

John William North and Richard Jefferies
Based on a talk given to the Richard Jefferies Society in
Swindon, Wiltshire by S P Milton
December 2003

Most readers of Richard Jefferies will know something of his friendship with the artist John William North from the references in Walter Besant's 'Eulogy' published in 1888.

John North was born in Fulham on New Year's Day 1842, second son of Charles and Fanny. Charles made a modest living from a drapers shop just off Fulham Broadway and a growing family was beginning to place an increasing burden on the meagre family finances. It was here in Fulham that John spent his early years among an extended family of uncles and aunts and received a simple education. From the age of 8, North spent extended summer holidays on Uncle Gathard's farm in Hertfordshire where he explored and sketched the local landscape and gained an understanding of rural life. North's talent for drawing was obvious from an early age and it seems that his parents scrimped enough to enrol him at a local art school. Unlike his great friend, the artistic luminary Fred Walker, he never trained along the lines followed at the Royal Academy Schools and, perhaps as a consequence, he was never an adherent to convention or a master of the figure. However, by the age of 11 he was completing competent watercolours - *The Thames at Wandsworth* now in the collection of the London Museum illustrates this development.

In 1858, at the age of 16, North was apprenticed to the wood engraver Josiah Whymper at his workshop in Canterbury Place, Lambeth. There, North worked as an illustrator, producing drawings for the woodblock. North's illustrations began to appear in a wide variety of publications including those of the Religious Tract Society and the SPCK. At Canterbury Place, North became friendly with his master's son Edward and the two made walking trips together. One such trip brought the two men to West Somerset in 1860 where they explored the area described by Richard Jefferies 23 years later in *Red Deer* and *Summer in Somerset*. By 1864, North had established a reputation as one of the finest landscape illustrators of the 1860s, his work appearing regularly in the popular periodicals of the time including: *Good Words*, *Once a Week* and *The Sunday Magazine*. However, his finest illustrations can be found in the expensive gift books produced by the Dalziel Brothers: *A Round of Days* (1866), *Wayside Posies* (1867) and (in the same year) *Jean Ingelow's Poems*.

By 1868, North had turned aside from illustration to make his living as an artist, principally at that time in watercolour. He was spending more and more time in Somerset, lodging at Halsway Manor, a crumbling C15 Ham stone house nestled under the western flank of

the Quantock hills between Crowcombe and Bicknoller. Here he worked with first George John Pinwell and later Fred Walker, both of whom he had met while they too were apprenticed with Whympster.

It was in Somerset that North began to develop the idiosyncratic landscape style most typified in his later exhibition watercolours. However, in the early 1870s, his style shows clearly his training as an illustrator with closely observed scenes in what has been described by Christopher Newell as a *rectilinear* form. These early works have a highly finished, almost enamelled quality, often with bright colour and the meticulous detail of the earlier Pre-Raphaelites. If the influence of the PRB can be traced in the manner of his works, in subject he may be seen to follow Birkett Foster - North's early training had involved making copies of his works. Swiftly though, North moved away from this early derivative style - becoming more distinctively original. The lack of formality - most apparent in his later work - may have been a consequence of technical limitation (marked in figure and sky), however, the unique poetic tone of his landscapes derives from a meticulous technique all of his own. An illuminating description of North's technique is provided by Hubert Herkomer in his Slade Lectures of 1893. North was rapidly asserting his own identity, moving from a detailed 'literal' style to a technique that creates the *impression* of great detail; detail that proves illusive on close examination. His method was slow and deliberate - it could take several months to finish an exhibition canvas, the surfaces of which, according to Walker, were 'wrought with gem-like care.' Herbert Alexander describes North's approach with great perception:

"North's interpretation of nature was like that of a poet. He did not sit down, like the average landscape painter, in picturesque scenery and arrange it improvingly; he waited until an entrancing moment in the passage of light or some human episode happily related to its surroundings awoke in his heart the ecstasy which is the poetic state. Then no sacrifice of time or labour was too great in the searching of nature to aid his revelation. Transparent colour, impalpable tone, illusive form distil a quintessence from life's beauty that dissolves like great music into the breadth of the eternal spirit."

North painted nature 'up-close' - choosing always the natural tangle and spontaneity of the living hedgerow and woodland above the formality of the classical landscape style. He always painted in the open air, often enduring inclement weather in order to capture fleeting light effects and to obtain the natural colour and tones of a scene. He

would spend many days at a chosen painting ground, occasionally leaving the unfinished canvas at a nearby cottage. Later he began to use huts that could be drawn by horse from place to place or located permanently in favoured spots (such as the wooded Luxborough Valley above Rodewater). North's landscapes began to appear regularly at the Old Watercolour Society's annual exhibitions, on the walls of the influential Grovesnor and New Galleries and later at the pre- eminent Royal Academy exhibitions. He was elected an Associate of the RWS in 1871, becoming a full member in 1884. He was elected an Associate of the Royal Academy in 1893, but perhaps significantly, he never was never elevated to the rank of Royal Academician.

The works of North, Pinwell, Walker, Lionel Smythe and Robert Macbeth became influential in the 1870s and the group is now known as *The Idyllists or the Idyllic School*. The influence of the Idyllists and their followers (including Herkomer, Luke Fildes and Frank Holl) was not confined to the shores of Britain - Van Gogh refers to his admiration for this group in his letters to his brother Theo. On the face of it, the term *Idyllist* suggests that these artists idealised or romanticised rural life and landscape, presenting an idyllic version of an often-harsh reality. The label is attractive, but it is certainly inadequate if used as the sole context by which North's work is considered. While there is a quiet, contemplative and poetic tone in many of his works they are almost completely free of the overt sentimentality that was prevalent in the late Victorian period. North acquired a great sympathy for the plight of the agricultural labouring class and he sought to portray life as it was presented before him. His canvasses are populated with wood-gatherers, gleaners, gamekeepers, gypsies and reapers - the people of the countryside.

It is interesting that a truly coherent *Idyllist* style never did develop during the lifetime of Pinwell and Walker for both died of consumption in 1875. Today the *Idyllists* are acknowledged as the first awakening of the '*social realism*' movement.

In Somerset, North found a remnant of an ancient feudal society - a world that was changing as mechanisation and the Game Laws brought hardship for farm labourers. Many of his paintings reflect on this theme; recording a way of life that must have seemed archaic even in his own time. By reflecting this forgotten world, North too can seem old- fashioned and nostalgic. Closer inspection reveals a complexity and depth for which North is rarely acknowledged. As he moved away from the constraints that illustration imposed, the narrative in his work became more subtle or replaced with a more obscure symbolism.

Alexander described North as a 'poet-painter' and the titles of his works are littered with fragments from Blake, Spenser, Shakespeare, Pindar, Fontaine, Voltaire and others. Often these fragments can help to reveal the feeling that North is seeking to convey. Frequently, there is a subtle dialogue between the artist and the viewer - a sense that the artist is seeking to express to us a purely emotional or, perhaps spiritual response to the landscape. Like Jefferies, North imbues his landscapes with a mystical quality - deeper truths are glimpsed. For North, the *Idyllic* state is a transitory moment when heart and mind resonate in harmony with the landscape.

During the later part of the 1870s and during the first years of the 1880s North divided his time between Somerset, Algeria (where he built a home) and his London studios. After his marriage to a local farmer's daughter, Selina Weetch, at Bicknoller Church in 1884, the couple settled at Beggearnhuish House near Washford in West Somerset and his trips to London started to become less frequent. Within 15 years Selina was dead and North moved with six children to Newland House near Bilbrook, then to Withycombe and finally to Stamborough, a remote hamlet on the edge of Exmoor where he died in 1924.

John North and Richard Jefferies had much in common. They both came from lower middle class backgrounds and neither received an expensive education - indeed they were largely self- taught from any book that came to hand. They had inquiring radical minds, unconstrained by conventional Victorian values. Both understood the reality of country life and sympathised with those who lived it. North was a fervent campaigner on behalf of the agricultural labouring class, championing their cause in the national and local press. He opposed the enclosure of common lands on the Quantocks under the Game Laws and he campaigned for decent rural sanitation and for social housing. Jefferies wrote articles and essays on similar themes. North was Liberal in both conviction and politics but his sympathy for the plight of the agricultural labourer came from direct first hand knowledge and observation and not from any fervent political conviction. Alexander states that, for North, fighting the battles of the agricultural labourer was a *labour of love, and he called it his recreation*. This sympathy is greatly evident in his pronouncement before the start of WW1:

"And if Germany were to conquer England, I don't see that it would matter, for if, as you say, she is so splendidly organised

she might improve the state of England's agricultural labourers, which could not be worse than it is now."

A little of Jefferies' spirit is clearly evident in that remark (North later changed his view and supported the war). But most significantly, North and Jefferies shared a similar emotional response to the landscape.

There is an entry in a notebook kept by North's friend and biographer Herbert Alexander that confirms that Joseph Comyns Carr introduced Richard Jefferies and John North in 1883 - the year that Jefferies made his visit to Somerset to research material for *Red Deer* and the posthumous *Summer in Somerset*. Alexander's notes were based on recollections of conversations with North and there is no reason to doubt this assertion. Carr graduated in law from London University in 1869 and before becoming editor of the English Illustrated Magazine after he had worked as an art critic for the Pall Mall Gazette under the editorship of Frederick Greenwood. Jefferies claimed to have been associated with the PMG from the late 1860s, although it seems that a more formal relationship began around the middle of the next decade. North was a reader of the PMG (and occasional contributor) and this may have been his first contact with Jefferies' writing.

Frederick Greenwood was an early admirer of Richard Jefferies and later recalled that he had been among the first to publish his work. He wrote: *"One or two of those beautiful books of J first came out of the Pall Mall, all to an exasperatingly small amount of attention, a not inconsiderable amount in itself, but so much less than their manifest worth and charm deserved as to be painfully disappointing to J's editor."* In a letter reproduced in Robertson Scott's *Story of the PMG* Jefferies confirms that he very much valued Greenwood's advice indeed he offered him a share in the proceeds of *The Gamekeeper at Home* in acknowledgement of his considerable editorial assistance with the work. Greenwood was an influential figure and his support did much to advance Jefferies' career, setting him before a wider and more discerning audience - it was Greenwood who in 1878 urged the reluctant publisher George Bentley to give serious consideration to *Green Ferne Farm*. (he had previously declined J's work)

North was on close terms with Comyns Carr; they shared a mutual circle of friends and associates through their connections with the Grosvenor Gallery, the New Gallery, the Arts Club and, in Carr's case, the Rabelais Club. North had been a member of the Arts Club since 1874 and had been exhibiting at the Grosvenor Gallery since at least

1882 but more probably since it opened in 1876. Sir Coutts Lindsay had appointed Comyns Carr press representative for the Grosvenor Gallery and later co- assistant along with Charles Halle. The Grosvenor became a focus for those artists opposed to the anachronistic values of the pre-eminent Royal Academy - an institution denounced by Comyns Carr. However, in 1888 he and Halle left the Grosvenor Gallery to set up the rival New Gallery on Regent Street, taking with them Lindsay's greatest asset, Burne-Jones. North switched allegiance too and was appointed onto the 'Consulting Committee'. Through his friendship with the flamboyant Carr and by virtue of his associations with these artistic institutions, North entered the periphery of a circle that included George Meredith, Barbara Bodichon, Thomas Hardy, Oliver Wendell Holmes, Victor Hugo, Henry Irving, Henry James, R.L. Stevenson, Burne Jones, Whistler, Charles Halle, Walter Besant and other notable fin de siècle figures of the Aesthetic movement.

As a friend and critic, Comyns Carr was well acquainted with North's West Somerset landscapes and aware of the fascination this remote part of England held for the Idyllists. In 1885, Carr published an essay on Frederick Walker who had stayed and worked with North at Halsway and Woolston. There is no record of Carr visiting Somerset but his interest in the area was significant for it seems that it was Carr who suggested that Jefferies make the trip to write a topographical article for the newly launched English Illustrated Magazine, of which Carr was editor (Treitel and Matthews have suggested that Carr financed the trip). North was persuaded to illustrate the article - a project that could have been of little commercial interest to North who at this time was approaching the zenith of his fame and wealth (from 1871 his exhibition paintings had been selling for over £200), so this may have been a favour for Carr (unless North was already an admirer of Jefferies). With the trip planned, it remained only for Carr to introduce Jefferies and North. The introduction was made and in June of 1883 Jefferies was in Somerset.

Richard Jefferies' visit to Somerset was a brief one, lasting maybe two weeks at most. However, it turned out to be a fruitful trip, producing material for *Red Deer*, *Summer in Somerset* and other articles. He must have been in good health, because during his short stay he was able to explore a large area stretching from West Bagborough on the eastern flank of the Quantock Hills (about 5 miles west of Taunton) across the Brendon Hills, along the Severn coast to Porlock Weir and beyond to Oareford on Exmoor - a distance of some 30 miles. Memorably, Jefferies walks the banks of the River Barle (a

river well known to North) following its course from Dulverton to Tarr Steps and beyond. Dulverton lies on the southern flank of Exmoor some 12 miles inland from Porlock Weir. It is hard to trace the writer's steps using only the published texts as a guide and the narrative occasionally hops from place to place ignoring the inconvenience of distance or geography. For example, Jefferies *drifts* from Dulverton back to The Quantocks - a hard march of at least 16 miles.

It seems clear that Jefferies started his exploration of West Somerset from the Quantock Hills. The late Berta Lawrence recalled a conversation with North's daughter supporting the idea that Jefferies stayed with North while in Somerset and the Alexander notes appear to confirm this with a reference to a *visit* in this year. It would have been a convenient arrangement; Stogumber and Williton stations are both less than a couple of miles from Bicknoller where North had lodgings. Jefferies refers to Bicknoller in *Summer in Somerset* describing the ancient cross and he clearly explored the area for a day or two making walks onto the Quantock ridge and into Holford Combe - a spot well known to North. His rambles in this area suggest he had a local guide - someone to point out the local antiquities and places of interest. For example, Jefferies refers to Walker's painting grounds (and specifically to Walker's work *The Plough*) and who would have known the location of these places other than North? The background of *The Plough* - a crumbling honey coloured quarry - can be found not more than a few hundred yards from Woolston where North and Walker had lodged some ten years before. Curdon Mill with its undershot wheel can be found on the road from Woolston to Stogumber and it too features in Jefferies' narrative and appears in one of North's accompanying illustrations.

From Bicknoller Jefferies seems to have travelled on through Williton, Bilbrook (where Dragon Cross and Hotel are to be found) and Dunster to Minehead. From Minehead he explored the area around Selworthy before making for Porlock Weir where it appears he took or considered taking accommodation at the Anchor Hotel. He certainly explored the area around Porlock including the beautiful woodlands of the Holnicot estate and beyond to Cloutsham and Dunkery Beacon. From Porlock it is a steep climb but relatively short journey to Exford where much of the material for *Red Deer* was collected with the help of Arthur and Fred Heal of the Devon and Somerset staghounds. The account of the Barle in *Summer in Somerset* suggests that from Dulverton Jefferies then travelled back to the Quantock Hills and to West Bagborough, so it is quite possible that his trip to Somerset began and ended in the company of North.

The friendship lasted for the remaining years of Jefferies' life. It is known that North made at least two visits to Jefferies and his family. In a note made the day after his friend's death North refers to a meeting "*four years earlier at Eltham*" (although Jefferies was living in Brighton in 1883). There is only one surviving letter from North to Jefferies dating from March 1886. In the letter, North plans "*a further*" trip to Crowborough (confirming a previous visit had been made) and discusses details of family illnesses and bereavements - here he also refers to Jefferies' previous letter that must have touched on his deteriorating health. The letter concludes with some observations on wildlife. The friendly and intimate tone is obvious. Alexander notes further correspondence in 1887 but sadly these letters are lost. Jefferies seems to have shared the feelings of friendship for he sent North inscribed editions of his later works that were still in existence at the time of writing.

On 14th August 1887 at 2.30 pm in the afternoon North knocked on the door of 'Sea View' Goring. No doubt he had been informed of Jefferies' final decline and was hurrying to be at his bedside. A tragic scene confronted North, a scene that moved him deeply. Jefferies had died some 12 hours before his arrival at 2.30am in the morning and his wife Jesse was in a state of great distress. North's account of the scene (written in the style of a letter to his wife - note the reference to *dear*) speaks for itself:

"Monday, 15th August 1887

I went yesterday expecting to once more speak with him. I found him lying dead, twelve hours dead. I saw him with Mrs Jefferies and their little Phyllis. A pitiful sight to see them kiss the poor cold face! God help them! The poor dear wife seemed to feel the change which death had brought upon the dear loved face almost more than all the rest. "Oh, how he is changed! A few hours back he was himself. How can I bear it? But they tell me he will again look better." When I tried to dissuade her from looking upon him she said: I MUST - I MUST; until he is taken away I must see him and kiss him each time. My Phyllis, you will never see your dear papa without kissing him?" "No, no," said the little one, and she had no fear in the presence of death. You know, dear, how hard life was with them. All through his last days his wife was with him day and night. She had no hired nurse; their only servant (a young country girl who behaved nobly throughout) was her only help. His long, long illness of six years (you remember how near death he looked

when you saw him first at Eltham four years back) this long, wearisome time had almost persuaded many who knew him not intimately that this illness was partly imaginary. He has proved it otherwise. A soldier who in health and high spirits, and excitement, rides to what appears certain death is called a hero; glory and honours are heaped upon him; but what is that compared with years of fighting without cessation, and absolute certainty of defeat always present to the mind.

I asked Mrs J if he had made a will. "No surely it would have been useless; we have nothing. A woman singly, strong as I am, could rough it; but if something could be done for the children I shall be thankful." I had to call at my framemakers's to put off an appointment. I told him roughly what had happened to me yesterday. He had never heard of J, knew nothing of his work; but he said, "I shall be glad if anything can be done if you will put me down for two guineas." You, being both country born and bred, and with a heart inside your body, have always, sometimes to my surprise, recognised and admired poor J's writing."

North then adds further notes, clearly written some time after the event:

"Shall I tell you what I think and know, that in all our literature until now he has never had a rival, and it is most unlikely that he will ever be equalled. In a hundred years he will be more truly appreciated. The number of men who combine the love and knowledge of his subjects with the love and knowledge of literary work is more limited perhaps in this age than in any previous one. Few people of intelligence and refinement of heart and mind live completely enough in the comparative solitude of the country, and much, perhaps most of his work, will always be unintelligible to those who cannot exist in a country house except it is full of frequently changing guests. I have been trying by a different art for thirty years - equal to almost the whole of his life on earth - to convey the idea to others of some such subjects, and I feel with shame that in the work of half a year I do not get so near the heart and truth of nature as he in one paragraph. With strict charge that it should not leave my hands Mrs J lent me the proof of an article which appeared in Longman's Magazine in spring, 1888. It was the very last copy he wrote with his own hand. Since that time his wife wrote from his dictation. I will try to get it for you, but in the meantime read this

quotation, which touched me greatly yesterday:-

*"I wonder to myself how they can all get on without me - how they manage, birds and flower, without ME to keep the calendar for them. For I noted it so carefully and lovingly, day by day."
And this:-*

"They go on without me, orchis flower and cowslip. I cannot number them all. I hear, as it were, the patter of their feet - flower and buds, and beautiful clouds that go over, with sweet rush of rain and burst of sun glory among the leafy trees. They go on, and I am no more than the least of the empty shells that strewed the sward of the hill."

"One thing I saw in his last notebooks: "Three great giants are against me - Disease, Despair, and Poverty."

"Almost his last intelligible words were: "Yes, yes that is so. Help, Lord for Jesus' sake. Darling, good-bye. God bless you and the children, and save you all from such great pain."

"In the gentlest, sweet, soft, sunny rain he was born along the path to his grave in the grass; and when the last part of the service for the dead was read, well and solemnly, and we turned away leaving him forever on earth, the large tears of Heaven fell thick and fast, and over and over again came to me the saying, 'Happy are the dead that the rain rains on.' The modest home-made wreath of wild-wood clematis and myrtle my wife had sent, pleased me by happy symbolism 'for as the myrtle is, so will his memory be 'forever green.' "

North concludes his eulogy with the following passages selected from Robert Burns' *Elegy on Captain Matthew Henderson* :

*"Mourn, little harebells o'er the lea;
Ye stately foxgloves, fair to see;
Ye woodbines hanging bonilie,
In scented bow'rs;
Ye roses on your thorny tree,
The first o' flow'rs.
Mourn, Spring, thou darling of the year!
Ilk cowslip cup shall keep a tear:
Thou, Simmer, while each corny spear
Shoots up its head,*

*Thy gay, green, flow'ry tresses shear,"
For him that's dead!"*

Having witnessed this most deeply affecting scene, North wrote next day to the Pall Mall Gazette calling for donations to help the widow and the family. His appeal was published on Tuesday 16th August 1887. An insight into the efforts made by North to discharge this last duty to his departed friend is provided by some surviving correspondence between North and Charles Churchill Osborne of De Vaux Place, Salisbury (Editor of The Winchester and Salisbury Journal). In the letters we find that North was unaware that another fund was already in existence. This is probably a reference to the fund established by C P Scott of the Manchester Guardian that had predated his own appeal by some months. If so, then North must have been unaware of Scott's friendship with and support for Jefferies. By the time of North's appeal Scott's fund stood at over £200 (Jefferies had stated his last annual earnings at only £50). It was Scott who had assisted Jefferies to submit an application to the Royal Literary Fund for relief of his immediate pecuniary crisis. Osborne himself had launched an appeal in the *Salisbury and Winchester Journal* and had obviously written to North making him aware of it. Various other funds are referred to in North's final published accounts - the *Langworthy Fund* being one.

In his letters to Osborne, North tells how he labours until the early hours personally answering every letter in connection with the Fund. Much of the correspondence concerns the choice of Trustees for the fund and various names are mentioned. Most seemed unwilling to take on this duty and North himself was not inclined to put himself forward. Some of those approached by Osborne (and indeed Osborne himself) seem to have been slightly suspicious of any undertaking associated with the radical, campaigning and Liberal supporting *Pall Mall Gazette*. It seems too, that Osborne first suggested to North the idea of a memorial bust in Salisbury Cathedral. After consulting Jesse, North replies enthusiastically: *"I can tell you that yesterday Mrs Jefferies seemed more touched and pleased by the idea of recognition in this way in her and his native county than in any other means I heard."* It was Osborne too who suggested an application for a civil list pension on behalf of the family and North encouraged the idea, inviting him to *"speedily draw up an independent petition to the Treasury."* North, never one to rely totally on others, took a personal interest in the application, personally calling on Louis Jessop M.P considering *"the best way to influence the government is through the members of Parliament."* North had no great faith in formal petitions.

On 27th August 1887 a letter from North appeared in the 'Standard' referring to the Richard Jefferies Fund. This may have been an effort to broaden support and free himself; *"from the taint"* of the Pall Mall Gazette. In a letter the following Monday (29th of August), North provides some biographical details for Osborne who seems to have been unaware of Jefferies' place of birth or personal circumstances. He adds a description of the writers' long illness. It is a detailed and graphic account - suggesting that their friendship had been of a frank and intimate nature. Indeed, in the same letter North adds that he was *"perhaps the nearest personal friend of Jefferies."* Among the other interesting fragments in this letter is a reference to an approach made by Mr Arthur Kinglake of Taunton to Mrs Jefferies seeking to offer a position to her domestic servant, Jennie Moss. Kinglake, who had also launched an appeal to assist Jesse and the Children in the Morning Post was later instrumental in the commissioning of the marble memorial bust for Salisbury Cathedral by Margaret Thomas.

By September, North had secured the support of W C Alexander, Banker, of 24 Lombard Street, London to act as treasurer of the RJ Fund - Alexander himself had made a generous donation to the fund of £100. Still no Trustees had been found although plans were now in place for the disposal of the funds. The interest on the accumulated fund would be applied to Jesse, until the children came of age when the capital would be applied for their benefit. North had already arranged for £140 to be paid to Jesse to help with her immediate necessities. On Saturday 17th September 1887 at North's request Jesse, Harold and Phyllis arrived at Beggearnhuish House in West Somerset. They would stay with North for several months (they were still there in January 1888) until the immediate financial situation was secure. This must have been of great comfort to the grieving widow. North busied himself making arrangements for the 12-year-old Harold's education, describing the young student as *"a handsome lad, very tall for his age with exceedingly fair hair and with plenty of vivacity and fairly well up in the three R's."* On Monday morning, 3rd October, Harold walked through the gates at West Somerset County School in Wellington. On Sunday 25th September Jesse received confirmation that the Treasury had made an award of £100 per annum from the Civil List. And so, within six weeks of Jefferies' death his family's financial worries were at an end. There is in this a tragic irony - Jefferies' last years having been spent eking out a meagre living and worrying what would happen to the family after his impending death.

With financial matters resolved, Jesse and North turned their thoughts to Jefferies' papers. Several publishers had agreed to republish articles in book form and Walter Besant had promised to write a memoir and preface for one such volume. He visited Jesse and North in Somerset during October to look through the papers and it seems that the idea of a memoir was abandoned in favour of a full-blown biography - *The Eulogy*.

With Trustees now appointed - Besant, Alfred Buckley and C J Longman having agreed - North finally published a full statement of the consolidated accounts for the Richard Jefferies Fund on 1st January 1889. This fascinating account contains the names of all the subscribers to the Fund. The various appeals had raised a total of £1,514 that would provide an annuity of around £150 for Jesse and the family. This, augmented by the other pensions and earnings from the posthumous publications, secured for the family a comfortable income.

At the Royal Watercolour Society in 1888 North presented his own beautiful eulogy to Jefferies under the title, '*Sir Bevis and the Wood Woman* .' This large watercolour measuring 37" x 26" depicts a sunlit woodland scene in autumn - a woman stands in the foreground with a billhook in hand. In the distance we see *Sir Bevis* , a blond haired boy, fighting off a swarm of bees; an incident that juxtaposes humour to the overall reflective mood (it is likely that the figures represent Jefferies' wife and small children). North must have started work on this painting shortly after his return from Jefferies' funeral and is probably set in the Luxborough valley - a favourite painting ground during this period and only a couple of miles from his home at Begbearnhuish. The work shows North at the height of his powers - the last golden leaves hang from the trees and a glow of magical sunlight suffuses the scene. On the left is a stream and on the horizon we can see the soft outline of the Brendon Hills. There is an obvious symbolism - the rustic billhook, the woodman's equivalent to the scythe, can be seen as a symbol of death and yet although it glints in the autumn sun it seems somehow insignificant. The power that death holds over man seems scorned by nature's eternal regeneration. There is also a strange ennobling of *Bevis* in the title of the work that is difficult to explain. By passing a hereditary peerage from father to allegorical son is North thus ennobling the departed Jefferies? Is the blade that symbolises death, the same blade that elevates the son? In *Sir Bevis* , we have an example of the complexity in North's work - there is no simple reading - what we have is an expression of North's

unaffected emotional response to the landscape, the feelings of loss for a friend and the daily life that goes on around him.

The elegiac '*Sir Bevis and the Wood Woman*' was not to be North's final involvement with Richard Jefferies. In July 1890, Arthur Kinglake issued yet another appeal - this time to support the erection of a memorial bust in Salisbury Cathedral. Margaret Thomas was the selected sculptress and North dutifully volunteered to be a member of the organising Committee. The other committee members were the Richard Jefferies Fund Trustees - Besant, Longman and Buckley together with Kinglake, North, Osborne, C P Scott, George Smith, Andrew Lang, Mr Burdett- Coutts, Walter Pollack, Andrew Chatto, Ambrose Goddard, H Rider Haggard and F G Heath. The cost of the bust, £150, was slow in coming and in the end Kinglake himself made a generous donation that allowed the project to be completed. The sculpture was undertaken using the London Stereoscopic Company photograph North had obtained and was supervised by Jesse Jefferies and Walter Besant. The marble was completed in 1891 and was unveiled by Bishop Wordsworth on Wednesday 9th March at noon on a stormy spring day. In 1925, a plaster copy of the bust was presented to the Salisbury City Council by Frederick Sutton a local confectioner and Mayor of Salisbury (having been obtained from Besant and the Society of Authors) - it then stood for over 50 years in the Committee Room of the Council Offices (where this lowly scribe and great grandson of North sat for many hours under that distant gaze). The bust is currently on loan to the RJ Soc and displayed at the museum at Coate.

In later years, North recorded his reflections on Art in typically philosophical terms:

*"Art is a translation of a poem in the language of nature."
"A true worker in any art is a minister of the very oldest form
of religious worship..."
"Originality in Art is the expression of unaffected emotion."*

Perhaps it is in the last of these we have the clearest insight into the minds and work of both Richard Jefferies and John William North.

Steve Milton

10th January 2004

Selected bibliography:

Alexander, Herbert, *John William North, A.R.A., R.W.S.*, Old Water-Colour Society's Club Fifth Annual Volume, 1927-8
Besant, Walter, *The Eulogy of Richard Jefferies*, 1888

Billingham, R.M. 'A Somerset Draw for Painters - Victorian Artists at Halsway Manor', *Country Life*, 18 August 1977, pp.428-30

Comyns, Alice Vansittart, *J. Comyns Carr: Stray Memories* London: Macmillan, 1920 University of Ottawa

Comyns Carr, J. *Coasting Bohemia* (London: Macmillan, 1914);

Comyns Carr, J. *Essays on Art* (London: Smith and Elder, 1879);

Comyns Carr, J. *Frederick Walker: An Essay* (London: C. Whittingham, 1885);

Comyns Carr, J., *Hubert Herkomer* (London, 1882);

Comyns Carr, J., *Papers on Art* (London: Macmillan, 1885);

Dalziel, Gilbert 'The Publishers' Circular and Booksellers' Record of 10/1/1925

Goldman, Paul, *Victorian Illustration - The Pre- Raphaelites, the Idyllic School and the High Victorians*, Aldershot, 1996

Herkomer, Hubert 'J.W. North, A.R.A., R.W.S.: Painter and Poet', *Magazine of Art*, 1893, pp.297-00, 342-8

Laurie, Kedrun, Unpublished PhD manuscript

Lawrence, Berta, 'A Painter in West Somerset', *Exmoor Review*, 1983, pp.55- 8

Looker, Samuel J. , *Richard Jefferies: Man of the Fields*, 1964

Marks J.G., *The Life & Letters of Frederick Walker*, 1896

Matthews, Hugoe and Phyllis Treitel, *The Forward Life of Richard Jefferies*, 1994

Salt, H.S. , *Richard Jefferies: A Study*, 1894

Staley, Allen, et al, *The Post Pre- Raphaelite Print*, exhibition catalogue, Miriam & Ira D. Wallach Art Gallery, Columbia University, New York, 1995

Thomas, Edward, *Richard Jefferies: His Life and Work*, 1909

Wilcox, Scott and Christopher Newall, *Victorian Landscape Watercolors*, exhibition catalogue, Yale Center for British Art, New Haven, 1992

Acknowledgements

Pippa North,
 Lady Treitel,
 Kedrun Laurie,
 Christopher Newell.

Updated 20/10/04