

# KEATS, 'TO AUTUMN', AND THE NEW MEN OF WINCHESTER

BY RICHARD MARGGRAF TURLEY,  
JAYNE ELIZABETH ARCHER AND HOWARD THOMAS

It is generally accepted that John Keats composed his ode 'To Autumn' following leisurely daily walks along the water-meadows south of the market city of Winchester. The present article brings together new archival evidence to suggest that the 'eastern extremity' of Winchester, St Giles's Hill—cornfields in 1819, we show, as well as the site of a major fair—in fact provides direct inspiration for the sights and sounds of the famous ode. This new topography enables us to see hitherto unsuspected dimensions to Keats's engagement with contemporary politics, in particular as they pertained to the management of food production and supply, wages and productivity. Furthermore, we suggest, this hill and its ancient market offered Keats a trenchant conceptual frame with which to reflect on his own poetic process. The article also examines the rise of what we might call the 'new men' of Winchester: financial figures—enclosers, landlords and bankers—who found their ideological counterpart in the city's printer-publisher, James Robbins. We consider 'To Autumn' alongside land lease records, Robbins's guidebooks to Winchester, as well as previously unidentified textual sources, to show that 'To Autumn' not only resists a concerted 'capitalist' reimagining of Winchester and its agricultural heritage, but also takes its place in a wider contemporary debate around labour and 'idleness', surplus and profit.

It is generally accepted that John Keats composed his ode 'To Autumn', one of the most anthologized poems in the English language, following leisurely daily walks along the water-meadows south of the market city of Winchester.<sup>1</sup> A letter to John Hamilton Reynolds, dated 21 September 1819, suggests that the ode was drafted on the poet's 'Sunday's walk' two days earlier, and alludes enthusiastically to 'chaste weather', 'Dian skies' and the 'stubble-fields' of Hampshire. 'Somehow', Keats adds, 'a stubble field looks warm, in the same way that some pictures look warm', a fact that struck him 'so much . . . that [he] composed upon it'.<sup>2</sup> For those wishing to 'walk in the poet's footsteps', Winchester Tourist Information has produced a leaflet on 'the landscape which inspired the ode To Autumn', mapping

1 Keats details the walk's route to his brother and sister-in-law, George and Georgiana Keats, in a journal letter composed between 17 and 27 September 1819. *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Hyder Edward Rollins, 2 vols (Cambridge, MA, 1958), ii. 209–10.

2 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 167.

out what it calls the ‘Keats Walk’.<sup>3</sup> This circuit takes us in a southerly direction from Keats’s lodgings beside the Cathedral in Market Street, past Winchester College (St Mary’s College, in Keats’s day), along the River Itchen to St Cross Hospital and back again. The itinerary is informed by the sixth and final route outlined by Charles Ball in his *Descriptive Walks* (1818), a guide to the history and topography of Winchester that Keats is thought to have consulted.<sup>4</sup>

Keats would have been able to acquire a copy of Ball’s *Descriptive Walks* from the bookshop on College Street in Winchester, owned by printer and publisher James Robbins, nestled next to the College Library, itself a potential destination for Keats. (The poet told his sister Fanny on 29 August 1819 that he had left Shanklin for Winchester to ‘be near a tolerable library’.)<sup>5</sup> He passed the shop front on his way down to the water-meadows. In the shop window were displayed prints of city views. These images, specially commissioned by Robbins, could be bought individually, or bound in such volumes as Ball’s *Descriptive Walks*, John Milner’s *The History, Civil and Ecclesiastical, and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester* (1809), or the *Hampshire Chronicle*—all of which were published by Robbins.<sup>6</sup> Robbins had bought the premises in 1806; one of his innovations in 1817 was to include a ‘reading room’, precisely to help address what Ball called the city’s surprising ‘want of a Public Library or some Literary Institution of a general character’.<sup>7</sup> If Keats, frustrated by the lack of an accessible library, did not actually buy one of the available guides to Winchester, he would have been able to enter the bookshop, take a seat and browse through them.

Robbins’s publications on Winchester formed part of a concerted effort at rebranding the city, then undergoing a period of significant socio-economic transformation. In 1809, Robbins had brought out an illustrated edition of Milner’s *Antiquities of Winchester*, with new images that played on nostalgic memories of the city. Typically, these images set single labourers returning home against leafy prospects (see Fig. 1). Robbins, then, was involved in reimagining Winchester

3 <<http://www.visitwinchester.co.uk/site/keats-walk>> accessed 19 September 2011.

4 Charles Ball, *An Historical account of Winchester, with Descriptive Walks* (Winchester, 1818) [*Descriptive Walks*], 215–38. Ball’s work was reprinted, with an introduction by Christopher Mulvey, by Winchester University Press in 2009. Mulvey notes that ‘it is the firm belief in Winchester that Keats had a copy of An Historical Account of Winchester, With Descriptive Walks that [*sic*] he used it as a guide to the city’ (17).

5 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 184.

6 John Milner, *The History Civil and Ecclesiastical, & Survey of the Antiquities, of Winchester* (1809) [*Antiquities of Winchester*]. Robbins sold the *Hampshire Chronicle* in 1813. Other publications about Winchester published by Robbins include: John Milner, *A Short Description of the History and Antiquities of St. Cross, Near Winchester* (1818) and *Rules, Orders, and Regulations, for the Government of the Gaol, and Bridemell or House of Correction, at Winchester* (1818); Peter Hall, *Picturesque Memorials of Winchester* (1830). On Robbins, see: Peter C. G. Isaac, ed., *Six Centuries of the Provincial Book Trade* (Winchester, 1990), 157; Frank Arthur Mumby and Ian Norrie, *Publishing and Bookselling*, 5<sup>th</sup> edn (London, 1974), 300; *Collected Reports of the Jane Austen Society*, vol. 4: 1986–1995 (Overton, 1997), 232.

7 Ball, *Descriptive Walks*, 81.



FIG. 1. 'The College Tower, Library, and Mill', engraving from Peter Hall, *Picturesque Memorials of Winchester* (Winchester: Robbins and Wheeler, 1830), Pl. IV. Copyright British Library (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved). Hall's volume was published by Robbins and Wheeler.

as a tourist destination through a lens of pastoral retreat. In Ball's guide, as in Milner's, the agricultural basis of Winchester's prosperity is neatly folded into the civic picturesque. The printer-publisher represented an ideological arm of what we might—adopting William Cobbett's disparaging term in *Rural Rides*—call the 'new men' of Winchester, a coterie of bourgeois citizens including bankers-turned-farmers and millers-turned-mayors (such as Nicholas Waller and John Benham, the focus of later sections of this article), who were assiduously refashioning the decayed market city as a centre of finance, culture and tourism.<sup>8</sup> In accordance with his 'new man' status, Robbins set about purchasing leases on other properties in and about College Street, including in 1817 the 'coach house', where, presumably, he would have been able to put up tourists drawn in by his illustrated publications to this antiquated, Arcadian version of the city.<sup>9</sup>

If Robbins thought agriculture was a declining industry, and was engaged in re-presenting the city's agrarian economy within a picturesque frame of nostalgia, Keats's sunset ode, 'To Autumn', we will argue, is anything but complicit. Indeed, the ode's images of apparent bucolic idleness in fact harbour an intellectually rigorous resistance, drawing on a wider debate about capital, labour (and its withdrawal), measures and surplus. We are used to associating the water-meadows with the composition of Keats's ode. However, as we demonstrate, Keats journeyed for the conceptual perspectives of his poem, and his readjustment of Robbins, to the very site of the most potent of the printer-publisher's visual iconographies—the view from St Giles's Hill, looking west over the city. It is on St Giles's Hill, which Keats climbed by 29 August 1819 (when he reported the event to his sister), where the poet's ideological reflex against this new vision of Winchester takes place.<sup>10</sup>

## 1. At the eastern extremity: St Giles's Hill and 'To Autumn'

As diverse as they may seem, the most resonant recent readings of 'To Autumn' share a feature in common: all, in various ways, abstract the ode from its specific Winchester setting. In *The Odes of John Keats* (1983), Helen Vendler's formalist critique recognizes the poem's 'remarkably meticulous topography', but, finally,

8 William Cobbett, *Rural Rides* (London, 1830), 5.

9 Hampshire Record Office [HRO], 11M59/E2/58977 (25 Nov. 1811); 11M59/E2/58983 ('Lease and counterpart lease for 30 years of a coach house on College Street', 25 November 1817); 11M59/E2/58932 (23 June 1823); 11M59/E2/58980 (25 November 1831); 11M59/E2/58981 (25 November 1841). In these leases, Robbins is variously described as 'stationer', 'bookseller' and (by 1841) 'bankrupt'. Ownership of the premises eventually passed to Robbins's former apprentice, Joseph Wells, and remained in the Wells family until the 1980s. It remains a bookshop to this day: P&G Wells, 11 College Street (<<http://www.bookwells.co.uk>> accessed 19 September 2011).

10 There is a brief reference to this letter and St Giles's Hill in Katherine M. R. Kenyon, 'Keats and the Ode to Autumn Walk', *Keats-Shelley Memorial Bulletin*, Rome, 26–7 (1975), 15–18.

refers the land's (and the poem's) meaning back to literary precursors and classical myth.<sup>11</sup> Nicholas Roe's new historicist resistance of the idea of art as political escapism in *Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (1998) takes its brio from the relocation of the dissenting energies of Keats's ode some 200 miles north to St Peter's Fields in Manchester.<sup>12</sup> Jonathan Bate, in his provocative analysis of the ode as 'ecosystem' in *The Song of the Earth* (2000), similarly rejects readings of 'To Autumn' as 'an escapist fantasy which turns its back on the ruptures of Regency culture', contending that the poem is a 'meditation on how human culture can only function through links and reciprocal relations with nature'.<sup>13</sup> Yet here Bate substitutes formalism's mythic time and timelessness with a global, rather than a Winchester-based, framing chrono-topography, centred on the restoration of the 'cycle of the seasons' and weather patterns following the eruption of Mount Tambora in 1815 (p. 260).

An insistence on the significance of the Winchester setting of Keats's 'To Autumn', we argue, enhances our ability to hear and perceive the delicate and nuanced tensions identified by previous critics of this poem. Indeed, the ode's rhetorical complexities resonate in new ways when we recognize the importance for Keats of an agricultural economy and sociology specific to a particular place at a crucial juncture in its long history.

Milner's *Antiquities of Winchester* encourages visitors to begin their tour by climbing St Giles's Hill, a 100-metre prospect to the east of the city:

The curious stranger will not fail to mount up to the top of that white cliff, which overhangs the city, and once formed part of it, called *St. Giles's Hill* . . . Having attained to that point of the summit which is in a line with the High-street, he will certainly confess himself richly repaid for his labour in mounting hither. In fact, we have here the whole city under our feet, and command a bird's eye view of all the objects that we have described, consisting of streets, fortifications, palaces, churches, and ruins, with intermingled gardens, fields, groves, and streams.<sup>14</sup>

From this outlook, much as Milner promises, Keats enjoyed a panoramic view that took in all of the salient elements described in his poem: flocks of sheep (due south, towards St Catherine's Hill), the City Mill (as well as other mills to the south of the Itchen, including one along College Street), garden-crofts along Chesil (formerly Cheese Hill) Street, and St Mary's College (home in Keats's day to a granary and 'brewhouse').<sup>15</sup> From St Giles's Hill, the walker faces due west,

11 Helen Vendler, *The Odes of John Keats* (Cambridge, MA, 1983), 244.

12 Nicholas Roe, *Keats and the Culture of Dissent* (Oxford, 1998), 253–67.

13 Jonathan Bate, *The Song of the Earth* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 103.

14 Milner, *Antiquities of Winchester*, 199–200.

15 The 'brewhouse' and granary in St Mary's College are noted by Ball, *Descriptive Walks*, 153. Milner remarks on the presence of a 'granery' in the area known as 'the Soke', which lay to the east of the River Itchen, below the western-facing slope of St Giles's Hill (*Antiquities of Winchester*, 199).

and in the late-afternoon may observe the ‘maturing sun’ together with the tincturing changes it brings to the landscape (the ‘rosy hue’ of the ‘stubble-plains’), as well as indigenous wildlife such as low-flying swallows gathering insects over the Itchen’s reed beds before nightfall.<sup>16</sup> From its brow, the sights and sounds remembered in Keats’s poem—from the ‘half-reaped furrow’ on which the reaper sleeps, to the bleats of ‘full-grown lambs’ on ‘hilly bourn’—could be observed in one glorious sweep.

Not surprisingly, the vista afforded by St Giles’s Hill was a staple of eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century representations of Winchester.<sup>17</sup> Indeed, an engraving of the once-familiar view forms the frontispiece of *Descriptive Walks*, and in a brief remark Ball praises the hill’s ‘abrupt grandeur’ (see Fig. 2).<sup>18</sup> In Ball’s vertiginous frontispiece (as, we suggest, in ‘To Autumn’), St Giles’s Hill is a point to surmount then look away from—a visual framing device from which to admire the city’s ‘prospect of Streets, and old Buildings mixed up with Trees’ (as Keats put it for Fanny in his letter of 29 August).<sup>19</sup> The 1818 engraving, commissioned by Robbins, and based on an aquatint by the architect C. F. Porden, differs from earlier versions of this popular view in one important respect. Interestingly, though easily missed, the only part of the engraving that actually shows us anything of the hill itself indicates furrows in the left foreground. The hill, then, was partially under corn when Keats mentioned it in his letter to Fanny. This detail, corresponding, we believe, to Keats’s careful description of an arable scene in stanza 2, confirms that in recent years—due in part to the high price of corn—there had been a concerted effort to convert wasteland around Winchester into land capable of producing food.<sup>20</sup>

The importance of maximizing food production and profits in Winchester at this time, and specifically the role of the cornfield on St Giles’s Hill, is revealed by the evidence provided by land leases in Hampshire Record Office. Leases dating from the mid-eighteenth century show that a triangle of land to the northeast of the city centre, its sides formed by Cheshil (now Chesil) Street, St Magdalen Hill and the western (city-facing) slope of St Giles’s Hill, provided new ground that was appropriated for arable farming.<sup>21</sup> Situated on the acclivity, this field was safe from flooding and was in convenient proximity to the City Mill, which

16 All quotations from ‘To Autumn’ are taken from John Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. and intr. John Barnard, 3rd edn (London, 2006), 434–5.

17 See, for example, HRO, J. Ryland, ‘East View of Winchester’, Top 343/2/7; HRO, ‘The East Prospect of the City of Winchester’, dated 1750, Top 343/2/5; HRO, Top 343/2/4.

18 Ball, *Descriptive Walks*, 186. St Giles’s Hill is included on the route of Ball’s ‘Third Walk’ (177–90).

19 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 148.

20 This project was prompted by a report on farming in Hampshire produced by Abraham and William Driver and published as *General View of the Agriculture of the County of Hampshire* (London, 1794).

21 HRO, W/F3/267/4, 13 December 1783, lease made out to ‘Mrs Sarah Cole Widow’ for payment of 8<sup>d</sup> and two chickens; W/F3/267/5, 24 December 1800, lease made out to ‘Samuel Deuerell’.

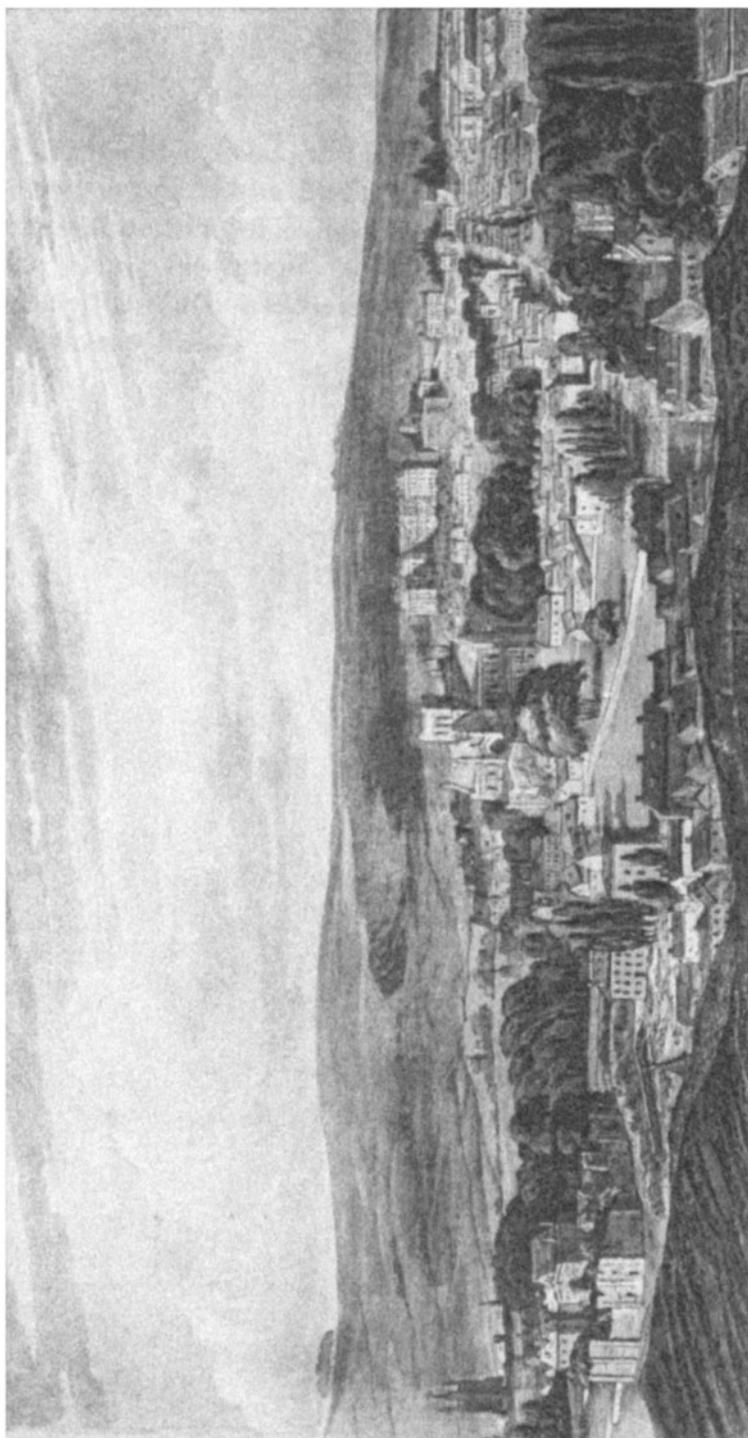


FIG. 2. Illustrated frontispiece, 'View from St. Giles's Hill', engraving from Charles Ball, *An Historical account of Winchester, with descriptive walks* (Winchester, 1818), based on an aquatint by C. F. Porden. Copyright British Library (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved).

still spans the River Itchen between High Street and Bridge Street.<sup>22</sup> Heavily wooded until the final quarter of the eighteenth century, the field had presumably been deforested in the run-up to the Napoleonic Wars and its oaks sent downstream to Southampton's shipbuilding yards.<sup>23</sup> In the 50 years before Keats visited the city, the lease on this 'croft and parcel of land' had changed hands several times. Most recently, on 21 March 1818, it had been acquired from the Bishop of Winchester by Nicholas Waller, owner of the recently established County Bank.<sup>24</sup> Waller, who came from an old Winchester family of drapers-turned-bankers, was not the only wealthy citizen to seize on the opportunities opened up by a combination of high corn prices generated by the 1815 Corn Law and cheap labour created by the influx of soldiers returning from the Napoleonic Wars.<sup>25</sup> In the same period, John Benham (a future mayor of the city) was in negotiations to purchase the City Mill. He had held the lease on the Mill since 1812 and the sale itself was finally approved in 1821, at which moment ownership of the Mill—originally presented to the people of Winchester by Queen Mary in 1554—passed for the first time in its history into private hands.<sup>26</sup>

In this context of the privatization of food production and processing in Winchester during a time of national dearth, stanza 2 of 'To Autumn', with its familiar tableau of bucolic languor, takes on more troubled resonances. Waller's sixteenth-century family household (today the oldest house in Winchester) was situated between the city-side slope of St Giles's Hill and the eastern City Gate. Waller would have been able to keep a keen eye on his newly acquired croft. His labourers, toiling under his watchful gaze, would have had precious little

22 The City Mill was rebuilt in 1764 on an earlier Medieval site, and is now managed by the National Trust.

23 On the use of oak for shipbuilding in Britain, see Paul Hatcher and Nick Battey, *Biological Diversity: Exploited and Exploiters* (Chichester, 2011), 187. In the present day, parts of St Giles's Hill are once again densely wooded (see *St Giles Hill Winchester Neighbourhood Design Statement Revised* (2011), produced by St. Giles's Hill Residents Association in co-operation with Winchester City Council <<http://www.winchester.gov.uk/General.asp?id= SX9452-A785D092&cat=5407>> accessed 19 September 2011).

24 HRO, 11M59/E2/155506. The Waller family had been leasing land for business purposes from the Bishop of Winchester since the mid-sixteenth century: HRO, W/F3/225; W/F3/226; W/F3/418.

25 On the social and economic consequences of returning soldiers, see N. Gash, 'After Waterloo: British Society and the Legacy of the Napoleonic Wars', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 28 (1978), 145–57. For the impact of the 1815 Corn Law, see Donald Grove Barnes, *A History of English Corn Laws: From 1660-1846* (London, 2006), 117–84. Proposals for a second Bill were debated in Parliament during late 1818 and early 1819.

26 The City Mill, having been left to languish into decay in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, had been a fully functioning 'water grist mill' from 1744, following which it was leased out to a series of individuals, including William Meader (who is described as a 'cornfactor' turned 'merchant'): HRO, Property records, City leases, W/F3/38. Benham's lease is dated 27 January 1812. After 1821, the Mill remained in the Benham family (see the will of John Benham 'of 1 Bridge Street, Winchester, retired Miller', dated 1893 (HRO, Winchester Probate District registers, M412-M413, SM62/27, 62<sup>b</sup>)).

opportunity to down tools and doze idly amidst their master's swathes and furrows. The governing question posed in stanza 2—'Who hath not seen thee oft amid thy store?'—acquires new ironic charge, given the signal changes in working conditions that Waller's speculating, wage-dampening purchase of land would have occasioned.

## 2. Winchester bushels: mobs and measures

When Keats visited Winchester in Autumn 1819, popular protests at food prices and agricultural changes were still (just) within living memory. In January 1766, 'a mob' resisting the export of corn via the English Channel had 'burned several granaries and threatened barges loaded with corn on the river at Winchester'.<sup>27</sup> More widespread dissatisfaction at high bread prices in the area culminated in periods of frequent unrest during the Napoleonic Wars, when the import of food in England was curtailed. Adding to labourers' woes, the gradual introduction of mechanised reaping and threshing meant that Hampshire agricultural workers were being laid off. Threshing machines such as the one described in 'Mr. [Thomas] Noon's Patent' of October 1804, which it was claimed 'cause[d] less injury to the straw', were producing downward pressure on farm-worker's wages.<sup>28</sup> A description of Harbottle's rival threshing machine came with a handy breakdown of the estimated savings to be made by switching from manual to mechanized threshing: requiring just eight workers and four horses to operate, the machine, it was promised, would 'thresh twenty quarters of *wheat* in twelve hours, in great perfection' and yield savings of 1<sup>s</sup> 4<sup>d</sup> per quarter of wheat.<sup>29</sup> By 1814, a Reading diarist could declare that 'the Threshing Machine has now superseded the use of the flail'.<sup>30</sup> To make matters worse, the 1815 Corn Law levied taxes on imported grain in order to protect the interests of the landowners. Wheat was in short supply following several bad harvests—the harvest of 1816, the 'year without a summer', was particularly poor—and the price of bread became prohibitive for the working classes as employers left it to the parish authorities to augment starvation wages.

What made this situation more striking and ironic was that Winchester was associated with an ancient, albeit contentious, symbol of the equitable distribution of corn.<sup>31</sup> The standard eight-gallon, stricken 'Winchester Bushel' had been the

27 Adrian Randall, *Riotous Assemblies: Popular Protest in Hanoverian England* (Oxford, 2006), 91 n. 1.

28 *The Repertory of Arts, Manufactures, and Agriculture*, 2nd ser., 32 (January 1805), 79.

29 William Fordyce Mavor, *General View of the Agriculture of Berkshire* (London, 1813), 181.

30 N. E. Fox, 'The Spread of the Threshing Machine in Central Southern England', *Agricultural History Review*, 26 (1978), 26–8.

31 The following history of the Winchester bushel is based on R. D. Connor, *The Weights and Measures of England* (London, 1987).

official measure of dry capacity since the tenth century, and the city itself the centre of manufacture for the brass measures sent throughout the country.<sup>32</sup> However, the larger, heaped customary measure (usually around nine gallons) lingered; unscrupulous middlemen were suspected of buying heaped and selling stricken, skimming off the surplus and extracting additional profit of some ten per cent.<sup>33</sup> In Keats's day, this contentious symbol of public anxiety and suffering was on view in Winchester Guildhall, where, as is stated in the Hampshire volume of *The Beauties of England and Wales* (1805), 'the original Winchester Bushel given by King Edgar, with other measures, both for quantity and length, fixed as standard by succeeding Princes' were 'still preserved' for public display.<sup>34</sup> Conflict over government attempts to enforce the use of the stricken as opposed to the heaped or customary bushel had ignited nationwide (several brass templates were smashed in market places), and was exacerbated by high corn prices. Henry Hunt remembers 1795 as a particularly 'turbulent' year in terms of food riots, with disturbances in Salisbury, some thirty-five miles from Winchester, over the high price of bread (a quartern loaf rose to more than a shilling). Hunt identifies the unpopular Winchester Bushel, the use of which government officials were still trying to enforce, as a key factor in this unrest:

Mr. William Dyke . . . one of the largest farmers in the west of England, who attended the market at Salisbury with his corn, was insulted and ill-used by the people. The windows of his carriage were broken . . . as he was escaping out of the town towards his home in the afternoon. The antipathy of the people was directed towards him particularly, because he had been very instrumental in causing the *little bushel*, of the Winchester measure, of eight gallons, to be introduced generally in the county of Wilts, instead of the old bushel, which contained nine gallons, and in some instances ten gallons. . . . Dyke was singled out, on account of his being the ring-leader, in what the poor called a conspiracy to lessen the size of the bushel, and at the same time to keep up the price of corn.<sup>35</sup>

Although a heterogeneity of customary measures survived in the regions well into the nineteenth century, by and large after 1812 there was a collapse of 'sturdy

32 Ball notes that a royal charter of 1587 confirmed Winchester's right 'of keeping the standard weights and measures of the kingdom', and that in 1588 Queen Elizabeth presented the city with 'a new set of them, bearing the arms and name of the queen' (*Descriptive Walks*, 62).

33 Richard Sheldon, Adrian Randall, Andrew Charlesworth, and David Walsh, 'Popular Protest and the Persistence of Customary Corn Measures: Resistance to the Winchester Bushel in the English West', in *Markets, Market Culture and Popular Protest*, ed. Adrian Randall and Andrew Charlesworth (Chicago, 1996), 25–45. See also Randall, *Riotous Assemblies*, and John Bohstedt, "'We'd Rather be Hanged than Starved": The Politics of Provisions', in Bohstedt, *The Politics of Provisions: Food Riots, Moral Economy, and Market Transition in England, c. 1550–1850* (Aldershot, 2010), 1–20. Resistance to the standardized bushel is also registered by J[ohn] F[isher] in the title poem of his *Miscellaneous Poems. Including the Winchester Bushel*, 2nd edn (London, 1798).

34 Edward Wedlake Brayley and John Britton, *The Beauties of England and Wales*, vol. 6: *Hampshire* (London, 1805), 94.

35 Henry Hunt, *Memoirs*, 2 vols (London, 1820), i. 237.

localism in defence of customary measures' long symbolized by 'the ubiquity of the scales of justice or the notion of the just measure'.<sup>36</sup>

Keats's circle of friends and political allies had these contentious issues of food supply and social justice uppermost in their minds in the twelve months preceding the poet's visit to Winchester. In November 1818, Keats would have been able to read an article by 'J. L.' in the *Examiner*, edited by his poetical and political mentor Leigh Hunt, condemning the Corn Bill and the government's perceived wider mismanagement of post-war food supply. 'J. L.' also railed against 'Landlords' (such as Waller) who, 'clothed with legislative authority', had 'doomed the mass of the populace . . . to ever-enduring, intolerable dearth' by pushing up the price of staple commodities to a level where local people could no longer afford to purchase the crops they were employed to harvest.<sup>37</sup> Responses by 'G. C.' and 'Philanthropos' in the January and May 1819 issues of the *Examiner* echoed and amplified these concerns, condemning the transfer of corn-production into private hands and calling, in the words of 'Philanthropos', for the foundation of a 'Public Granary'.<sup>38</sup>

Charles Wentworth Dilke, a close friend who sent copies of *The Examiner* to Keats in Winchester, had been developing and crystallizing his circle's thoughts on labour relations during this period.<sup>39</sup> The resulting pamphlet, *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties, Deduced from Principles of National Economy*, published in February 1821, rejected the idea of regulating agricultural produce such as wheat, pointing out that it was natural for the 'wealth of a nation' to 'vary with the seasons; before harvest and after harvest materially'.<sup>40</sup> Dilke's complaint that 'capitalists' were now starting to 'speculate on the food that requires the least labour to produce it' perfectly captures the emerging situation in Winchester at the time of Keats's stay.<sup>41</sup> Similar sentiments are voiced in the 1819 issue of *Farmer's Magazine*, in which the author of an article entitled 'The Relation of Corn to Currency' examines the problem of 'county banks' being licensed to print their own notes.<sup>42</sup> Specifically, these analyses respond to the actions of men such as Waller and Benham and anticipate the long-term impact of transferring into

36 Sheldon, Randall, Charlesworth and Walsh, 'Popular Protest and the Persistence of Customary Corn Measures', 43, 45.

37 J. L., 'On the Corn Bill. – The Real Cause of the Present Depravity', *The Examiner* (Sunday 8 November 1818), 717–9 (718).

38 G. C., 'Gleaning made Robbery', *The Examiner* (4 January 1819), 13; Philanthropos, 'High Price of Bread', *The Examiner* (24 May 1819), 326–7 (327).

39 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 178, 180, 218.

40 *The Source and Remedy of National Difficulties, Deduced from Principles of Political Economy, in a Letter to Lord John Russell* (London, 1821), 6. The pamphlet, which drew on David Ricardo's *On the Principles of Political Economy and Taxation* (London, 1817), was published anonymously.

41 Dilke, *The Source and Remedy of National Difficulties*, 12.

42 *The Farmer's Magazine*, vol. 20 (Edinburgh, 1819), 413–20 (esp. 417–8).

private hands the commonly owned processes of food production and distribution that had been centred on the City Mill as well as the common grazing rights hitherto enjoyed on St Catherine's and St Giles's hills, with concomitant consequences for wages, work and living conditions. Dilke's examination of the value of 'productive' and 'unproductive' labour resonates intriguingly with Keats's poignant tableau of arrested work in stanza 2, which meditates, like *The Source and Remedy of the National Difficulties*, on the relation between 'idle' and 'productive' labour, as well as on the value of Keats's own poetry in the literary marketplace.

### 3. Bread & butter poetry

Keats's imagination was exercised by images of food production and processing witnessed in Winchester, which he related nervously to his own tentative status as 'working' poet. In a letter to J. H. Reynolds of 11 July 1819, composed en route from the Isle of Wight up to Winchester, Keats agonizes about poor sales and the necessity of making a financial profit from his poetry. He records being struck both by the beauty of fields of growing wheat and the fact that this corn, only just ripened, is destined 'for the market': 'So, why sho<sup>d</sup> I be delicate?', he asks.<sup>43</sup> Later, in a letter sent on 27 September 1819 to his brother and sister-in-law, Keats considers how the foodstuffs gathered in stanzas 2 and 3 of the ode were refined in processes beyond the field, also remarking on how, to his surprise, 'there is not one loom or anything like manufacturing beyond bread & butter, in the whole city'.<sup>44</sup> Keats's apparently throwaway comment reveals something of the way in which, in his mind, Winchester and the genesis of his ode are linked.

The predominant farming method practised on the Hampshire downs since Medieval times is known as the 'sheep and corn' system.<sup>45</sup> Following this system, sheep fed on grass in the water-meadows—where waterlogging raised ground temperature, advancing the grass crop—and were then folded on higher land, manuring the cornfields.<sup>46</sup> This synthesis of arable and pastoral farming

43 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 129.

44 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814-21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 189.

45 B. Edwards, *Historic Farmsteads & Landscape Character in Hampshire: Pilot Report for English Heritage* <<http://www.english-heritage.org.uk/.../historic-farmsteads.../historicfarmsteadsandlandscapecharacterinhampshireintrostages12.pdf>> accessed 19 September 2011, 19.

46 Water meadows were created throughout the chalkland valleys of Wessex during the seventeenth century. Brayley and Britton note that Hampshire 'is particularly famous for its water meadows; which are extremely productive, and, in general, well attended to' (*Beauties of England and Wales*, 88). On the history of the Hampshire water meadows, see: Joseph Bettey, 'The Development of Water Meadows on the Salisbury Avon, 1665-1690' <[www.bahs.org.uk/51n2a3.pdf](http://www.bahs.org.uk/51n2a3.pdf)> accessed 19 September 2011.

(bread and butter) resulted in higher wheat yields and superior dairy produce.<sup>47</sup> Combining different types of soil, centres of production, a fast-flowing river and a market from which food routes radiated throughout (and beyond) the county, Winchester was ideally suited to the requirements of the sheep-corn system. Indeed, Waller's reason for purchasing pasture lands between the water-meadows and St Catherine's Hill southeast of Winchester was presumably in order to maximize the potential profits of this tradition. All of these elements—including the vital relationship between pastoral and arable farming—are present in Keats's 'To Autumn'. The 'full-grown lambs' bleating in stanza 3 would have grazed in the water-meadows towards St Catherine's Hill by day, before being moved into folds, such as the one on St Giles's Hill, by night in order to provide much-needed manure for the cornfields (see Fig. 3).

'[B]read & butter', then, accurately describes Winchester's investment in the sheep-corn system, but Keats's own bread and butter was, of course, poetry destined for the marketplace. As he stood on St Giles's Hill, markets of quite different flavours were situated on either side. Before him, the city of Winchester represented the regulated distribution of corn and the antiquated, civic picturesque. Turning round 180 degrees from his vantage point on the brow of St Giles's Hill, Keats saw a very different and decidedly unregulated market. The land on the eastern slopes of St Giles's Hill was home to one of England's oldest and largest annual markets. St Giles's Fair took place every Autumn, granted a space of four days 'yearly and every year', 10–13 September inclusive, by the terms of the 24-year lease that had been renewed most recently in 1809. It was a historic fair, its zenith being in the twelfth to fourteenth centuries, when it could last for over twenty-four days.<sup>48</sup> During its decline, the land on the eastern slope of St Giles's Hill was leased out, and the grant to hold the fair was purchased by local traders.<sup>49</sup> In 1819, that lease was owned by Ann Prickett 'and others', who held the right to erect 'Booths, Stalls and Standings' for a rent of 10 shillings a year.<sup>50</sup> From this market, the year's harvest could be distributed beyond the city limits and out of regulatory sight of the civic authorities. While the market was in operation, trade in the city was prohibited; craftsmen and traders were either

47 On this point, see John Snow's 'Argument to shew what greate profit may redound to the owners of land upon a free ymprovement, by drowning, watering or drayninge' (1674), quoted in Betsey, 'The Development of water meadows on the Salisbury Avon, 1665-1690', 168.

48 There is a brief mention of St Giles's Fair in *Piers Plowman*, Passus 4, l. 50: 'Bere sikerlyche eny seluer to seynt Gyles doune' (William Langland, *Piers Plowman: An Edition of the C-Text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (Berkeley, 1982), 90).

49 HRO, 11M59/E2/155644, 108 (1676); 11M59/E2/154121 (1711-95); 11M59/E2/155498, 290 (1782); 11M59/E2/155501, 358 (1795); 11M59/E2/154122 (1803); 11M59/E2/155503, 379 (1803).

50 'Lease by Winchester Bishopric Estate to Ann Prickett, George Cook Yarborough, Judith Mellish and William Mellish of the liberty to yearly hold a fair upon St Giles Hill or St Giles Downe near the city of Winchester', 27 August 1803; HRO, 11M59/E2/155503, 379. Ann Prickett had also been a co-signatory of the 1795 lease (HRO, 11M59/E2/155501, 358).



FIG. 3. 'View from St. Giles's Hill', engraving from John Milner, *The History and Survey of the Antiquities of Winchester*, 3rd edn, 2 vols (Winchester, 1838), i. The roofs of the houses nearest St Giles's Hill appear to be thatched. Copyright British Library (© British Library Board. All Rights Reserved).

transferred to the fair or ordered to cease work, resulting in a period when 'municipal life was paralysed'.<sup>51</sup> The subversive energies licensed by the market are noted by Milner and Ball, who observe that on the night before the fair commenced each year, the Bishop of Winchester took the keys to the four city gates from the mayor and appointed 'a temporary magistrate'.<sup>52</sup>

With its semi-permanent structures and street names, its own rituals and legislation (enacted in the 'Court of Pavilion'), St Giles's fair was Winchester's strange sibling—'a kind of temporary city, which was entirely mercantile', to quote Milner.<sup>53</sup> It lived and lasted for the three weeks (in Keats's day, two weeks) of the harvest period—well beyond, then, the terms of the official lease, and far exceeding the duration of a 'single day' recorded, rather hopefully, by Ball in his *Descriptive Walks*.<sup>54</sup> On the day Keats ascended St Giles's Hill, with preparations for the market in full swing—stalls being dressed, cider pressed, and crops and produce gathered for sale—Autumn must indeed have appeared to be in her 'store'.

#### 4. Twinned flowers: 'To Autumn' and *Lamia*

For Keats, Winchester—in particular, his climb up St Giles's Hill—provided him with a much-needed opportunity to reflect on the kind of poetry likely to succeed in the marketplace. His most recent work, *Lamia*—begun in July 1819 on the journey from London to the Isle of Wight, via Southampton, and completed in Winchester by 5 September 1819—had been explicitly conceived as a last-ditch attempt to reach an audience that had favoured his competitors, most notably Barry Cornwall (a solicitor-writer who managed to commodify Cockney School poetry for a wider readership). Over several weeks in Winchester, Keats's feelings about his literary career oscillated between optimism and profound self-doubt. Writing to his brother and sister-in-law in a journal-letter dated 17–27 September, he declares himself 'certain' that *Lamia* has 'that sort of fire in it, which must take hold of people'.<sup>55</sup> But just a few days after composing 'To Autumn', he says morosely that his 'Poetry will never be fit for anything[,] it does n't cover its ground well'.<sup>56</sup> The use of an agricultural metaphor, in which Keats compares his poetry (unfavourably) to a well-sown crop that makes full use of the available resources (i.e. one that 'cover[s] its ground'), is particularly striking

51 'Winchester: Fairs and Trades', in *Victoria County History. A History of the County of Hampshire: Volume 5* (n.p., 1912), 36–44. Milner notes: 'During the said time of the Fair the shops were shut up, and no business was allowed to be transacted throughout the whole city, in Southampton, or, in short, within the distance of seven leagues from the hill in every direction' (*Antiquities of Winchester*, 200–1).

52 Milner, *Antiquities of Winchester*, 201; Ball, *Descriptive Walks*, 186–7.

53 Milner, *Antiquities of Winchester*, 201.

54 Ball, *Descriptive Walks*, 187.

55 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 189.

56 *The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 172.

in light of the ode's engagement with the economics of finance, food and land use in early-nineteenth-century Winchester.

Keats had turned before to agriculture as an aid to conceptualizing his poetic practice. In a striking conflation of anatomical and agricultural imagery, the 1818 sonnet 'When I have fears that I may cease to be' finds the poet imagining his pen 'gleaning [his] teeming brain'.<sup>57</sup> On (or in) the one hand, gleaning, outlawed in the same year, was closely associated with 'idleness'.<sup>58</sup> A Scottish farmer writing in September 1800 remarks: 'I am decidedly an enemy to gleaning; it encourages idleness, when hands are wanted for reaping'.<sup>59</sup> On the other, a traditional metaphor for literary composition and textual recovery, gleaning was also recognized as a valuable part of the process of harvesting—the very opposite of idleness.<sup>60</sup> Many farmers welcomed gleaners onto their land, safe in the knowledge that their activity would help to prepare the ground for the following year's cycle of ploughing and sowing. In 'When I have fears', the furrowed brain is compared to a cornfield and 'high-pilèd books' are the 'rich garnerers' that hold the 'full-ripened grain'—'high-pilèd' hinting at another outlawed agri-economic practice: the heaped bushel.<sup>61</sup>

One rich furrow for Keats to plough in the context of composing 'To Autumn' seems to have been John Duncombe's two-volume edition of Horace's *Odes* (1757–1759). Overlooked by Keats scholars, this publication contains phrases that appear in both 'To Autumn' and *Lamia*. Duncombe's commentary on his own Englishing of Horace's ode 'To the MUSE' embeds lengthy quotations from other translators. In the following extract, Duncombe quotes André Dacier's 'curious Remark' on Marc-Antoine Muret's defence of Horace, via Euripides's *Hippolytus*:

Monsieur Muret very well observes, that the Poets often call their Works, *Crowns*, which they place on the Heads of those whom they commend: But I know not whether this can

57 Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Barnard, 221. On Keats's use of gleaning, see Andrew J. Bennett, *Keats, Narrative, and Audience: The Posthumous Life of Writing* (Cambridge, 1994), 169–70, and Bennett's 'The Politics of Gleaning in Keats's "Ode to a Nightingale" and "To Autumn"', *Keats-Shelley Journal*, 10 (1990), 34–8.

58 On the impact of anti-gleaning legislation, see Peter King, 'Gleaners, Farmers and the Failure of Legal Sanctions in England 1750–1850', *Past and Present*, 125 (November 1989), 116–50.

59 *The Farmer's Magazine*, vol. 1, 4th edn (Edinburgh, 1800), 454.

60 On the representation of gleaning in Romantic literature, see Theresa Adams, 'Representing Rural Leisure: John Clare and the Politics of Popular Culture', *Studies in Romanticism*, 47 (Fall 2008), 371–92 (379); Simon J. White, *Robert Bloomfield, Romanticism and the Poetry of Community* (Aldershot, 2007), 59–62, 116. See also the preface to Nathan Drake's four-volume edition of early English texts, *The Gleaner: A Series of Periodical Essays*, ed. Nathan Drake, 4 vols (London, 1811), i., iv.

61 Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Barnard, 221. A similar conflation of gleaning and heaping is used in 'J. L.'s article 'The Corn Bill. – Gleaning Made Robbery', published in *The Examiner* (10 November 1818): 'That the measure of misery is not sufficiently heaped, and that thy present dearth after a fine harvest is below the average intended, is plain' (745).

entirely defend *Horace* from the Reproach of Impropriety in saying, *O Muse, who dost rejoice in untasted Fountains, weave a Garland of Flowers for my LAMIA*. The Images seem too remote. To make myself better understood, I say there would have been a closer Connexion, both in Thought and Expression, if he had said, *Ye Muses, who delight in untrod Meadows, gather a Garland of Flowers for my Lamia*.

Thus *Hippolytus*, in *Euripides*, says to *Diana*, when he offers her a Hymn, . . . *O Goddess! I offer to thee this Garland, which I have twined with Flowers, gathered in a Meadow that never felt the Scythe*.<sup>62</sup>

The 'twined . . . Flowers' and the image of the arrested scythe in Duncombe's discussion find a direct route into Keats's ode ('thy hook/ Spares the next swath and all its twined flowers'), whilst the virgin 'Meadow that never felt the Scythe' and 'Garland' for *Lamia* (who, in *Horace's* ode, is *Lucius Aelius Lamia*, a Roman consul) find fruition in Keats's poem of the same name: 'Garlands of every green, and every scent/ From vales deflowered . . . / What wreath for *Lamia*'.<sup>63</sup> Apparently the first use of 'twined flowers' in English literature – after Duncombe – is Keats's in 'To Autumn'. An echo of 'amid thy store', which now sounds familiar from the ode, but was not a stock phrase in 1819, also appears in Duncombe's *Works of Horace* as 'amidst his store'.<sup>64</sup>

## 5. Keeping a very strict eye

Having situated 'To Autumn' within the context of the social and economic tensions present in Winchester in Autumn 1819, we may now gain a new perspective on the poem's representation of idleness and its engagement with generic conventions. Annabel M. Patterson contrasts Keats's slothful Autumn with the energy extolled in Virgil's *Georgics*, which she calls the 'locus classicus of "To Autumn"'.<sup>65</sup> Noting that Keats's use of the georgic tradition is filtered through Edmund Spenser's *The Shepheardes Calender* (1579) and *Mutabilitie Cantos* (1609) and James Thomson's *Seasons* (1730), Patterson detects a subverting force in Keats's poem that undermines this model. Reminding us that the *Georgics* emphasise above all that plenty is not to be won with ease, but rather through

62 *The Works of Horace in English verse*, 2 vols (London, 1757–9), i. 92. A second edition, 'To which are added, Many Imitations, now first published', was published in 4 volumes in 1767. In Duncombe's translation, this passage is rendered as follows: 'Rejoicing in th'untasted Spring,/ Hither thy funny Garlands bring,/ O Muse! And choicest Fragrance shed/ Around my much-lov'd *Lamia's* Head.' (*The Works of Horace in English Verse* (1757) i., 91) Dacier's and Muret's commentaries on this ode featured in other eighteenth-century editions of *Horace*, but the reference to *Euripides's Hippolytus* and the phrase 'twined with Flowers' is unique to Duncombe (see, for example, *The Odes, Epodes, and Carmen Seculare of Horace*, ed. and trans. Philip Francis, 2 vols (London, 1743), i. 123n).

63 Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Barnard, 430–1.

64 *The Works of Horace in English verse* (1767), i. 7.

65 Annabel M. Patterson, "'How to load and . . . bend": Syntax and interpretation in Keats's "To Autumn"', *PMLA: Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*, 94 (May 1979), 449–58 (453).

hard labour, Patterson suggests that 'To Autumn' is 'a betrayed georgic, its energies displaced in the direction of pastoral lethargy'.<sup>66</sup>

However, we would argue that with the ode's carefully observed presentation of the sheep-corn system, which integrates different types of soil, topographies and modes of labour, 'To Autumn' moves beyond the pastoral/georgic dichotomy, reflecting instead and meditating on the diverging and oppositional energies found in Winchester at this time. In particular, the arable idleness of stanza 2 is indicative of problems faced by Winchester farmers in the early nineteenth century. Farmers across the country were urged to be vigilant of the casual labourers employed at harvest-time: in the *Farmer's Calendar* (1804), they are advised to keep 'a very strict eye' on their 'harvest-men' and to attend to 'the *manner* in which every thing is done', ensuring that the men 'do not cut the corn at improper times; that they take proper care to turn it after rain, and to get it perfectly dry into the barn'.<sup>67</sup> Indeed, the contributor to this journal carps: 'It requires constant attention, early and late, to see that the men work their hours; and that . . . they work as long as they can see'.<sup>68</sup> The need for continual watchfulness and perfect timing (sometimes withholding the act of reaping when the corn is not ready, or the conditions imperfect, other times hurrying on to prevent the crop from spoiling, or to take advantage of good weather) was not a matter of generic and aesthetic convention. For those who made a living from the earth, it was the difference between starvation and survival during the long winter ahead. In Hampshire, where farmers were threatened by a dearth of good labour, the need for attentiveness was perceived to be all the more important. As Charles Vancouver complains in his *General View of the Agriculture of Hampshire* (1813), that county's rural labour force was known to be particularly given to 'idleness', since other higher-paying occupations, such as ship-building in nearby Portsmouth, siphon off the more skilled and ambitious workers, leaving little more behind than 'feebleness and debility'.<sup>69</sup>

In other ways, Keats's poem reveals close observation of arable farming techniques, amplified—but not replaced by—literary gleanings. The ostensible cause of the unseasonal inactivity in stanza 2 is opiate intoxication (the reaper lies 'Drowsed with the fume of poppies'), an imaginative extrapolation of the effects of psychotoxic weeds ('twined flowers') in the ungathered half of the cornfield. Poppies, or 'corn-roses' as John Gerard called them in 1598, were often found 'twined' with the 'blue-bottle', or cornflower.<sup>70</sup> These weeds were included among those that farmers were especially warned to remain vigilant against and

66 Patterson, "How to load and . . . bend", 453.

67 Arthur Young, *The Farmer's Calendar* (London, 1804), 425.

68 Young, *The Farmer's Calendar*, 425.

69 Charles Vancouver, *General View of the Agriculture of Hampshire, Including the Isle of Wight* (London, 1813), 384–5.

70 John Gerard, *The Herball or Generall Historie of Plantes* (London, 1597), 293–301, 591–4. On the properties of the poppy and cornflower, see *The New Family Receipt Book* (London, 1810), 277.

remove at the earliest opportunity to prevent the degeneration of the wheat and the eventual, inevitable corruption of the food supply.<sup>71</sup>

This concern with man's mismanagement of natural resources is registered in another likely source of inspiration for 'To Autumn': Leigh Hunt's entry for July in the 'Calendar of Nature', published in *The Examiner* on the 4th of that month.<sup>72</sup> Although critics have identified shared themes and motifs between 'To Autumn' and the September instalment of the 'Calendar', it is in fact the July instalment that is more likely to have insinuated itself in Keats's mind, since Hunt included in it an extract from his protégé's 1816 composition 'On the Grasshopper and Cricket'.<sup>73</sup> Written in a sonnet competition with Hunt, this poem sees the grasshopper resting 'at ease . . . beneath some pleasant weed' and the cricket 'in drowsiness half lost'.<sup>74</sup> Immediately preceding his quotation from Keats's Grasshopper sonnet, while also answering it, Hunt remarks on the 'active and air-cutting swallows, now beginning to assemble for migration' and the 'sound of insects', such as 'gnats'. Both figure, of course, in Keats's ode. Perhaps spurred on by Hunt's commentary, Keats, experiencing these sights and sounds for himself as he stands on St Giles's Hill, reworks images and ideas from his 1816 sonnet and the 'Calendar' into stanza 3 of 'To Autumn'. He is also prompted to think more deeply about the sleeping reaper, and other idle labourers, in the cornfield before him. In the July 'Calendar', Hunt notes that though the 'farmer is still occupied in getting the productions of the earth into his garners . . . those who can avoid labour enjoy as much rest and shade as possible.' The necessary consequence of avoiding labour is the eruption of blade-dulling, grain-contaminating weeds among the corn—also remarked on by Hunt: 'Pimpernel, cockle, and fumitory, are not to be found [that is, *shouldn't* be found] in corn-fields'.

Hunt is right, of course, as are the labourers' masters and the author of *The Farmer's Calendar*, that idle workers and unweeded fields are a symptom of slide. But Dilke, speaking for the drowsed reaper, would say both these phenomena are rather symptoms of inadequate wages and living conditions. Keats's own sense of poetic process is a fusion of labour and idle reflection, framed in defiance

71 See, for example, *The Farmer's Magazine*, vol. 20 (1819), 12, regarding the importance to the farmer of minimising the impact of 'the fecundating farina of plants of different varieties' in order to prevent 'deterioration in his future crops'. Gerard notes that the cornflower 'hindereth and annoieth the reapers, by dulling and turning the edges of their sickles in reaping of corne' (*The Herball*, 594).

72 'Calendar of Nature', *Examiner* (4 July 1819), 431. The complete 'Calendar' was reprinted by Hunt as *The Months* (London, 1821), priced 3<sup>s</sup> 6<sup>d</sup>. The volume included stanzas 2 and 3 of Keats's 'To Autumn'.

73 William Keach was the first of several critics who have remarked on parallels between 'To Autumn' and the September instalment of the 'Calendar of Nature' ('Cockney Couplets: Keats and the Politics of Style', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25 (Summer 1986), 182–96, esp. 194–5). However, the possible influence of the July instalment has not been noted.

74 Keats, *The Complete Poems*, ed. and intr. Barnard, 94.

towards the new men of Winchester, Robbins, Waller, Benham and their like.<sup>75</sup> In his ode, then, Keats's strict and steady eye insists on recording, without nostalgia or sentiment, a set of relationships to the land that are often fraught, and always in tension, relationships in the process of being disguised and repackaged (through tour guides and visual iconography).

## 6. Conclusion

On 29 August 1819, Keats stood on St Giles's Hill in Winchester, beside a half-reaped cornfield, looking out over the city. He returned with poetic produce to be milled into poetic 'bread', patted into butter, squeezed in the cider-press, bound ultimately for the printing press. Fiona Stafford is right when she senses, commenting on the effect of 'localism' in Romantic poetry, that 'For later readers, who felt far more distant from the earth than either Burns or Wordsworth, Keats held out the possibility of achieving the same kind of fully embodied art, persuasive enough to carry its own in-placeness.'<sup>76</sup> The stubble field in stanza 2 of 'To Autumn' is a particular field, fixed in place and time, and in an agricultural system specific to its county. Keats's poem, moreover, commemorates a set of human relationships to the land that in 10 years would be passing out of living memory.

Today, the arable field on the western slope of St Giles's Hill, once leased by Nicholas Waller, is a multi-storey car park.<sup>77</sup> Nevertheless, although it is the water-meadows that have traditionally featured in accounts of the composition of 'To Autumn', the conceptual force of the poem and of its internal debates are to be found on the 'hilly bourn' of Keats's day. St Giles's conflicting energies—the communal and the private, abundance and dearth—enabled Keats in his ode to gesture towards an economy that runs counter to the speculating and deadening forces of the age, forces whose stricken harvest we continue to reap. Nicholas Waller's house, from which a banker speculated on the profit to be derived by sending bushels to London, lay at the bottom of the western-facing slope; to the east, the sprawling market offered an alternative, older and subversive model of labour and distribution. Identifying with the energies of the latter, whilst observing the power of the former, Keats stands at the still centre, the fulcrum. His act of weighing, presided over by the goddess Autumn (also evoked

75 Keats records his own propensity to languor in a letter to his brother and sister-in-law in February 1819: 'This morning I am in a sort of temper indolent and supremely careless: I long after a stanza or two of Thompson's *Castle of indolence*. My passions are all aleep from my having slumbered till nearly eleven and weakened the animal fibre all over me to a delightful sensation about three degrees on this side of faintness – if I had teeth of pearl and the breath of lillies I should call it languor – but as I am I must call it Laziness.' (*The Letters of John Keats, 1814–21*, ed. Rollins, ii. 78.)

76 Fiona Stafford, *Local Attachments: The Province of Poetry* (Oxford, 2010), 272.

77 For images of St Giles's Hill as it is now, see: *St Giles Hill Winchester Neighbourhood Design Statement Revised* (2011).

in *Lamia*'s 'Ceres'), shows him reflecting on the very questions of labour and idleness, surplus and profit, that occupied his circle at this time. His Winchester poetry, then, in particular 'To Autumn', conceived between St Giles's market and his digs in Market Street, is just as much of a rebuke to Waller, Benham, Robbins and their fellow capitalists as Dilke's pamphlet and those spiky articles in Hunt's *Examiner*.

*Aberystmyth University*