

## PRESS PACK FOR

# ***Love's Cold Returning:*** ***John Clare's 1841 Odyssey from Essex to Northamptonshire***

By Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh  
Maps by Jon Harris  
Illustrated by Pam Smy

*An exploration in verse, prose and images of the world of John Clare's  
epic journey, then and now.*

*A detective story. A historical adventure. A meditation on love and loss.*

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### Ellis Hall (Author)

Ellis studied Modern Languages at the University of Manchester before completing a Masters there in Comparative Literature. In 1983 he abandoned a PhD in English to work for various software companies before joining the then nascent ARM Holdings in 1993. He left ARM nine years later, following its growth from a small firm to a publicly listed multinational, to set up a digital media consultancy. *Love's Cold Returning* is his second literary collaboration. In 2013 he contributed to, edited and produced *Hideous Cambridge* by David Jones, which was a Spectator Magazine Book of the Year.

### Bridget Somekh (Author)

Bridget grew up in Ireland and read English at Trinity College, Dublin, before working as an English teacher in Cambridge. Fascination with the process of learning led her into Educational Research and a professorship at Manchester Metropolitan University. Her poetry has been influenced by Irish writers' love of natural imagery, human idiosyncrasy and heritage. In recent years both her poetry and prose has been mostly about John Clare. She is passionate about poetry and theatregoing, and reads poetry and attends plays on almost a daily basis. Her one act drama *Aliens* was given a rehearsed reading in the Cambridge ADC bar.

### Jon Harris (Cartographer)

Jon studied Architecture and Art History at Trinity Hall, Cambridge University. He taught drawing for 25 years at the Cambridge School of Art (now Anglia Ruskin University). In 2018, a book of his topographical paintings and drawings, *Artist About Cambridge*, was published, and an exhibition of his watercolours held at the King's Lynn Festival. Jon is particularly known for his illustrated calligraphic maps, which made him the natural choice for tracking in pen and ink Clare's journey across England.

### Pam Smy (Illustrator)

Pam studied Illustration at the Cambridge School of Art, Anglia Ruskin University, where she is now an associate lecturer. She has illustrated books by Conan Doyle (*The Hound of the Baskervilles*), Julia Donaldson (*Follow the Swallow*) and Kathy Henderson (*Hush, Baby, Hush!*), among others. Her own book, *Thornhill*—part written narrative, part graphic novel—was published in 2017 to critical acclaim. Her expressionist black-and-white illustrations capture perfectly the emotional depth of Clare's experiences on the road.

## Product Information

<b>Title:</b>	Love's Cold Returning: John Clare's 1841 Odyssey from Essex to Northamptonshire						
<b>Authors:</b>	Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh						
<b>Publication Date:</b>	15 <sup>th</sup> November 2019						
<b>Available from:</b>	All good bookshops Amazon Marketplace The John Clare Cottage, Helpston: <a href="http://www.clarecottage.org/pages/Shop">http://www.clarecottage.org/pages/Shop</a> The John Clare Society: <a href="https://johnclaresociety.wordpress.com/publications-and-merchandise/">https://johnclaresociety.wordpress.com/publications-and-merchandise/</a>						
<b>ISBN:</b>	978-0-99286073-1-9						
<b>Retail Price:</b>	£20.00						
<b>Format:</b>	420pp, soft cover, 15.24 cm x 22.86 cm (6 in x 9 in)						
<b>Content:</b>	prose and verse, 215 drawings and colour photographs, 21 hand-drawn maps						
<b>Genres and Subgenres:</b>	<table><tr><td>Primary</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ DC</li><li>○ DCF</li><li>○ DSC</li><li>○ DS</li></ul></td><td>Poetry Poetry by individual poets Literary studies: poetry and poets Literature: history and criticism</td></tr><tr><td>Secondary</td><td><ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ HB</li><li>○ HBJD1</li><li>○ HBT</li><li>○ HBTB</li><li>○ HBTK</li><li>○ HBTP1</li><li>○ AJ</li></ul></td><td>History British and Irish history History: specific events and topics Social and cultural history Industrialisation and industrial history Historical maps and atlases Photography and photographs</td></tr></table>	Primary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ DC</li><li>○ DCF</li><li>○ DSC</li><li>○ DS</li></ul>	Poetry Poetry by individual poets Literary studies: poetry and poets Literature: history and criticism	Secondary	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ HB</li><li>○ HBJD1</li><li>○ HBT</li><li>○ HBTB</li><li>○ HBTK</li><li>○ HBTP1</li><li>○ AJ</li></ul>	History British and Irish history History: specific events and topics Social and cultural history Industrialisation and industrial history Historical maps and atlases Photography and photographs
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## Promotional Information

### Short description:

In 1841, the poet John Clare fled a lunatic asylum and traversed 5 counties to find his wife, Mary Joyce. But Mary had died a spinster. Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh follow his footsteps and capture the remains of his world, providing an important addition to Clare scholarship.

### Full description:

In July 1841, the poet John Clare escaped a lunatic asylum and embarked on a four-day journey across East Anglia to find his adored wife and muse, Mary Joyce. But Mary had died three years earlier, a spinster. *Love's Cold Returning* explores the world of Clare's epic journey in verse, prose, maps and images.

Without money or provisions, and lamed by a broken shoe, Clare endured extreme hardship to be reunited with Mary. Clare was toiling home to a truth he would struggle to acknowledge – that his memory of their marriage was a delusion.

Using Clare's brief account of his 85-mile trek, known as 'The Journey out of Essex', as a guide, Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh shed new light on his journey and the world in which it took place. Following in his footsteps, they seek out the remains of that world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. With original verse, prose, maps, drawings and colour photographs, *Love's Cold Returning* is an important new addition to the canon of Clare scholarship.

## Interview Resources

- **What inspired you to write *Love's Cold Returning*?**

We (Ellis and Bridget) have loved Clare ever since his *Selected Works* was one of our English A-level texts. Forty years on, at a time when we were casting about for a collaborative project, Iain Sinclair's *Edge of the Orison* gave us the idea of tracking down the remains of the world through which Clare fled on his escape from an Epping Forest lunatic asylum. Sinclair's frustration at being unable to walk the vanished nineteenth-century roads prompted us to devise an alternative strategy of visiting the villages and towns along the route Clare followed and then using historical records to join them up. That way we hoped to build up a picture of the world he walked through, and recapture some of the essence of his adventure in the present day.

- **Describe the book**

It's partly a detective story, partly a historical narrative, and partly an account of the adventures and mishaps that befell us as we uncovered the lost details of Clare's 85-mile walk to his home. Passages of prose are interleaved with poetic meditations, or 'Musings', which were inspired by the landscapes and townscapes along his route as they appear today, and his own account of walking through them in 1841. The text is supported by colour photographs, hand-drawn maps, and illustrations that capture key moments in his four-day odyssey.

- **The format of *Love's Cold Returning*, with poetry, prose, photographs, drawings, and maps, is unusual and complex. Describe your working practices and how the two of you, and the four of you, found each other and worked together.**

We (Bridget and Ellis) first met in Cambridge during the early 1970s but lost touch when our careers took us in different directions and to different places. A chance encounter in 2013 led to regular meetings at which we presented our creative efforts to each other for constructive criticism. As a member of the Cambridge Poetry Stanza, Bridget was seriously engaged in writing verse, and Ellis was writing short fiction while pursuing a late career in fine-art photography. It occurred to us that we might collaborate on a single work—perhaps a volume of verse supported by photographs. We needed a theme that would be both powerful and engrossing: 'poor mad John' and his long walk provided it.

It's a cliché to say that a book writes itself but in this case it was more or less true. Before starting work, we both agreed on two rules: that we would allow each other to take our own creative paths without judgement or interference, and that we would be 'critical friends', expressing an honest assessment of the other's work. We conducted field trips together, produced the resulting material separately, and held weekly meetings to review and critique the week's output. Over time a collection of disparate elements—poems, prose, and photos—began to cohere into a single whole, taking on a form that neither of us could have envisaged nor would have felt equal to creating in a planned, controlled way.

Harris became involved when it was apparent that maps were needed. Bridget had known him ever since her move to Cambridge in 1970. His distinctive and idiosyncratic style was a natural fit for the project, and he quickly became a third member of the team, joining us on our explorations of the road, provoking us with challenges to our assumptions, and generously sharing with us his unparalleled knowledge of architecture and landscape. When the time came to find an illustrator, he recommended Pam—an ex-student of his at ARU—for her extraordinary ability to convey mood and emotion in her subjects.

- **What does the title *Love's Cold Returning* mean?**

It's a near-quote from one of two poems Clare composed to his imaginary wife on arriving home from his long walk to find her absent: 'I've wandered many a weary mile / Love in my heart was burning / To seek a home in Mary's smile / But cold is love's returning'.

- **What did you learn while writing the book?**

Probably more than we can say, but the things that immediately spring to mind are: that tenacity, focus and attention to detail can yield unexpected insights; that the process of reading a nineteenth-century text alongside contemporary maps and then walking the territory can bring a long-dead author's experiences and state of mind to brilliantly coloured life; and that the past is more present in our lives than we think—it's often just lurking out of the corner of the eye.

- **What surprised you the most about the research and writing of *Love's Cold Returning*?**

To begin with, the sheer fun of it, and how it sustained our interest and enthusiasm over the five years it took us to complete. Then, just how much depth there was to a subject we believed was straightforward; how every time we thought we'd exhausted a seam of research we found there was more to dig up, and the more we dug the more we found. And also, how much creativity was sparked by our collaboration, which was an unlooked-for bonus.

- **How has the Clare community responded to the book?**

The three Clare scholars who have read the final draft have all been very positive and generous with their assessment. As for the wider Clare community, we expect a variety of reactions when it's published—controversy over our bolder assertions and hopefully some enthusiasm over the small advances we've made in Clare scholarship: connections that no-one has seen before, or at any rate seen fit to make public. One of them sheds new light on Clare's suggestively loving relationship with his closest female friend Eliza Emmerson, who helped to bring his work to the attention of London Society.

- **Did creating the book change your opinion of Clare the man, *The Journey of out Essex*?**

Absolutely. We read extensively in Clare's body of work and were amazed at the range of subjects he covered. Previously we'd known him only as a rustic poet preoccupied with birds and flowers and insects, the rhythms of the farming year, and so on. But his lesser-known poems, the bulk of which were unpublished in his lifetime (and we're talking over 3,000 here), along with his essays, deal with so much more: current affairs, politics, religion and natural history, amongst other topics. Then there's the sheer sophistication and elegance of his verse – its metres and rhyme schemes. We were well acquainted with his early work, when he was riding high as a literary celebrity, but less so with what he wrote later. His more mature output shows he was constantly refining his craft, so that by the time he was forgotten by society he'd become a master of poetic form, easily comparable to Byron, Keats and Shelley.

As for the *Journey out of Essex*, we started off by viewing it as a rambling account written hastily and without much thought. But the more we examined it the more we realised that Clare was not, as is commonly believed, incoherently insane at the time. Despite its semi-chaotic surface, it is a carefully crafted piece of prose by an accomplished writer who still has a firm grip on his literary abilities, whatever delusions he may be labouring under. We came to understand that its 'mad' assertions were simply jokes, and that the 'chaotic' passages were carefully constructed for effect. We also realised, from the way he'd started writing it in a small notebook and then switched to the kind of ledger he'd previously used for working with his former publishers, that he intended it to be read by the wider public and not simply his imaginary wife.

- **What's your next project?**

Now that *Love's Cold Returning* is finished, we'll be working 'together apart'. Ellis has two projects in mind: cataloguing the marginalia in Clare's manuscripts (Clare often scribbled notes and drew little cartoons while composing verse) and investigating Clare's library to see how his reading as a young man during the 1820s influenced his output. Bridget, meanwhile, will be writing a play about Clare. As ever, we will be meeting weekly to critique each other's work—in other words, still collaborating.

## Media Reactions

"Twinned and interweaving voices lead us back, once more, to venture in the traces of one of the great English literary journeys: John Clare's elemental tramp from Epping Forest to his 'rescue' at Werrington. Here, mapped and illustrated, is a scrupulous and perhaps definitive reckoning with the specifics of the written road. A lively and sympathetic account that tests and refines all previous myths and theories. A labour of love."

Iain Sinclair, author of *London Orbital* and *Edge of the Orison*.

<https://literature.britishcouncil.org/writer/iain-sinclair>

"A fascinating book, very thoroughly researched and illustrated throughout with colour photographs of an unusually high quality, *Love's Cold Returning* works on two levels: Bridget Somekh's poems shadow Clare in his lonely obsession while she and Ellis Hall retrace his *Journey out of Essex* in such detail that it becomes a social history of England as it moves from canals and aqueducts to gridlocked roads, from common land and open heath to land banks and intensive agriculture. Along the way we encounter many forgotten trades, from the lightermen on the canals to the women in the crape factory, and Clare comes to seem more and more representative, not so much a hopeless romantic as 'the muse of the broken land'."

Roger Garfitt, poet

[https://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?owner\\_id=251](https://www.carcanet.co.uk/cgi-bin/indexer?owner_id=251)

"A richly considered retracing of John Clare's last journey or flight in 1841 from Matthew Allen's private asylum in Essex to his home in Northamptonshire. The authors employ many acutely connected perspectives in a book that is a treasury of information drawn from archival material, atmospheric photographs, essential timelines, and invaluable 'ephemera'. To accompany the authors on their journey in the footsteps of Clare is a thrilling experience. In a landscape that has changed utterly from Clare's day they find echoes and ghosts of the places that Clare knew in our contemporary urban landscape, playing detective to great effect.

The authors' multiple sympathies are both unique and moving, and throughout give exact context to Clare as he heads home.

Collaborative work gives a particularly appropriate and dependable structure to the book, which resounds with the exhilaration of discoveries made, and of the authors' life-long love of Clare's work. Ellis Hall's factual prose writings make their energised vistas throughout and Bridget Somekh's poetic 'Musings' leap to answer with their own 'heightened speech'. This call and response demonstrates fully the ways in which one genre sparks another into life; the balance between the two modes is exquisitely maintained throughout. The 'Musings' are imagined with a clarity and a sympathy which anchors the poems beautifully; they run in exciting and seamless parallel to Clare's poems, Clare who is a third and constant participant. They keep Clare utterly present in his own lived reality.

On every page we find unfailing insights and illuminations regarding Clare as the authors follow close readings both of his life and his work. The reader follows their footprints, as they follow Clare's, in a wonderful continuity. Their text is scrupulously attentive, bringing Clare to life as if he were our own living breathing contemporary. Jon Harris's maps are a fount of information, extending the physical and emotional geographies of Clare's journey, an essential strand in the fabric of the book.

*Love's Cold Returning* finds new very readable ways of presenting biographical energy, while remaining scholarly throughout. It offers a sprightly, sure-footed and engaging intimacy with Clare observed at a huge crisis in his life. Clare was an ecologist and an outsider poet who continues to have strong relevance to our contemporary experience. The authors serve him with great fidelity, bringing him into telling and essential focus."

Penelope Shuttle, poet

<http://www.penelopeshuttle.co.uk/>

## Book Excerpts

### An Invitation (p. vii)

Come and join us. Creating this book has been our obsession, and now we are looking for readers to explore it. We have both loved John Clare's poetry ever since it was set for A level in 1974 (yes, it really was), so we were intrigued to hear about Iain Sinclair's *Edge of the Orison: in the traces of John Clare's 'Journey out of Essex'*. But, having admired the combination of astute observation and personal experience in his *London Orbital*, we were disappointed to find that Sinclair had diverged from his original impulse to track Clare's walk and taken a more circuitous approach. True, the nineteenth-century roads were no longer there to follow, but might there be another way?

We decided to make our own attempt, taking Clare's *Journey out of Essex* as our guiding text. Never published during his lifetime, this account of his trek from Matthew Allen's asylum at High Beach in Epping Forest to his home at Northborough in Northamptonshire is less than three and a half thousand words long. In line with its brevity, we initially set out to produce a slim volume of photographs and poems that would attempt to reflect his experience during his great escape. Our intention was to uncover what we could of the roads he trod, but since many had vanished beneath urban development and the dual carriageways of the A1, walking his route was out of the question. Instead, we resolved to make focused visits by car to the sections that remained.

We always arrived early in the morning before cars cluttered the streets. In rain and sun, Ellis took hundreds of photos and I filled notebooks with ideas for poems. Empathy was our aim: what had Clare been thinking and feeling when he passed these houses, crossed this bridge, negotiated the first railway line he had ever seen? How much was he carrying, and did he have a knapsack? What were these houses like when newly built? How had the view from this location changed since he was here? Questions like these focussed our attention on the materiality of the road and the social conditions of the time, and gradually it became clear there was more to do if we were to capture the essence of his adventure. Also, since our investigations often turned into minor adventures of their own, they seemed worth recording as part of a broader narrative. Ellis therefore began to produce some prose to accompany the photos and poems: a description of Clare, newly arrived home, writing down the first line of the *Journey*, and an account of our trip to High Beach, where we were shown the register recording his arrival at Allen's asylum.

By this time, I was composing what I came to call 'poetic musings'. I wanted to honour Clare in my own style, with a continuing form that would allow me to experiment within its constraints. I chose a five-line stanza with some internal rhyme and assonance and a broadly pentameter rhythm and borrowed occasional quotes from his work as a means of keeping his presence alive to me. These pieces have no title: they catch glimpses of Clare on the road, touching on books he loved and happenings in his life—his violin-playing, his friendship with the gypsies, his trips to London....

### Writing a Song, the Evening He Returned (p.360)

From his table in the window  
the apple tree with four years' new growth  
has closed a declivity in the view.  
He brushes a fly from the sill, fleshless and crisped,  
and hears the oak stairs creak under adolescent feet.

He imagines a room within a room  
and through the window watches Mary plant roses  
and kingcups by his orchis collection;  
her likeness has gone from the wall, but the real Mary  
presses his lips with an insistent kiss.

He can only tell of his lonely heart in song.  
He hummed an old song on the road to ride hope high  
for Mary - now in a new song he weaves  
lost hope and love for Mary in a sweet refrain.  
Through song his lonely heart is free to fly.

### **The Hero Home at Last (p.5)**

In our mind's eye there is a room.

It has a low ceiling, a flagstone floor and lime-washed walls. Level evening sun streams in through a casement window, striking the wall opposite and lighting the pictures that hang there—lithographs of the local aristocracy, rustic scenes, and the watercolour of a handsome, strong-featured man in his mid-twenties. Much else remains in shadow, though a plain oak bookcase crammed with scuffed and battered volumes can be made out in the coppersy gloom, and beside the bookcase, a scratched and scored kitchen table.

In the room, there is a man.

He is sitting at the table, body thrown back in an attitude of reverie, head cocked to one side and legs thrust out before him. One of his feet is booted; the other is bandaged with clean rags. Though the room is warm and close—it is summer, the end of haymaking—he is wearing the clothes he arrived in: a pair of mud-stained breeches and a pea-green fustian jacket white with dust from the road. One broken shoe and an old hat with a battered crown lie discarded on the floor nearby, as forgotten as the half-finished meal of bread, cheese and beer set before him. His attention is wholly focused on the notebook that lies open in his hands. Slowly he reaches for a pen and on a fresh page writes the day's date. It is the 23rd of July 1841.

### **The Ruins of Utopia (p.158)**

Stevenage is the first location Clare describes in any detail. The unusual clarity with which he narrates what happens to him there gives us the chance to reconstruct with some confidence the world in which it occurred, and to gauge how well his narrative fits that reconstruction. Yet of all the places he encountered on his journey, Stevenage is the one that has undergone the most change, and where unpicking the nineteenth century from the twenty-first presents a challenge of more than usual scope. In 1841 it was a town grown fat on the custom that was daily passing through its inns. A traveller with sufficient means could take refreshment at any one of the establishments that catered to the coaching trade, from the Swan, whose clientele consisted of the wealthy and the titled, to havens for humbler folk such as the Coach and Horses, the Old Castle and the White Lion. And if on that July evening the publicans of Stevenage were feeling content with their lot, it was only because they could not see what was awaiting them in their own future: the arrival, in 1850, of the Great Northern Railway, which almost overnight would sweep away their livelihoods and return their town to rustic obscurity.

Whatever ground Clare was treading on the night of 20th July 1841 is long gone, scraped away by giant earth movers during the expansion of Stevenage. Almost a hundred and eighty years on, the fields and orchards that lined the southern approaches are not even a distant memory. We have in their place—what exactly? A New Town? The road signs would have us believe so, but it is hard to recognise anything urban about our surroundings: there are no shops, no pubs, no houses, no people. By the look of the low-rise superstores and factory outlets around us, Stevenage in the twenty-first century has abandoned its Utopian aspirations and settled instead for becoming a giant retail park.

We turn onto the old road, the soles of our shoes scraping its weathered, potholed surface. Behind us the thunder of traffic dwindles to a whisper, and we experience the onset of an unexpected calm—the sort of stillness you find in marginal urban spaces where neglect and disuse have prompted the countryside to re-invade. Here, though, the complete reverse has happened: a thin sliver of countryside has endured against the encroachment of a town. Mature trees—some a century old—flank the road for a hundred metres, interrupted solely by the boxy bulk of the Stevenage Leisure Centre, and ending only where the road itself breaks off, amputated and cauterised by Swingate, a two-lane ribbon of tarmac leading to the New Town's heart. I reach for my phone to check our position, but even with the scale zoomed up to maximum the map shows us treading empty space. This remnant of the Great North Road has been purged from our collective digital memory; we are walking down a corridor of lost time.

## Press Release



Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh

**EMBARGOED UNTIL 1/11/2019**

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### ***Love's Cold Returning***

**A detective story. A historical adventure. A meditation on love and loss.**

(Cambridge, 1 November 2019) Thirteen Eighty One Press announces the publication on November 15<sup>th</sup> 2019 of an important addition to the canon of John Clare scholarship and early-nineteenth-century social history. *Love's Cold Returning: John Clare's 1841 Odyssey from Essex to Northamptonshire*, by Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh, sheds new light on the poet's journey and the world in which it took place. Following his footsteps, Hall and Somekh seek out the remains of Clare's world in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Capturing their journey in verse, prose, maps, drawings, and colour photographs, they also re-examine and challenge some major assumptions about the journey itself.

In July 1841, the poet John Clare escaped a lunatic asylum and embarked on a four-day journey across East Anglia to find his adored wife and muse, Mary Joyce. Without money or provisions, and lamed by a broken shoe, he endured extreme hardship to be reunited with her. But Mary had died three years earlier, a spinster. Clare was toiling home to a truth he would struggle to acknowledge—that his cherished memory of their marriage was a delusion.

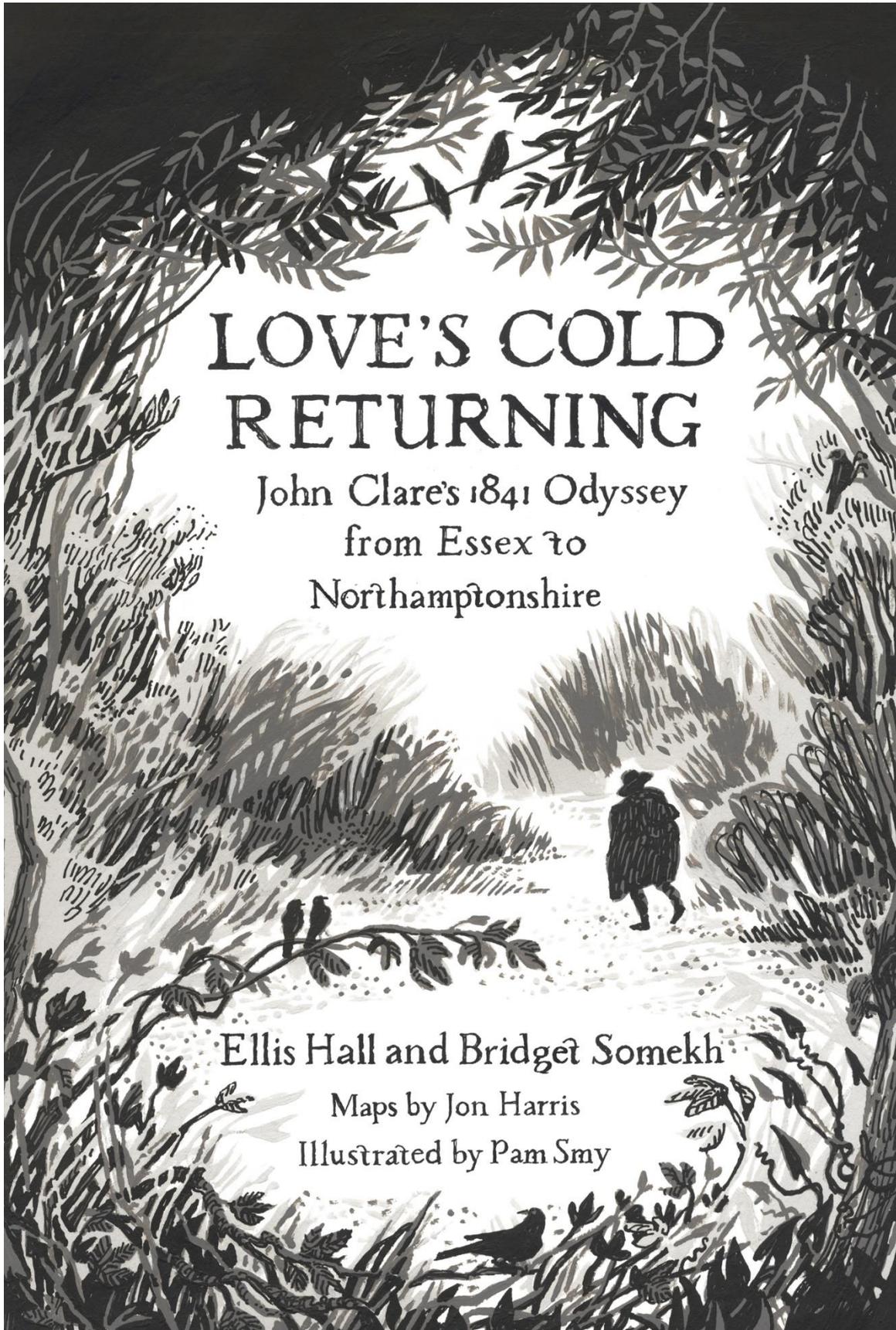
Clare's brief account of the 85-mile trek to find her, known as *The Journey out of Essex*, has fascinated readers down the years. By turns lucid and incoherent, prosaic and poetic, it invites interpretation and reinterpretation, argument and conjecture.

Author and Clare scholar Iain Sinclair describes *Love's Cold Returning* as:

"A scrupulous and perhaps definitive reckoning with the specifics of the written road. A lively and sympathetic account that tests and refines all previous myths and theories. A labour of love."

Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh met at sixth form college in the 1970s and have shared the joys of the written word ever since. Ellis abandoned academia for Cambridge's IT industry, where we worked for 20 years before starting his own digital media consultancy. He is co-author of *Hideous Cambridge* (Thirteen Eighty One LLP, 2013), which was a Spectator Magazine Book of the Year. Bridget read English at Trinity College Dublin. She has performed her John Clare poems at the Poetry Café in London and the open mic at CB1 Poetry, Cambridge, and her one act drama *Aliens* was given a rehearsed reading in the Cambridge ADC bar. This is their first book together.

*Love's Cold Returning* is 420 pages long and comprises prose and original verse illustrated with 215 drawings and colour photographs, and 21 hand-drawn maps. The full price is £20.00. It is available from Amazon Marketplace and all good bookshops.



# LOVE'S COLD RETURNING

John Clare's 1841 Odyssey  
from Essex to  
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Ellis Hall and Bridget Somekh

Maps by Jon Harris  
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