NOVEMBER 2026 MONTHLY BLOG/ 188

A YEAR OF POEMS
'TO AUTUMN'
BY JOHN CLARE

"I love the fitful gust that shakes
The casement all the day;
And from the mossy elm tree takes
The faded leaf away ..."

John Clare (1793-1864) salute 'To Autumn',
publ. posthumously 1920

by Penelope J. Corfield
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My style of walking is improving. Not steadily, because it still varies markedly from day to day! But, overall, it is getting much better - to my joy and relief!

The brilliant osteopath, who is supervising my recovery, gave me an additional tip for holding my upper body straight upright. And that helps enormously! I was tilting (unintentionally) to one side, meaning that my strides were out of balance. But now I am getting back into synchronisation.

To celebrate, this brief BLOG is recording three lovely walks that I undertook during the last month. Interestingly, when walking and talking with friends, everything becomes much easier. I stop worrying and enjoy the beauties of Autumn in both town and countryside.

One gorgeous walk was along a long, open beach near Hastings on the south coast. We were enjoying the kind hospitality of old friends, who live nearby. After strolling round the old town, which was as completely delightful as we remembered, our hosts took us out of town, along the coast to the East.

There we were able to walk along a quiet level road that runs between the sea on the left and lowish housing and cliffs on the right. Magical.

There's something at once calming and inspiring about being by the sea. The weather was cool, with a light breeze. Perfect for a walk. I found myself singing, absurdly but sincerely: *'Oh, I do like to be beside the sea-side'*. Yes! Magical!

Then my second walk was a promenade around Chelmsford in Essex, where I'd gone to give a lecture. Again, the weather was autumnal and breezy - ideal encouragement for brisk walking. I explored the town centre, entranced by its mix of shops, pubs and fine buildings. I particularly liked the welcoming look of The Golden Fleece - a historic pub, dating back to the seventeenth century. But, as I was about to give a lecture, I refrained from sampling its range of drinks.

Indeed, I suddenly realised that time was running away with itself (as it so often does). I therefore had to halt my promenade and hurry to meet the colleagues who were organising my lecture. I arrived in a very cheerful mood; thoroughly enjoyed talking to a responsive audience; and replied to lots of insightful questions and comments. Later I returned home with a firm decision to return to Chelmsford for a longer visit next time.

After that, the third walk was much more challenging, because the wind was getting up to gale force. But it was totally exhilarating. *'O wild West Wind, though breath of Autumn's being!'* as Shelley once romantically saluted a roaring gale.[1] I was walking through the side streets of Highgate on the way to have lunch with friends. I was bent double, not because my spine was failing but to combat the strength of the wind. It was trying to push me downhill when I was trying to move in the opposite direction. And I had removed my beret, which otherwise would have been blown instantly from Highgate Hill into central London.



Photo of unknown young woman, with windswept hair -2026

So I arrived at my friends' house looking utterly wild. My hair was blown into a crazy halo - and I was dizzy between laughing and trying to catch my breath. It was the prelude to a convivial lunch, with fine food and non-stop animated conversation.

I thought again about the benefits of walking (especially when it comes naturally, without having to concentrate on every step!). And I resolved to undertake at least one really long walk in November.

Let's hope that I find a day that is blessed with autumnal gusts rather than a howling gale. But, if there is a 'wild West Wind', I must do my best to walk with it rather than against it. Onwards!

ENDNOTES:

[1] P.B. Shelley, (1772=1822), *Ode to the West Wind* (written 1819; first published 1820).