JEFFERIES' LAND DIRECTION INDICATOR
THE MEMORIAL TO FRANCES J GAY

This Memorial Direction Indicator, set in a large block of Swindon Stone, can be visited on the top of the artificial mound near to the main entrance of Coate Water Country Park, from which there are commanding views over Coate Water and the Downs.



The lines that radiate from this hillock, help to unite the visitor with an impressive number of those places that are preserved for us by Richard Jefferies, born and raised nearby, and illustrated by the short extracts from his writing.

The Plaque, on which the indications and inscription are embossed, was cast in bronze by British Rail Engineering at the Swindon Works; it weighs 88 lbs and measures two feet square.

The four reliefs portray Old Holyrood Church, Swindon; Wayland's Smithy on the Ridgeway; Uffington White Horse; and Barbury Castle. Nineteen places of interest, within a radius often miles (16km), are mentioned. Nearly all of which have associations with Richard Jefferies,

through his life and writings. South Marston has been included as the birthplace of another distinguished nature-lover, the poet, translator and author—Alfred Williams, who is celebrated with Jefferies in the Memorials on Burderop Down and Liddington Castle.



Frances Gay (1886–1974) held the post of Chairman of the Richard Jefferies Society from its inception in 1950 until the year 1971, combining the office for some years with that of Secretary. She was acting secretary at the time of her death in August 1974 at the age of 88. Mrs Gay was an acknowledged authority on Jefferies; a stimulating and devoted correspondent with members and students all over the world; a vigorous and infectious personality; and a conspicuous fighter for the preservation of the beauty and amenities of Swindon's countryside. She was a native of Swindon, and her husband, Mr T G Gay, was Mayor of the Borough in 1961–2.

The Memorial was dedicated before a large gathering on Sunday 3rd April 1977. Harold Adams, Chairman of the Richard Jefferies Society, then handed over the monument to Swindon's Mayor, Leslie Gowing. The Memorial and the Plane Tree of Remembrance near the foot of the mound was funded by contributions raised by the Society from admirers of Richard Jefferies both in this country and abroad.

The selections that follow from Jefferies' works refer to destinations in the order in which they appear on the Plaque. Readers can enjoy the scenes in more leisurely detail by turning to the books and passages themselves. The oil paintings included below are from the work of Kate Tryon around 1911.

BARBURY CASTLE
An Iron Age Camp on the Marlborough Downs; a favourite haunt of Richard Jefferies. He mentions the "green track" linking the camps; this is the Ridgeway.

> Here, whence I start, is another such camp, with mound and fosse; beyond the one I have more closely described some four miles is still a third, all connected by the same green track running along the ridges of the downs, and entirely independent of the roads of modern days. They form a chain of forts on the edge of the downland overlooking the vale.
>
> *Wild Life in a Southern County.* Chapter 3.

BURDEROP PARK
The Great Estate, near Chiseldon, was in the possession of the Calley family.

> The great house at Okebourne Chace stands in the midst of the park, and from the southern windows no dwellings are visible. Near at hand the trees appear isolated but further away insensibly gather together, and above them rises the distant Downs crowned with four tumuli.
> In the enclosed portion of the park at Okebourne, the boughs of the trees descended and swept the sward. Nothing but sheep being permitted to graze there, the trees grew in their natural form, the lower limbs drooping downwards to the ground.
>
> *Round About a Great Estate.* Chapter 1.

SARSEN STONE ON BURDEROP DOWN

A joint Memorial erected to Richard Jefferies and Alfred Williams on 14th December 1939, largely through the efforts of J.B. Jones, Schoolmaster and Scholar, of Swindon. The monolith weighs three tons and bears two bronze plates, with these inscriptions:

RICHARD JEFFERIES 1848-1887
IT IS ETERNITY NOW. I AM IN THE MIDST OF IT. IT IS ABOUT ME IN THE SUNSHINE.
The Story of My Heart. Chapter 3.

ALFRED WILLIAMS 1877-1930
STILL TO FIND AND STILL TO FOLLOW JOY IN EVERY HILL AND HOLLOW COMPANY IN SOLITUDE.
'On the Downs', *Songs in Wiltshire*



THE GAMEKEEPER'S COTTAGE

A thatched cottage on the Burderop Estate in Hodson Bottom. Jefferies became friendly with the keeper.



> The keeper's cottage stands in a sheltered 'coomb', or narrow hollow of the woodlands, overshadowed by a mighty Spanish chestnut, bare now of leaves, but in summer a noble tree ...
> The cottage is thatched and oddly gabled - built before 'improvements' came into fashion - yet cosy; with walls three feet thick, which kept out the cold of winter and the heat of summer. This is not solid masonry; there are two shells as it were, filled up between with rubble and mortar rammed down hard.
>
> *The Gamekeeper at Home.* Chapter 1.

DRAYCOT FOLIAT

This ancient farmhouse, on the uplands beyond Chiseldon, was the early home of Richard Jefferies' forebears.

> But, though out of sight, there was a farmhouse behind a small copse, and clump of elms full of rooks' nests, a short way from the foot of the Down. This was The Idovers, once the residence of old Jonathan; it was the last farm before reaching the hill district proper ... They prided themselves then hi that hill district that they had neither a cow nor a poor married man hi the parish. The whole resident population was not much over a score, and of the labourers, they boasted not one was married. For in those old tunes, each parish kept its own poor, and consequently disliked an increase in population.
>
> *Round About a Great Estate.* Chapter 6.

THE OLD QUARRY, COATE WATER

They left the shore awhile and went into the quarry, and winding in and out of the beds of nettles and thistles, climbed up a slope where they sank at every step ankle deep hi sand. It led to a broad platform, above which the precipice rose straight to the roots of the grass above ...

Bevis. Chapter 5.

MARLBOROUGH TOWN HALL

Maryborough was the *Overboro' of Round About a Great Estate*

Hilary believed there was an old book - a history of the Overbore' town - which might perhaps contain some information, but where it could be found, he did not know. After some consideration, however, he thought there might be a copy at the Crown, once an old posting-inn, at Overbore' ... So one warm summer day I walked over to Overboro', following a path over the Downs, whose sward affords the best walking in the world.

Round about a Great Estate. Chapter 9.

SAVERNAKE FOREST

A privately owned forest, to which the public have access, close to Marlborough.

Perhaps it is because no such outbursts of human passion have swept along beneath its trees that the 'Forest' is unsung by the poet, and unvisited by the artist. Yet its very name is poetical—Savernake—i.e. savernes-acres—like the God's acres of Longfellow. Saverne—a peculiar species of sweet fern; acre-land. So we may call it 'Fern-land Forest', and with truth, for but one step beneath those beeches away from the path plunges us to our shoulders in an ocean of bracken.

'Marlborough Forest', *The Hills and the Vale*

CHISELDON CHURCH.

Richard Jefferies and Jessie Baden were married here in 1874.



Near the edge of the hill, just above the washpool, stands the village church. Old and grey as it is, yet the usage of the pool by the shepherds dates from still earlier days. Like some of the farmhouses further up among the hills, the tower is built of flints set in cement, which in the passage of tune has become almost as hard as the flint itself.

Wild Life in a Southern County. Chapter 4.

DAY HOUSE FARM.



Just past the thatched outbuildings of Coate Farm, a by-road, bordered by elms and good ash trees leads to Day House Farm, its elms and pollard willows, and a half a hundred moles nailed to the pigsty wall.

Richard Jefferies, his Life and Work. Edward Thomas. Chapter 1

LIDDINGTON CASTLE

An Iron- Age Fort on a prominent hill overlooking Swindon, much loved by Jefferies.

Moving up the short sweet turf, at every step my heart seemed to obtain a wider horizon of feeling; with every inhalation of rich, pure air, a deeper desire. This very light of the sun was whiter and more brilliant here. By the tune I had reached the summit I had entirely forgotten the petty circumstances and annoyances of existence. I felt myself, myself. There was an entrenchment on the summit, and going down into the fosse I walked round it slowly to recover by breath.

The Story of My Heart. Chapter 1.

LIDDINGTON CLUMP

A well-known landmark consisting of a group of trees, North East of Liddington Castle.

Here ... on the same ridge as the earthwork, and not a quarter of a mile distant, is a small clump of wind-harassed trees, growing on the very edge. They are firs and beeches and though so thoroughly exposed to furious gales have attained a fair height in that thin soil.

Wild Life in a Southern County. Chapter 2.

BADBURY COOMB

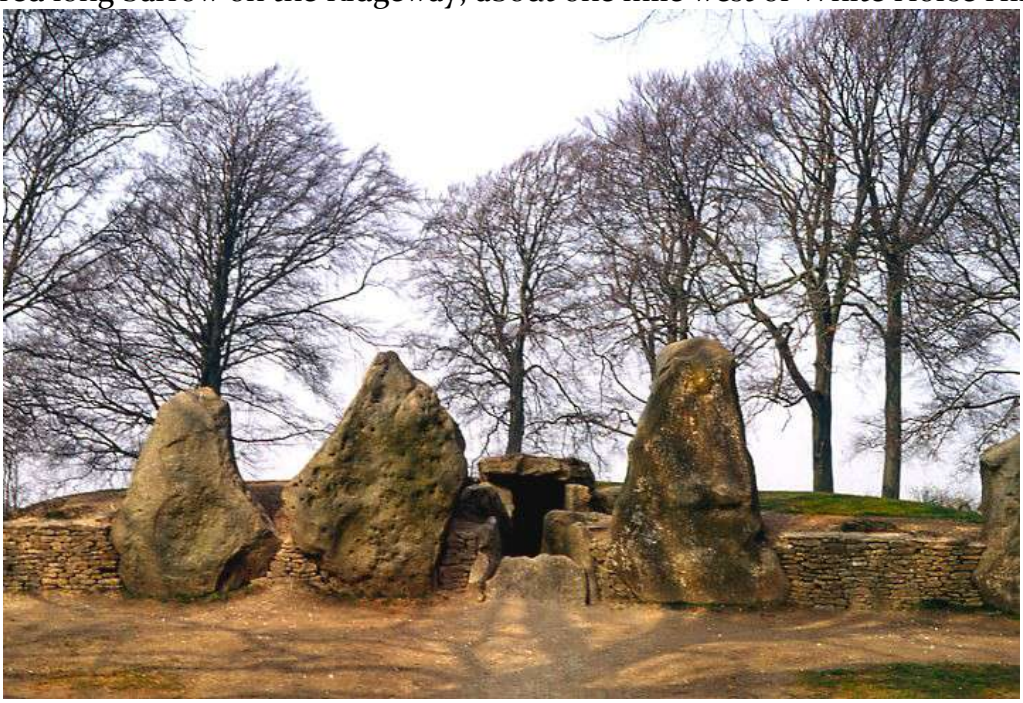
A hollow between Chiseldon and Liddington, now severed by the M4 Motorway, was once the location of Tibbald's Mill.

'Our time be a-most gone by', said the miller looking up from his work and laying aside the millpeck for a moment as he rubbed his eyes with his white and greasy sleeve ... 'We be too fur away up these here Downs. There! Listen to he!' A famt hollow whistle came up over the plain, and I saw a long white cloud of steam miles away, swiftly gliding above the trees beneath which in the cutting the train was running.

Round About a Great Estate. Chapter 9.

WAYLAND'S SMITHY

A chambered long barrow on the Ridgeway, about one mile west of White Horse Hill.



This monument is now hidden in a beech-copse and consists of three stones set on the edge supporting a fourth - a broad covering-stone. More are scattered round, forming an oval. The country people call it Wayland Smith's cave, and tell a story of an invisible smith who shoed travellers' horses, on condition of leaving the horse near. Presently, there would be a tinkling of hammers, and on returning to the spot, the horse would be found shod, and no one in sight.

From an early article by Jefferies, reprinted in *Jefferies Land.*

UFFINGTON CASTLE AND THE WHITE HORSE

A hill figure, over 2000 years old, cut in the chalk downs below an Iron Age Hill Fort.



This sculptured White Horse is of a gigantic size and is represented at full gallop. . It may be seen fourteen or fifteen miles off, it being formed by cutting away the turf down to the white chalk.

From an early article by Jefferies, reprinted in *Jefferies Land.* Chapter 4.

SOUTH MARSTON

A village north-east of Swindon, where Alfred Williams was born in 1887, and where he died in 1930.

South Marston, or Maason, as it is commonly called, is a straggling village. There is, really, one main street, if such it can be named, very close and narrow, consisting of a single row of houses, plain in appearance, the doors of which open almost on to the road ... A little brook crosses beneath the road just beyond, and tittle-tattles all through the shade of high elms and willows, till it emerges wonderingly into the broad meadows, and is received into the Cole, just opposite a large clump of hawthorns that stands by the side of the old weather-beaten hatches.

Alfred Williams: *A Wiltshire Village* (1912). Chapter 1.

CHRIST CHURCH SWINDON

The Parish Church of Swindon Old Town, built in 1851.

Christ Church is a landmark for miles around. It was consecrated upon Friday, the 7th of November, 1852, by the Lord Bishop of Llandaff. The length of the structure is 130 feet, and the breadth, exclusive of the transepts, nave and chancel, 50 feet, and the tower, with the spire, rises 165 feet."

From 'Swindon in 1867' *Jefferies Land.* Chapter 3.

OLD HOLY ROOD CHURCH SWINDON

The remains of this 12th century parish church, consisting mainly of the Chancel and some pillars and arches of the nave, are now lovingly preserved, and open to visitors on request. Richard Jefferies was christened here, and there is a box tombstone marking the burial place of some members of the Jefferies family.



Although Swindon had no monastery, yet it had a church from the earliest tunes, known as Holyrood, or more familiarly spoken of as the "Old Church", to distinguish it from the new, for Holyrood, as a place of worship, is a thing of bygone days. The bells are silent, the belfry itself has disappeared, and of the body of the church, only the chancel and the two ivy-coloured arches remain.

Written not later than 1867. *Jefferies Land.* Chapter 2.

LYDIARD MANSION

Formerly the seat of the St. John family, it now belongs to Swindon council. Lydiard Country Park is open to the public. The adjacent church of Lydiard Tregoze is also of great interest.

Here, deep in a coombe, or valley, half-hidden by trees, stand three or four old houses, whose stone tiling renders evident their antiquity. The church is invisible until the pedestrian arrives before it, so numerous are the trees. It stands exactly in front of the seat of Lord Bolinbroke, much in the same way as did the old church at Swindon, though this is even nearer. Lydiard Park lies just beyond. It was formerly famous for the rearing of "young things", i.e. cattle.

Jefferies Land. Chapter 8.