

## Robert Bloomfield Chronology

- 1766, 3<sup>rd</sup> December Born at Honington, Suffolk to George Bloomfield, a tailor, and Elizabeth Manby, a schoolmistress. Youngest of 6 children.
- 1767 Father dies of smallpox, leaving Bloomfield's mother to support the family through her work as a schoolmistress and by spinning wool.
- c.1770 Taught to read and write by his mother.
- 1772 Studies composition for three months with Mr Rodwell of Ixworth. Reads Gray's *Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard* and Goldsmith's *The Deserted Village*.
- 1773 Mother marries widower John Glover.
- c. 1778 Sent to his uncle, William Austin of Sapiston. Works as a farmer's boy for four years.
- 1781 It is decided that Bloomfield's slight stature (he was only just over 5ft tall in adulthood) meant he was unsuitable for work as a farm labourer.
- 1781, 29<sup>th</sup> June Sent to London to his two elder brothers, Nathaniel and George, to be trained by George as a cobbler. Reads widely. First poem, 'The Village Girl', published.
- 1783 Death of step-father John Glover.
- 1784 Returns to the farm at Sapiston following a trade dispute in London. Goes back to the city in autumn. Learns the violin.
- 1786 Brother George leaves London; Bloomfield skilled enough to support himself as a cobbler. Buys a violin. Brief courtship with Nancy Bantock whilst visiting Honington.
- 1790, 12<sup>th</sup> December Marries Mary Anne Church, daughter of a Woolwich shipbuilder, in London.
- 1791, 25<sup>th</sup> October First of five children born, Hannah. The family moves into 14 Bell Alley, Coleman Street, where they live for seven years, apparently struggling to make ends meet with a growing family.
- 1796, May Begins work on what will become *The Farmer's Boy*.
- 1798 Manuscript of *The Farmer's Boy* completed. It is rejected by a number of publishers, and Bloomfield eventually gives the manuscript to George for himself.
- 1798, November George shows the poem to Capel Lofft, who agrees to help Bloomfield. Lofft, a Suffolk radical and barrister, makes grammatical and orthographical amendments and adds his own preface. Publishers Vernor and Hood agree to take the poem, but it does not appear for sale until March 1800.
- 1800, March *The Farmer's Boy* published by Vernor and Hood and runs to three editions in one year. The Duke of Grafton becomes Bloomfield's patron, and the Duke of York sends Bloomfield 15 guineas. Royalties amount to £621, a fortune. Poem attracts the attention of Robert Southey, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and William Wordsworth, and attracts criticism from Lord Byron and Charles Lamb. Bloomfield moves to Shepherdess Walk, City Road.
- 1800 Birth of son Charles.

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| 1800-1801       | Initially enjoys financial benefits from the publication, but has to spend time away from cobbling, still his main occupation, to sit for portraits and visit in society. Experiences financial difficulties by autumn 1801. Continues to write.  |
| 1801            | <i>The Farmer's Boy</i> reaches a fourth edition and is also published in Philadelphia. Brief visit to Honington and Euston Park, home of the Duke of Grafton.  |
| 1801, September | Applies to his publishers for an advance due to financial problems.   |
| Autumn 1801     | Publication of <i>Rural Tales, Ballads, and Songs</i> . Prospects seem excellent despite suffering from rheumatism and a stomach complaint. New editions of <i>The Farmer's Boy</i> also published.   |
| c. autumn 1801  | Is awarded a £15 annuity from the Duke of Grafton. Shares this with his mother and brother George.  |
| 1802            | <i>Rural Tales, Ballads and Songs</i> published. Wins the admiration of Charles James Fox. Appointed by the Duke of Grafton undersealer in the king's bench court.  |
| 1803            | <i>The Farmer's Boy</i> reaches seventh edition, with 30,000 copies sold. Meets Prince Regent, Beau Brummel and Sarah Siddons. Becomes acquainted with Edward Jenner. Tires of the court, and resigns his post.   |
| 1804            | <i>Good Tidings or News from the Farm</i> published. The Duke of Grafton gets Bloomfield a post at Somerset House which he quits after several weeks. Death of Bloomfield's mother. Expenses incurred for her illness and funeral, as well as gifts to the family, return Bloomfield to financial difficulties. Son Charles ill, and would continue so for three years, ultimately being disabled by his condition. |
| 1805            | Visits Worthing for health.   |
| 1806            | Publication of <i>Wild Flowers, or, Pastoral and Local Poetry</i> , dedicated to son Charles.   |
| 1807            | Goes on a ten-day tour along the Wye. Begins keeping a poetical journal which he works on for the next three years. Calls on Jenner in Cheltenham.  |
| 1811            | Publication of the poetical journal as <i>The Banks of the Wye: A Poem</i> in four volumes. The poem is a success.  |
| c. 1811         | Death of the Duke of Grafton. His son, Lord Charles Fitzroy, is reluctant to continue the £15 annuity granted by his father, but is persuaded by Capel Lofft.   |
| 1812            | Failure of Bloomfield's publishers Vernor and Hood, after it is taken near to bankruptcy following Mr Hood's death. 4500 copies of Bloomfield's books sold to another bookseller, Crosby, but the money does not reach Bloomfield. Loses £500. moves to Shefford in Bedfordshire. Wife suffers mental illness.  |
| 1812-1814       | Bloomfield returns to London periodically for business. Manages to secure an advance from Crosby, but becomes disillusioned.  |
| 1814            | Daughter Mary-Anne dies, aged 21. Tour of Canterbury and Kent coast.  |

- 1815 Publication of *The History of Little Davy's New Hat*. Bloomfield has to find an apprenticeship for Charles, and a place for his daughter Charlotte at a milliner's. The Bloomfields move to a cheaper house. Attempts to publish children's stories.
- 1816 Bloomfield's mental and physical health failing due to financial difficulties. A subscription is raised by the Duke of Grafton and others.
- 1817 Charles found a position as a schoolmaster; his income allows the Bloomfields to pay off some debts.
- 1820 Asks Murray, Byron's publisher, to take *May-Day*, but Murray declines.
- 1822 *May-Day with the Muses* appears, the last of Bloomfield's works published in his lifetime, published by Baldwin, Cradock, and Joy. Reading John Clare. Begins to suffer blindness
- 1823 *Hazlewood Hall*, one and only drama, published.
- 23<sup>rd</sup> August, 1823 Bloomfield dies in Bloomfield House, Bedford Street, Shefford. The family is so destitute that they are forced to auction off Bloomfield's books and household items to pay off debts. Bloomfield is buried in the country churchyard at Campton in Bedfordshire. Tombstone erected by Thomas Inskip
- 1824 Remains edited by Joseph Weston and published by daughter Hannah. Contains the *Birds' and Insects' Post Office*, fifteen letters written for children.
- 1834 Bloomfield's widow dies in Bedford Asylum.
- 1866 *Biographical Sketches of Remarkable People* by Spencer T. Hall published; contains a chapter entitled 'Bloomfield and Clare'.
- 1870 *Selections from the Correspondence of Robert Bloomfield the Suffolk Poet* by W. H. Hart published.
- 1904 Robert Bloomfield Society founded. Plaque placed on his house in Shefford.
- 1916 Brass plaque placed in Honington Church to mark the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Bloomfield's birth.
- 1966 Bicentenary celebrated in Honington.
- 1971 *The Farmer's Boy – the Story of a Suffolk Poet* by W. Wickett and N. Duval published.
- 2001 New Robert Bloomfield Society founded.
- 2003 Memorial plaque placed in Campton Church.

Source: David Kaloustian, 'Robert Bloomfield' in *The National Dictionary of Biography*, <http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/2676>.