consider a new scale of membership subscriptions to be introduced on 1 January 2012:

| | Existing | Proposed |
|----------------------------|----------|----------|
| Individual Membership from | £8 | £10 |
| Family | £10 | £12 |
| Unwaged | £2 | £3 |
| Organisations | £10 | £12 |

Treasurer's Report for year ended 30 November 2010

This is the fifth annual statement of our accounts. You will see comparison income and expenses for 2009 set out on the next page. It has been decided to publish this year's accounts without any rounding up or down of figures. The 2009 figures were rounded and this always adds an element of inaccuracy.

Expenses have been minimal as a result of a relatively quiet year and this is reflected in printing and postage costs that were lower than in 2009.

Interest payments have been pitifully low, reflecting the current state of the economy. However we have recouped in full the tax on interest paid over previous years. Paypal monies are retained in the Paypal account and this is used for appropriate online purchases. Memberships that are paid in cash are also retained as petty cash and used for minor purchases. Membership subscriptions and donations are down and, this year, all donations have been placed in the Land Fund.

We received no grants this year.

Essentially, we have £9077.78 in total assets (£7,756 carried forward from last year) with £3,538.65 ring-fenced for the Land Fund (about £5000 with gift-aid added).

Thanks once again to Rob Brailsford, our independent examiner. He will be looking at the accounts and his report will be available at the AGM.

| | | |
|------------------------------------|--|-----------------|
| Triodos Bank | | £7177.00 |
| Co-op Bank | | £1819.58 |
| Petty cash | | £44.08 |
| Paypal | | £37.12 |
| Assets carried forward 2011 | | £9077.78 |

Marilyn Beale
 Honorary Treasurer
 December 2010

Published accounts

| Receipts and Payments Accounts for the year ending 30 November 2010 | | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------|-----------------------|--|-------------|--|-----------------------|
| 2009 | Receipts | | 2010 | | 2009 | Payments | 2010 |
| £ | | £ | £ | | £ | | £ |
| | <u>Balances carried forward</u> | | | | | | |
| | | | | | 144 | Printing, stationery | 66.10 |
| 4018 | Triodos Bank | 5855 | | | 33 | Website | 23.88 |
| 1971 | Co-op Bank | 1811 | | | 1 | Paypal charges | 4.04 |
| 30 | Petty cash | 57 | | | 88 | Postage | 62.00 |
| 0 | Paypal | <u>0</u> | | | 120 | Equipment/repair | 0.00 |
| | | <u>7723</u> | 7723.73 | | 6 | Tax on interest | <u>1.33</u> |
| 514 | Subscriptions | | 476 | | | | |
| 213 | Donations | | | | | | |
| 707 | Land Fund | | 644 | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| 583 | Gift Aid Tax Reclaim | | 341.60 | | | | |
| 27 | Interest:Triodos | | 6.72 | | 392 | TOTAL PAYMENTS | <u>157.35</u> |
| 52 | Tax reclaim on Interest paid | | <u>43.08</u> | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| | | | | | | Triodos Bank | 7177.00 |
| | | | | | | Co-op Bank | 1819.58 |
| | | | | | | Petty cash | 44.08 |
| 8115 | TOTAL RECEIPTS | | 9235.13 | | | Paypal | <u>37.12</u> |
| <u>392</u> | LESS PAYMENTS | | <u>157.35</u> | | | | |
| | | | | | | | |
| <u>7723</u> | BALANCE | | <u>9077.78</u> | | | Assets carried forward 2010 | <u>9077.78</u> |
| | | | | | | | |

Income for 2009-10 £1511.46

Expenses £157.35

Annual General Meeting of the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust,
Richard Jefferies Museum, Marlborough Road, Swindon on Saturday
27 March 2010

PRESENT: Marilyn Beale, Frances Bellamy, Keith Brain, Gillian Bromhead, Carmela Burchall, Brian Burrows, Tim Carroll, Felicity Cobb, Nick Goddard, Kaye & Graeme Franklin, Margaret Fryer, Linda Kasmaty, John Monniot, Steve Nethercot, Jean Saunders and Graham Walker.

1. THE CHAIR

Felicity Cobb took the Chair in the absence of Sue Birley who had tendered her apologies. The Acting Chair welcomed members to the fourth Annual General Meeting of the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust.

2. APOLOGIES

Apologies were given in respect of David & Sue Birley, Kate & Rob Brailsford, Simon Bridewell, Roy Burton, Susan Fitzpatrick, Dawn Manser, Ken Trenerry and Adam Twine.

3. MINUTES OF AGM DATED 28 March 2009

The minutes were accepted as a true record of proceedings, proposed by Graham Walker and seconded by Kaye Franklin, and were duly signed by the Acting Chair.

4. MATTERS ARISING

Minute item 10.2 – it was noted that we were pleased to see Brian Burrows still in our midst as he decided against moving to Sussex and moved to Old Town instead.

5. ANNUAL REPORT 2009

The report was accepted as a true record of the activities of the Jefferies Land Conservation Trust, proposed by Keith Brain and seconded by Brian Burrows. This was carried.

6. TREASURER'S REPORT.

Marilyn Beale reported that the accounts for 2008-2009 had been inspected by Rob Brailsford, an accountant, and were found to be accurate. There is, however, a mistake on page 10 of the Annual Report – in the penultimate paragraph, there is a typographical error. The total assets should read £7723 as stated in the table at the bottom of the page. Rob Brailsford has signed a letter confirming his agreement of the accounts and is prepared to continue to inspect the Trust's accounts next year. It was proposed by Kaye Franklin and seconded by Graham Walker that Rob Brailsford should be invited to do so. Acceptance of the Treasurer's report was proposed by Kaye Franklin and seconded by Brian Burrows.

Marilyn Beale tabled a spread-sheet of receipts and expenditure since 30th November 2009 that revealed a healthy balance of £8,862 in the account.

The Honorary Members – the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer – remain as signatories to authorise transactions from the accounts.

7. APPOINTMENT OF TRUSTEES

Felicity Cobb was invited to continue to Chair this item on the Agenda. The current Trustees, namely Marilyn Beale, Sue Birley, Simon Bridewell, Brian Burrows, Steve Nethercot and Jean Saunders had all agreed to act as Trustees for 2010. Felicity Cobb had been proposed for nomination by the Trustees but no other nominations had come forward. A show of hands showed Members to be in favour of retaining the current Trustees until the next Annual General meeting and a further show of hands recorded that Felicity Cobb should become a Trustee for the same period. There were no objections or abstentions.

Kaye Franklin proposed and Graham Walker seconded that Marilyn Beale should continue as Hon. Treasurer for the next year. This was carried. Carmela Burchall proposed and Kaye Franklin seconded that Jean Saunders should continue as Hon. Secretary for the next year. This was carried. Sue Birley was unable to continue as Hon. Chairman due to ill health. Members were invited to propose a nominee. Jean Saunders proposed and Steve Nethercot seconded that Felicity Cobb should be appointed to serve as Hon. Chairman for the next year. This was carried. The Trustees were thanked for their services.

8. THE SAVE COATE! CAMPAIGN

Jean Saunders reported that this time last year, the Planning Inquiry had just closed and we were awaiting the result of the Swindon Gateway appeal with trepidation. Whilst that particular battle was won, both David Richards (the planning inspector) and the Secretary of State had not ruled out development of the area subject to certain conditions. As a result Swindon Borough Council is taking forward a land-use policy in the emerging Swindon Core Strategy for 750 houses, whilst Redrow Homes and Persimmon Homes are about to submit a planning application for 960 new houses on land east of Day House Lane along with a business area in the south-east area next to the M4 motorway. The matter is still getting favourable coverage from our point of view in the media but it was regretted that James Wallin was no longer a journalist on the Swindon Advertiser with whom we had built up a strong relationship and to whom we owe a great thanks. Natural England is taking the lead on behalf of the Environment Agency and the Wiltshire Wildlife Trust by seeking to protect the proposed buffer land east and south of Coate Water as an integral part of the Country Park. Natural England is taking this forward as part of their objection to the Swindon Core Strategy planning policy for 'Commonhead'. This part of the emerging plan is likely to be subject to another planning inquiry this year.

The University of the West of England announced last month that they are pulling out of Swindon altogether and even the proposed town centre campus has been abandoned on the grounds that there is no government funding available for new universities. Members believed that there was huge potential for the existing Swindon College to enhance its educational programme to meet any short-fall. The old University of Bath Oakfield Campus has, regrettably, been demolished.

The Save Coate campaign was discussed by Members. It was agreed that we should continue to oppose the development proposals for the area. It was noted that the proposed development area was extremely rich in archaeology, particularly Neolithic and that we had no expertise in these matters. Several suggestions were made of people who might be approached to help us to develop reasons why the archaeological constraints should be better appreciated and preserved against development. John Monniot suggested that John Farrow might assist, whilst Margaret Fryer suggested Julian Richards. Felicity Cobb mentioned several birds that could be seen at Coate Water at the moment, including a tawny owl that has taken up residence in a tree next to the footpath on the north-west side of the lake whilst the heronry has expanded considerably on the nature reserve.

It was agreed that we should continue to engage public support for the campaign – the petition numbers will still be valid, but the public would need to be instructed as to how they might respond to the planning application that will be lodged soon as previous representations will not be accepted by Swindon Borough Council.

9. LAND FUND AND THE FUTURE OF THE JEFFERIES MUSEUM

Jean Saunders reported that donations to the Land Fund are still growing and there is now over £4,000 in the Land Fund if gift-aid is added from those who have signed the appropriate declaration. Adam Twine has sent a written pledge for a further £5,000. The Horton family, who own Day House Farm, have been approached twice by us to sell land to a Trust to put his farmland into conservation use. However now that the field bordering the eastern edge of Coate Water Country Park is out of the development proposals, the Horton family might be more amenable to sell off just this field to a Trust assuming that Redrow Homes has relinquished its option to buy it for development. The average price of agricultural land is about £5,000 per acre and the field in question is about 20 acres in size. It was felt that it would be possible for the Trust to raise this amount with a targeted purpose in mind. Jean Saunders proposed that we should write to Craig Horton again. Steve Nethercot seconded the proposal and this was carried. Jean Saunders read out a draft letter that might be sent to Craig Horton and, with some amendments, it was agreed that the Chairman should write to the family. Fund-raising schemes were suggested but put on hold until we had received a response from Mr Horton.

Mike Pringle, the Director of the Swindon Cultural Partnership, has taken an interest in the Richard Jefferies Museum for the last year. He has been working with the Richard Jefferies Society to see if we might come up with a business plan that would be acceptable to Swindon Borough Council. The latter has allowed approximately another year to make progress on the project before any other alternatives are considered.

10. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

10.1 The Chair reminded Members that they could renew their 2010 subscriptions today if they have not already done so.

10.2 Keith Brain questioned whether the group who run the miniature railway had approached the Museum regarding their wish to extend the railway track closer to the Museum. The Richard Jefferies Society has discussed the proposal and would not have an objection so long as their proposed 'station' for the Museum was ruled out of their project.

The meeting ended at 3.50pm.

Jean Saunders, Hon. Sec.28/3/2010



For more information contact:

Jean Saunders
Honorary Secretary
Jefferies Land Conservation Trust
Pear Tree Cottage, Longcot, Oxon SN7 7SS

☎: 01793 783040
e-mail: info@jefferieslandtrust.org.uk
web-site: <http://jefferieslandtrust.org.uk>