



“Royal HaskoningDHV’s involvement from the start helped us secure the lottery funding we needed to restore John Clare’s cottage and transform the site into a centre for the arts, education and the environment. Their commitment to the project and visionary approach meant we were able to employ the right people with the right skills, to ensure modern expertise and traditional methods worked hand in hand to create a heritage centre in keeping with its original surroundings that will last for years to come.”

Lynn Jackson, Project Manager,
The John Clare Trust

Recreating Clare’s ‘much loved place’ to inspire a new generation

Hailed as one of England’s great 19th century romantic poets, John Clare was born on 13 July 1793 and lived in a tiny row of whitewashed thatched cottages in the Cambridgeshire village of Helpston.

Living in this same cottage for almost forty years, John Clare began the early part of his life toiling in the surrounding fields and villages, working as ploughboy, potboy, lime burner and gardener. Teaching himself to read and write, John Clare published his first book of poems in 1820. Achieving overnight literary acclaim, he was known as the ‘peasant poet’ because of his rurally themed works.

Revered today for both his poetry and life story, people from across the globe come to Helpston to capture the essence of this self taught man in his own ‘much loved place’.

Now owned by the John Clare Trust, John Clare’s cottage has been lovingly restored to ensure his works go on to inspire and educate a new generation.

Working in partnership with the John Clare Trust, Royal HaskoningDHV helped the Trust secure a £1.5 million Heritage Lottery Fund grant and, alongside architects Jefferson Sheard, managed the construction process to restore the original 16th

century cottages and design and build a visitor annex. Work began in June 2008 and on 13 July 2009, John Clare’s birthday, the site was opened to the public.

Royal HaskoningDHV’s project manager Trevor Amis said: “We are delighted with the restoration work that has been achieved. Work to the cottage grounds included the construction of an annex, accommodation for an artist in residence, a reception area, a café, a shop and dry stone walling in the garden. The cottages now have new concrete ground floors with under floor heating whilst the upper storey floors have been strengthened or replaced.

“Whilst working on the project we discovered the original flagstone flooring in the garden area. We brought these back to the house and re-laid them in the kitchen, restoring the authentic flooring. Visitors to the centre can now see the living area as it would have appeared to John Clare and his family having exposed original beams, and opened up sections of the original wattle and daub construction, which can be studied behind Perspex panels.

“In the grounds, the old dovecote has been restored and visitors can study the upper inner walls via a raised gallery. Parts of the garden have been enclosed with dry stone



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walling and planted with herbs and flowers of the time and within the pathways a stone hopscotch has been laid. A section of the garden to the rear of the property has been converted to create a Swale that will provide a green drainage solution.

“A major part of the project was the construction of a new oak framed annex which has been linked to the original cottages by a glazed corridor. Getting the right balance of contemporary and original construction methods across the whole project took time, but it was important that we created a centre that was energy efficient, sustainable and very much part of the village.”

The restored cottage will bring the poet's past to life through the telling of stories about rural life in 18th and 19th century rural England, traditional folk tales and songs, environmental seminars, literacy programmes and creative writing workshops.

To find out more, visit www.clarecottage.org

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