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and more...

'I've something to tell'

Each time I start the process of editing the new edition of *Comet*, I have to lay to rest the niggling worry that this time there really won't be enough material to make an interesting and worthwhile issue—but there always is sufficient, and more than sufficient. People have things to say about Norman Nicholson and his work, and his work clearly has something it still wants to tell us.

In this Winter / Spring 2019 issue (*Comet* 30) I am particularly pleased to welcome new writers into the Nicholson fold: **Jeremy Craddock**, Lecturer in Multimedia Journalism at Manchester Metropolitan University; **Dr. Andrew Frayn**, Lecturer in Twentieth Century Literature and Culture at Edinburgh Napier University; **Jean Liney**, whose poem 'As long as I have music' was composed in memory of **Peggy Troll**; and **Frankie Ward**, who has contributed an environmentally conscious poem, in the spirit of Nicholson's work. You will also be able to get a feel for the poetry of **Kerry Darbishire**, a Cumbrian poet who has recently joined the Norman Nicholson Society, whose work is garnering increasing attention both regionally and nationally. Her most recent collection of poems, *Distance Sweet on my Tongue* is reviewed on page 27, in the *Comet's* tail.

I am also pleased to publish a further instalment of **Brian Whalley's** excellent introduction to the geology of this region, which will certainly prove to be a long-lasting resource for the Society, to help us to fully understand and appreciate Nicholson's deep understanding of geological processes and formations. Part 3 will follow in a later issue. Additionally, Brian has written an interesting account of his visit to the Stanza Stones on the Pennine Way, in the hope that this will inspire us to do, or promote, something along similar lines ourselves.

There are also reports on the events of the past six months which relate to Norman—either organized by the Society itself, or supported by us (such as the wonderful 'When Percy Met Norman' festival organized by the Maryporters, with strong participation from the NN Society). These reports, by **Brian Charnley**, **Sue Dawson** and myself, clearly demonstrate how lively the Society is and how imaginative and wide-ranging our events are. Nicholson's life and work have relevance beyond their literary impact and create opportunities for cultural celebration of the broadest kind. Similarly, **Joanne Weeks'** article on Nicholson's involvement with the Cumbrian Literary Group shows that this organization put him in touch with all kinds of other writers and helped him to develop friendships across the region. That artistic vitality, rooted in this landscape and its people, is still bearing fruit and more than justifies the new MA course at the University of Cumbria which is described by **Dr. Penny Bradshaw** in these pages.

Life includes disappointments and downturns, as well as joys and triumphs, and these also have to be told. **Charlie Lambert** reports on Project 14 developments on pages 16 and 17, and we share sad news about one of our members on page 7. But the overall impact of this *Comet* is a joyful one. I think Norman would be surprised and delighted that we still have so much to tell. **AF**

Norman Nicholson and Me

I.

Picture the scene.

It is 1986 and we are in the school library at Queen Katherine School in Kendal, Cumbria. A sixth-form student is prowling the shelves for something to stimulate his mind. He should be doing work towards his English Lit A-level, but he needs to escape for a while, to forget about exams, university, the future. He escapes like this a lot, often into books about The Beatles, Simon and Garfunkel, Bob Dylan. He loves reading about these musicians because he loves playing the guitar and performing in a band in pubs and working men's clubs across the Lake District. He also enjoys reading poetry: one of his A-level texts is *The Whitsun Weddings* by Philip Larkin. It has made a big impression on him. He likes the seemingly matter-of-fact style Larkin uses; it has a photojournalistic quality.

He pulls a slim book from the shelf at random: *Sea To The West*. It is by a poet called Norman Nicholson. There is a striking photo of the author with thick, lambchop sideburns. 'That's what I call a poet!' the 17-year-old student thinks.

Flicking through the book, his eye is caught by a poem called *Halley's Comet*. It mentions Black Combe, somewhere he recognizes. Millom is not far from Kendal. The student knows this because he and his band have played at Millom Working Men's Club.

The student is taken with the poem: it has that reportage quality he likes about Larkin. It has a line about the author seeing Halley's Comet in 1986.

1986.

That's this year, the student thinks.

II.

I was the student.

That scene was a lifetime ago. Now I am 50, I am married and I have two children. I am a lecturer in multimedia journalism at Manchester Metropolitan University. Before that I was a newspaper journalist for two decades.

That moment in the school library in 1986 was a formative one, I can see that now.

Let me explain.

At the age of 17, I harboured ambitions to become a writer. I was unsure what kind. I was writing songs that were pale imitations of the stuff I was listening to (Beatles mostly), and I was attempting to write poetry. I had no idea what I was doing. A lot of poetry I read was abstract, difficult. So reading Nicholson showed me it could be accessible. I liked his poems and he lived near me. I had the urge to write to him. I flicked through the phone book and found his address.

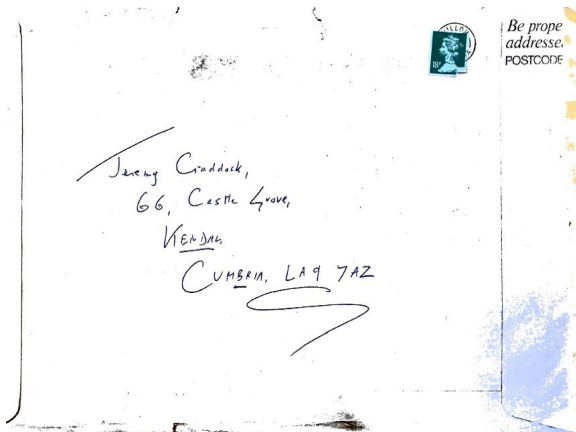
I sent my fan letter and tried to forget about it afterwards, but I couldn't. Each morning, I'd lay in bed wondering if there would be anything in the mail with a Millom postmark. I would tell myself I was being stupid: why would a famous poet write to me?

As soon as the letterbox clattered I'd shoot down the stairs to rifle through the post. Disappointment would fall on me when there was nothing for me.

Then, the miracle happened.

The familiar sound of the letterbox, the soft thump on the mat. A brown A4 envelope underneath a

by Jeremy Craddock



pile of white letters. It was for me! My name and address in spidery handwriting. The postmark: Millom. I flipped it over – the envelope had been re-used. Mr N. C. Nicholson and 14 St George's Terrace, Millom, had been crossed out.

I opened the letter with care – barely able to contain my excitement – and read the contents. I re-read it. I couldn't take it in.

I took it to school and while I was working in the school library I took it out from time to time to re-read.

When I look at the letter now, I'm amazed at how much effort Nicholson put into his reply, and the kindness he showed me. I had asked the inevitable question about how to become a poet, as well as complimenting him on the use of metaphor in his work.

As well as advising me not to rush my own writing, he recounted his own journey to becoming a poet.

He said a young Ted Hughes had sent his poems to read, and he also talked about his sadness at hearing about the death of Douglas Dunn's wife – he felt empathy, as his own wife had died only a few years earlier.

In my letter I had cheekily asked if I could receive a handwritten copy of one of his poems. What a surprise it was to discover he had diligently copied out *Scafell Pike*, its lovely, spare lines, tumbling steeply down the page.

In the months after receiving the letter I read as many of Nicholson books as I could.

The next time my band played at Millom Working Men's Club I visited Nicholson's house. I stood outside on the pavement. This would have been 1987, although I can't recall what month, so I'm not sure if Nicholson had died by then.

III.

After A-levels and university, I fulfilled my ambition to become a writer, but not as a poet. I became a newspaper reporter, starting at the Westmorland Gazette. When I became the arts editor I had the pleasure of interviewing Neil Curry when Nicholson's *Collected Poems* was published in 1994. I still treasure the review copy I received, and it sits proudly on my bookshelf at home.

As for the letter, well, it has been safely tucked away in the loft for years. About ten years ago I wrote a feature about it for *Cumbria Life* and pledged to give it to the John Rylands Library in Manchester to join the rest of Nicholson's archive. I never got around to it, but now that I work within walking distance of the library, I intend to offer it to them. Better late than never.

From one library to another, you might say, and that seems a nice way to conclude this memoir about Norman Nicholson and me.

Jeremy Craddock

It puff'd a kitchen smoke
 Black as peat & pinnae —
 Rock-pie a volcanic lava
 Half a mile thick
 Scattered over
 As he slide a an eye

When Percy Met Norman



“ONE DAY WE MUST FUSE OUR WORK FOR THE WHOLE WORLD TO SEE AND READ!”

(Percy writing to Norman after their initial meeting in 1959)

A very special friendship between a Cumbrian poet and artist was explored in a cultural weekend in September 2017, held at The Settlement, where Percy Kelly first met Norman Nicholson, in 1959. The industrial landscape, heritage, and people of West Cumbria provided both artists with clear inspiration from which a special friendship developed. The aim of this festival was to bring together experts on each of the men to be in conversation together.

More than a dozen Percy Kelly paintings formed a centre piece for the festival organised by The Maryporters. Amongst other exhibits were over 100 illustrated letters from Maryport school children complemented by some original painted letters from Kelly himself to his friend Nicholson.

The gathering opened on Friday 28th September with a lively introduction from Geoffrey Wilkinson, prior to a more formal launch from M.P. Sue Hayman and the Mayor of Allerdale. There were two events planned to open the literary proceedings: 1). A Percy Kelly art trail led by Chris Wadsworth 2); A creative writing workshop lead by Antoinette Fawcett.

Percy Kelly began to draw as soon as he could hold a pencil and seemed to have an innate sense of perspective and draughtsmanship. He drew or painted every day of his life on virtually anything that came to hand. To doodle and draw was a compulsion without which he could plunge into depression.

Maryport is one of six industrial coastal towns, full of history, upon which Percy, and Chris, focused much of their attention. Chris has recently launched a series of Percy Kelly trails and we were able to share part of the Maryport trail. Kelly was fascinated by harbours and boats thus this town became one of his favourite places. She informed us that setting up the trails had been a revelation for her. To walk where Kelly had walked and to see through his eyes had broadened her understanding and respect for this ‘complex genius’.

Antoinette is a multi-talented writer, editor and translator, known to the Society in her role as editor of *Comet* and as the current Membership Secretary. Her workshop focused on elements of patterning in Nicholson’s visual and aural effects and was well-received by the participants.

The Friday agenda closed with a talk by Kathleen Jones, poet, biographer and novelist; who was commissioned to write Nicholson’s biography “The Whispering Poet” published in 2013. Kathleen gave us details of Nicholson’s life stressing the impact of the tuberculosis he suffered in his early years. She showed us some interesting Nicholson family slides and offered plenty of food for

by Brian Charnley

thought: Why is the word 'regional' considered to be such a pejorative term? What was the actual significance, for Norman, of London being the literary centre of Britain? Did we all realise that Norman was 'green' before the term was even coined? Kathleen rounded off her presentation most professionally, in an excellent Q/A session with an exuberant audience.

Day 2 of the festival began with readings and personal reflections from selections of Nicholson's poetry from Brian Charnley; an interesting slant was to hear connections to Pablo Neruda and Bruce Springsteen in his investigations. Local poet, Mike Smith, who shared this session was able to offer a recording of a personal interview he had with Nicholson as well as an actual live reading of Nicholson's poem 'The Whispering Poet' in a very entertaining contribution.

The poetry scene in Cumbria is one of the liveliest anywhere in the country and Kelly Davies, herself a local writer, next hosted a wide ranging selection of readings by local poets. It is 28 years since William Scammell's book *The New Lake Poets* was published, which was the last anthology of then-contemporary Cumbrian poetry. A new anthology, however, was available, for the first time, at this festival—*This Place I Know*, edited by Kerry Darbishire, Kim Moore and Liz Nuttall, with a foreword by Grevel Lindop—a celebration of the effects of the Cumbrian landscape and people on the imagination. This book proved to be most beneficial since many of the readers were well represented. There were also several nationally known writers in Simon Armitage, Neil Curry, Tom Pickard and Phil Houghton whilst I was particularly pleased to see poems from our committee members Charlie Lambert and Antoinette Fawcett.

The poets were followed by Alan Roper, graphic designer and artist, featured in BBC *Countryfile*, who offered his art workshop, which was very popular with those who took part. It was Alan who had designed the fine poster which advertised the whole event and who has subsequently been commissioned by the Society to design publicity materials that will reflect Nicholson's poetic themes and his attachment to his region.

Alan Beattie, academic and activist, was the next speaker and provided an absorbing talk based upon the Settlement archives. Originally known as Dower House, The Settlement, a unique experiment in cultural action, ran from 1946 until 2017. The artistic legacy of the Settlement was minutely explored by Alan through archives/records of the many cultural events hosted in Maryport, over the past decades, featuring artists Sheila Fell, Percy Kelly and Norman Nicholson.

Kathleen Jones alongside Chris Wadsworth returned to the fore to conduct a completely improvised-light-hearted discussion—'Percy and Norman, Cumbrian Brothers'. With nothing rehearsed the two ladies simply spoke to one another in an interesting exchange of reminiscences, anecdotes and speculations whilst the audience, well-supplied with wine and canapés, was invited to respond.

Chris took us through the extraordinary life of Kelly who had discussed art with Prime Minister Winston Churchill, shook hands with the King George VI, and dined with members of the Royal family but ended up lonely and confused in a cottage in Norfolk.

Kathleen, at a slight disadvantage in that she had already presented a detailed overview of Nicholson, quite remarkably, provided further stimulation: Norman was a regional writer; now add working class and then religious and we have metamorphosed into a terrible indictment indeed. This is what Nicholson was fighting despite 7 collections of poetry, a Queen's Gold Medal and an O.B.E.—ironically, as his reputation seriously declined.

Last word to The Maryporters: 'It has been a huge undertaking and we are grateful for those who have made it possible to offer this free of charge. Thank you to Maryport and Allerdale councils, the Hadfield Trust, Cumbria Community Foundation and Abbeyfield Carlisle Community First Fund and to Nikki Shaw whose support enabled this festival to happen.'

Brian Charnley

Acknowledgements to: *News and Star/Cumberland News; This Place I Know; Chris Wadsworth.*

On rediscovering Norman Nicholson

My interest in Norman Nicholson derives from a very tangential personal connection. My family is all from Barrow-in-Furness and the surrounding area; many of the Frayns worked in the shipyards and associated industries, and Nicholson was actually my paternal grandmother's maiden name, although we haven't uncovered any connections with the Millom Nicholsons.

It's through my mother's side, the Bamfords, however, that my very tangential connection with Norman Nicholson comes. My maternal grandmother, Mary Edmondson, was from Millom. Her cousins of roughly the same age, the McLarens, were for a time school teachers in the area. It must, I presume, have been through this connection that they encountered Norman Nicholson, and a distinct memory I have is of being shown books by this famous local poet. At the time, aged in my teens, I didn't get it – why didn't most of these poems rhyme? That wasn't poetry, was it? I remember being frustrated at just being told that this was 'good poetry' without having a clear sense of why or how.

The McLaren sisters were keen to participate in literary circles: I recall them having signed copies of books by T.S. Eliot. I'm not quite sure of the provenance of these – with the wisdom of age I suspect speculative autograph soliciting, but it's also not impossible that they had another connection; I understand that the sisters had some family money, which was augmented by Jean's successful trading on the stock market. The longer surviving, Nancy, left very substantial bequests to local Silecroft and Whicham Valley causes when she died in 2004.

By 2004 I'd just started my PhD at the University of Manchester, on interwar novels about the First World War. It wasn't until after I'd finished the PhD (2008), rewritten this research as a book, *Writing Disenchantment: British First World War Prose, 1914-30* (Manchester University Press, 2014), and got my lectureship at Edinburgh Napier University, that serendipity led me back to Norman Nicholson, now armed with another couple of decades' worth of literary study. The university library was having a clear-out of books that hadn't been checked out for some time, and one of the things I asked to save was a copy of Nicholson's *Selected Poems*, which had clearly been bought many years ago by some enlightened former colleague. Moving to Edinburgh from the East Midlands, I was also ready, perhaps, to think more about making connections with places from my past: I was christened in Barrow, and went there regularly until my maternal grandfather died in 2007. At the end of my first academic year in Scotland I treated myself to the *Collected Poems*; I enjoyed dipping in and out of it over the next year or so.

Having studied literature for most of the 25 years since seeing those Nicholson volumes for the first time, I was able more easily to interpret the poems, knowing more about the traditions and forms in which he was writing. Some, primarily the more theologically-orientated ones, still remain hazy to me – I am a heathen of my generation – but there was lots there to interest me



by Andrew Frayn

in terms of both form and content.

Ready to do some new research after writing a lot about the First World War in the last few years, I'm writing a couple of academic articles on Nicholson between major projects on the earlier part of the twentieth century. My two articles are, firstly, on rural industry and post-industry, charting Nicholson's view from his earliest work (in poems such as 'Cleator Moor') that the industrial boom must end, and on Nicholson and wartime, from the impact on his childhood of the First World War, to his early writing and editing in the during the Second World War (such as 'Bombing Practice'), to the shadow of the Cold War on some of his later work (notably 'Windscale'). I'm planning a trip to the archives in Manchester in the coming months, and hope to finish the articles this summer.

I'd be glad to hear from anyone who might have memories of the Misses McLaren. The above is anecdotal, and there's nobody left in the family with whom I can check the above! Any thoughts on the research I outline above are also welcome to a.frayn@napier.ac.uk.

Andrew Frayn

Kathleen Mary Churchill née Bowman 4th September 1947 - 14th November 2018

We are extremely sorry to announce the death of Kathleen Churchill, who was a long-term member of the Norman Nicholson Society. Kathleen's husband, John, was kind enough to send the following obituary of Kathleen, which will give our readers a good sense of who she was. John tells me that Norman Nicholson's poem 'Wall' was read at her funeral, and that many people commented on how much they had enjoyed hearing it. Condolences were sent to John on behalf of the Society.



Kathleen Churchill, like Norman Nicholson, was born and brought up in Cumbria; her hometown however was Maryport. She attended Cockermouth Grammar School and went on to study Domestic Science in Newcastle. After a brief spell teaching in Sunderland, she returned to Cumbria, first to Kells in Whitehaven and then Caldew School, Dalston, where she was a popular and inspiring Head of Home Economics.

In the nineties, after training as a Blue Badge Guide, Kath began to share her wide knowledge and deep love of the county, its history, natural beauty and culture. It was not surprising then that Norman Nicholson's poetry should speak to her.

Long before that she met and married John Churchill. Their wedding took place in 1980 in Carlisle Cathedral and there began a long and very happy marriage. Later on Kath and John lived and taught in Saudi Arabia for 15 years, during which time Kath would return to Cumbria in the summer to do guiding.

Kathleen had a lovely singing voice and sang and toured for many years with The Abbey Singers. She was also an active Soroptomist for over thirty years. She had a strong faith and served in the late eighties and early nineties on the Diocesan Board of Education. Kath lived life to the full but sadly, after a brave struggle with cancer, she died in November in Whitehaven with, at the last, the sea to the west (and doubtless blinded by the dazzle).

John Churchill

Norman Nicholson and the Cumbria Literary Group

The year was 1946. Post-war Britain. A defiant spirit of optimism. Opportunity for regeneration extended along Cumbria's coastal plain.

War had touched the county comparatively lightly, considered a safer zone. Children from areas of industrial and military significance were evacuated here. Prisoner-of-war camps were sited at Shap Wells and Moota. The Danish fishing fleet and a London firm producing leather jackets for tank and air crews found refuge in Whitehaven. Sunderland Flying Boats were built on Windermere, Naval vessels in Barrow, the only location to be bombed, in 1941. Airfields abounded, ten around Carlisle; transatlantic craft flew in to Kirkbride, en route to being armed.

In June, 1946, three West Cumbrian people met in Flimby Vicarage, with a shared concern for regional writing and literature: **J Roderick Webb**, a Maryport solicitor-turned-poet, **Gwyneth Jones**, short story writer and successful dramatist and Harry Hollinson, ex-journalist and teacher, who wrote articles and stories. They aspired to bring about a literary renaissance in the North West, hence the Cumbrian Literary Group was founded, to provide a meeting place for writers and readers of all tastes associated with the geographical area now known as Cumbria, stimulating interest through lectures and discussions. A magazine, *Bookshelf*, would link more isolated members.

The early sporadic meetings were held at various venues, including the Maryport Settlement, home of their Workers Education Association. Was it through his connection with the WEA that Nicholson became aware of CLG? **Kathleen Jones** wrote that he taught regularly between 1939-1943 as far north as Whitehaven. Without accessing CLG's records lodged in the County Archives, Carlisle, my sources are scanty but *Bookshelf* no.10, June 1947, the first anniversary, boasted of a membership of over sixty. Among the established writers were: **Norman Nicholson**, **Graham Sutton**, **Dorothy Una Ratcliffe**, **Kathleen Raine**, **WR Calvert** and **Stephen Hopkinson**.



*The Maryport Settlement
Photo courtesy of Jim O'Rourke*

It is fascinating to conjecture how many of these writers Nicholson would have known. A verbal Venn diagram. **David Boyd** tells us that Nicholson was noted for networking, a prolific letter-writer. Certainly he had met and collaborated with Kathleen Raine [1908-2003] at Cockley Moor in the early Forties and although she returned to London in 1943, they remained in friendly contact.

Graham Sutton [?-1960], who lived in Keswick wrote a series of successful novels set against a Lake District background, the first, *Shepherd's Warning*, published in 1946.

Dorothy Una Ratcliffe [1887-1967] might, in today's parlance, be termed 'exotic'! Her obituary

by Joanne Weeks

appeared in *Bookshelf* no 108. The Thoresby Society, Historical Society for Leeds and District, begins her entry:

DUR lived a rich and colourful life. Glamorous, wealthy, a socialite who loved nature and the gypsy life, she published almost fifty books, travelled all over the world, often by their caravan or yacht, nurtured her garden, adored Yorkshire and its traditions, was a prolific collector and the inspiration behind her father-in-law's magnificent legacy to Leeds University of the Brotherton Library, built to house his collection of rare and precious books and manuscripts, in trust for the Nation. She published a literary magazine, "The Microcosm", which contained, among many others, articles by Tolkien and Chesterton. Her first marriage ended in divorce. She and her second husband lived in Temple Sowerby Manor, near Penrith, where, on his death, she gave her beloved garden, Acorn Bank, to the National Trust.

WR Calvert [?] was the author of a succession of books for naturalists, beginning with *Wild Life on Moor and Fell* and continuing into the Fifties.

The received wisdom held by long-serving members of the Group has it that when Nicholson joined, it was with the proviso that he need not attend meetings. Again, speculation: this may have been because of lack of transport and the fact that he was increasingly immersed in his writing. In the Forties and early Fifties, he was engaged in freelance journalism, Christian verse drama, as an editor and literary critic, was working on a second novel as well as poetry. *Five Rivers*, published by Faber in 1944, won the Royal Society of Literature's Heinemann Award. *Rock Face* was published in 1948.

In the coming years, Nicholson would play an important part in the life of the Cumbrian Literary Group, would form friendships with prominent members and through *Bookshelf*, follow the fortunes of CLG.

Joanne Weeks

To be continued.

Joanne Weeks gratefully acknowledges the generosity of Kathleen Jones and David Boyd in permitting use of their painstaking published research.

[Bold typeface indicates internet presence]

CUMBERLAND AND WESTMORLAND—STILL WORTH READING?

Nicholson's topographical book *Cumberland and Westmorland* is 70 this year, and, whilst it might not be the most up-to-date guide to the English Lakes, it remains a classic that is full of good writing and pithy observations. This was the first of Nicholson's topographical books and also marked the start of his long relationship with Robert Hale Ltd, who published several other books by Nicholson: *The Lakers*; *A Portrait of the Lakes*; *Provincial Pleasures*; *Greater Lakeland*; and others. *Cumberland and Westmorland* was reviewed by several important periodicals, including the *TLS*, *Time and Tide*, *The Listener* and *The New Statesman*. Nicholson was 35 years old when the book was published and at the height of his writing powers—certainly in terms of output. Janet Adam Smith, reviewing it for the *TLS*, considered it to be a 'book worthy to stand on the shelf beside the *Guide to the Lakes*' (i.e. Wordsworth's seminal guidebook). She adds: 'Fortified with Mr Nicholson's excellent book, even the most ardent Wordsworthian pilgrim [...] may gain a larger perspective and a better understanding of the real character of the landscape he loves'. It can still be bought secondhand—and is stocked in Cumbria Libraries (29 copies, according to the online catalogue). Why don't you order a copy to read, if you don't already have one, and send your reactions on this book—or on Nicholson's other topographical works—to the editor for possible publication in the Summer/Autumn *Comet*? I'd love to hear from you!

AF

Member Writing—A Song from the Heart by Jean Liney

Jean Liney has recently joined the Norman Nicholson Society and sent the editor this piece of verse, with the following touching explanation: 'I am a member of the Phoenix Singers of which Peggy Troll was also a member. In fact I think she was one of the original members who formed the then "Millom Singers" mixed voice choir which then folded, hence the rise from the ashes "The Phoenix Singers" ladies choir. I used to sit next to Peggy every week at the choir practice and miss her dreadfully. I penned this poem with Peggy in mind, as I know how much music meant to her. I don't profess to be a poet of any kind but now and again something touches me and I need to write it down.' She adds that the poem is 'In Memory of Peggy'.

As long as I have music

The chords of my escape, the feeling of the beat
 The vibration of my soul, it sends me to my peak
 The way it makes me move, just graceful on my feet
 In the chords of my escape, no expectation do I meet

I'm free to be myself, I can dance & I can sing
 I can twirl around the floor; this is how it's supposed to be
 It takes me to another place, somewhere far away
 It makes me melancholy & I begin to sway

Music **can** make me forget my pain
 It brings out the sun when I see only rain
 I can happily listen to music all the day long
 It doesn't matter what tune - it doesn't matter what song

Music is something we all take for granted
 But - if you really listen, it can make you feel enchanted
 Music is for everyone, young, old or in-between
 And if you take the time to really listen - you will know what I mean

I am in need of music, my mood is very low
 I think about a song - and my heart begins to glow
 With a melody in my head & as I begin to sing
 Suddenly my mood lightens - I can now do ANYTHING

My love of music; is something I cannot live without
 It soothes MY mind & heals MY heart
 It lets me drift, into the past - of thoughts of long ago
 It gives me glimpses of memories, that I've always treasured so

For as long as I have music, as long as there's a song for me to sing
 I can find my way; I can see a brighter day
 The music in MY life does set MY spirit free

Jean Liney

Rocks and Landscapes in the West (Part 2) by Brian Whalley

In Part 1 (Comet 13/1, 2018) we looked at the distribution of the main rock types found in Cumbria, with the aid of Alan Smith's useful book *Lakeland Rocks*). Here, I indicate something about the ages of Cumbrian rocks. In Part 3 I shall bring these ideas together in the context of some of Norman's poems.

Thinking geologically

We left Jonathan Otley (in the 1820s) instructing the Rev. Adam Sedgwick¹ in the basic division of rocks and mapping the complexities of Lakeland geology. In the nineteenth century, clerics with a natural history bent had long realised that the date of 'creation' of the earth was vastly beyond Archbishop Ussher's date of 23 October 4004 BC and that 'creation' was something rather different from biblical statements. We need some technical information as to how early geologists started to think 'geologically' and embrace long lengths of time – 'deep time'. To use James Hutton's phrase at the end of his 1788 book, *Theory of the Earth, or, An Investigation of the Laws Observable in the Composition, Dissolution, and Restoration of Land upon the Globe*, 'The result, therefore, of our present enquiry is, that we find no vestige of a beginning, no prospect of an end.'

A fundamental 'law' of geology is that, in a vertical sequence of rocks, the oldest were deposited first and seen at the base of the sequence, progressively newer rock strata were deposited on top of older. This is the 'Principle of Superposition' first stated by the Danish scientist Nicolas Steno (Niels Steensen) in the late 17th Century and popularised by the father of English Geology, William Smith (1769-1839) as his 'first law'. Smith's second rule, the 'law of strata' is that fossils can be distinctive and used to correlate strata across the countryside. Smith collected fossils as a surveyor of canals, coal mines in Somerset and from railway cutting outcrops. This 'faunal succession' idea was shown in his mapping of the area around Bath (1799) and in 1815 his geological map of part of Great Britain². Smith's methods showed the importance of collecting fossils, rocks and minerals in stratigraphic context, that is, specimens indicating past conditions, ages and changing geological environments embedded in outcrops. We also need to note that by 'rocks' and 'strata' here we mainly mean sedimentary rocks; those laid down in seas, deep and shallow,

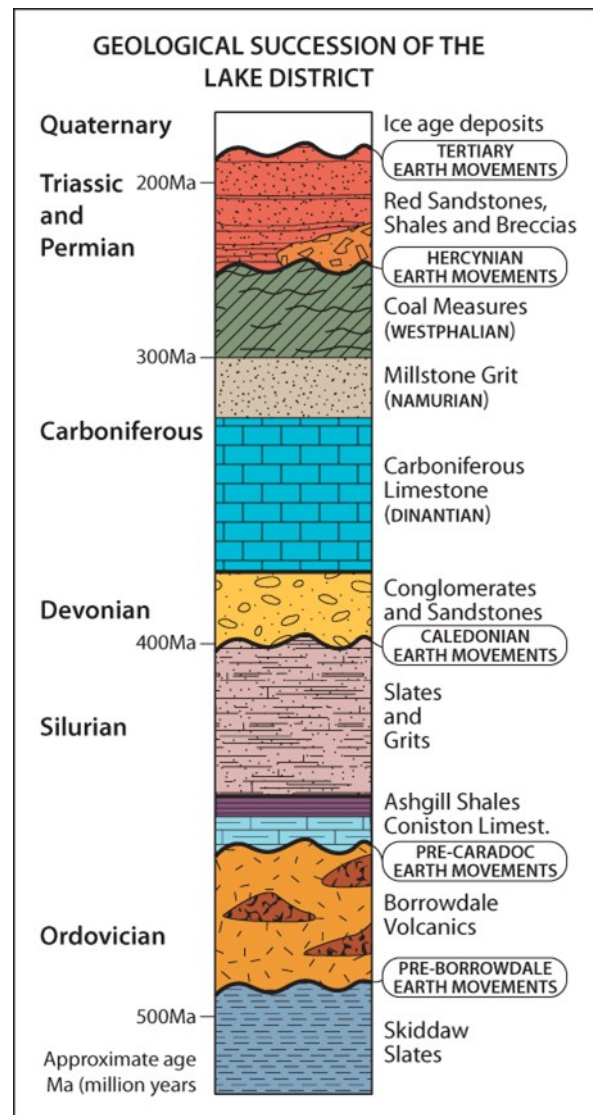


Figure 1. An outline of the stratigraphy of Cumbria. Not all the names or symbols are explained in the text. The wavy lines represent periods of crystal deformation or earth movements. Otley recorded a very simple stratigraphic column in about 1837 (Oldroyd 2002). The vertical scale indicates age rather than thickness of the sediment.

Rocks and Landscapes in the West (part 2)

estuaries and on the earth's surface in rivers, deserts and by glaciers. Geological mapping needs to perceive the three dimensions of the stratigraphy in relation to the topography of outcrops and time. Geologists try to decode this complex information, in the lab as well as the field.

The geological succession in Cumbria

Figure 1 (see above, p. 11) is a generalised geological section showing the main rock types, the succession, in Cumbria. The map of geology (in Part 1) provides the disposition of surface exposures (outcrops) of the strata on the topography. The section shows the stratigraphic succession and thus relative ages. From the earliest years of mapping, when Sedgwick was active, until the 1950s, it was not possible to say how old (in millions of years) each stratum was. However, it became clear that the very oldest, 'basement' rocks, below the Skiddaw Slates, are not seen in outcrop, only in boreholes.

Early Days of Geology in Cumbria

When mapping in south Wales, Roderick Murchison (1792-1871) proposed the 'Silurian System' (what we now term a 'period') below the 'Devonian'. In central Wales, Murchison and Sedgwick suggested that Silurian rocks overlay 'Cambrian' rocks. However, a dispute arose owing to different ways in which the strata were identified; Sedgwick's 'upper' Cambrian rocks overlapped with Murchison's 'lower' Silurian. In 1879, after the deaths of Sedgwick and Murchison, Charles Lapworth (1842-1920), using fossil evidence, suggested that the 'Ordovician Period'³ (from the ancient Welsh tribe of Ordovices) between the Silurian (the Silures) and Cambrian reconciled the differences. In Cumbria, Cambrian rocks are not present but the Ordovician rocks are very important. The Lower Ordovician, the Skiddaw Slates (Skiddaw Group) are fine-grained mudstones and siltstones.

Note that the 'age' has to be interpreted carefully. Thus, Maddox explains (2017, p. 115): 'Although there was no way of determining absolute ages in the nineteenth century, he [Murchison] claimed the age of the Silurian [Period] to have been 443 million to 417 million years ago ..' This is anachronistic geological knowledge⁴. Other than through Smith's 'laws', Murchison could not know the dates as they were not determined until the latter 20th century. Such 'absolute' dates can be changed as methods are refined, the latest dating gives the end of the Silurian as 419.2 Ma. That is, millions of years before the present.

In Cumbria the few Devonian rocks are the conglomerates north of Ullswater at Great Mell Fell (as noted by Jonathan Otley). Conglomerates are beds of rounded pebbles, here in ferruginous sandstone. A similar, coarse pebbly rock, but with angular fragments, is found as 'brockram' in the Vale of Eden, the first deposits of the Permian Period.

The reason for the 'missing' Devonian could be one of two reasons, or both. The principle of superposition says that older is below younger but there might be no deposition at all for millions of years. Alternatively, deposited sediments might have been eroded away with much younger deposits on top. This indication of a time gap in strata is called an 'unconformity'; one rock lies unconformably on top of another with a considerable age difference between the two. The classic unconformities are at Siccar Point (Eyemouth, SE Scotland) and Jedburgh ('Hutton's Unconformity'). In Cumbria, the Permian-Triassic rocks (such as the strata at St Bees Head) lie unconformably on the Carboniferous rocks south of Whitehaven harbour.

by Brian Whalley

Volcanic Interlude

The Ordovician includes the Borrowdale Volcanics (Borrowdale Volcanic Group or Series; BVS), eruptive volcanic lavas and tuffs and agglomerates. The latter two are ejected ash; tuffs are fine grained and agglomerates are coarser and include volcanic bombs. Such 'volcaniclastics' can form in high-altitude ash plumes but also from rapid hot airborne flows down slopes. Wet volcanic ash may form rapidly-flowing mudflows (lahars). These deposits were compacted and lithified in time by heat and overlying load. Now exposed at the surface, they are resistant to erosion, especially when compared to the rounded hills of Skiddaw Group. The steepest cliffs, and best rock climbing, are on the BVS.

The Silurian, the Windermere Supergroup

Coniston Limestone is the rock unit distinguished by Otley on the south side of his 'Greenstones' (or BVS). It is one of a series of strata quarried for building: the Brathay Formation/Flags (near Hawkshead) and the Kirkby Moor Formation extracted by the Burlington Slate Company. It is thought that the thickness of these sediments, now properly called the Windermere Supergroup, is perhaps 8000m thick.

Although Old Red Sandstone rocks (Devonian) in Cumbria were eroded, the pre-existing 'country rocks' (Silurian-Devonian) had liquid magma injected into them. As the magma cooled and solidified, intrusive igneous rocks, 'granites', were formed. These granitic rocks, Ennerdale, Threlkeld, Eskdale, Skiddaw and Shap, can provide 'absolute' dates that range from the Silurian to the lower Devonian⁵. Shap granite dates from about 397M years ago.

The Carboniferous: limestones, grits, coal and hematite

The Lower Carboniferous rocks ('Mountain Limestone') are best seen around Morecambe Bay from Arnside to Hodbarrow. Figures 2 and 3 show some of the sequence in the Grange area.

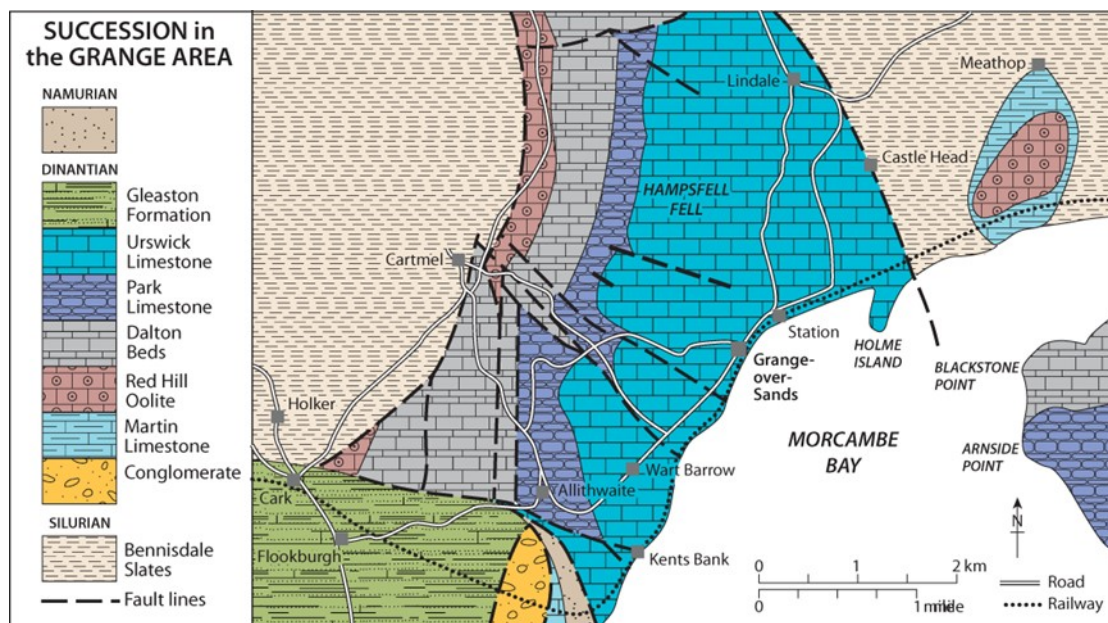


Figure 2. Geological map of the Grange area. The Dinantian (Lower) Carboniferous limestones are more complex than in Figure 1.

Rocks and Landscapes in the West (Part 2)

Calcitic shells were deposited in warm shallow seas when the location was about 20° south of the equator (350M years ago). They were lithified over time as the location moved towards the equator and covered by non-calcareous silt and grit deposits from deltas in the Upper Carboniferous (310 Ma). Subsequently, coal was produced from the buried and compressed woods of swamps and forests accumulated over long periods of time and buried by silts of migrating rivers of the Upper Carboniferous. Coals occur within silts and grits, often in complex and repeating sequences called 'cyclothem'.

The St Bees sandstone of the Permo-Trias was primarily deposited as riverine sands derived from long-vanished 'oldlands'. The rounded sand grains are coated with iron oxide that help cement the grains into the rock. The sandstones in the Vale of Eden are mainly sand-dune derived.

Hematite occurs mostly in the south of the coastal strip and was injected into the limestones via super-heated water under pressure from tectonic activity in the Irish Sea basin. This water dissolved iron in the overlying sandstones and the fluids gained access to the limestones via faults, locally dissolving and replacing limestone by hematite, a process known as metasomatism.

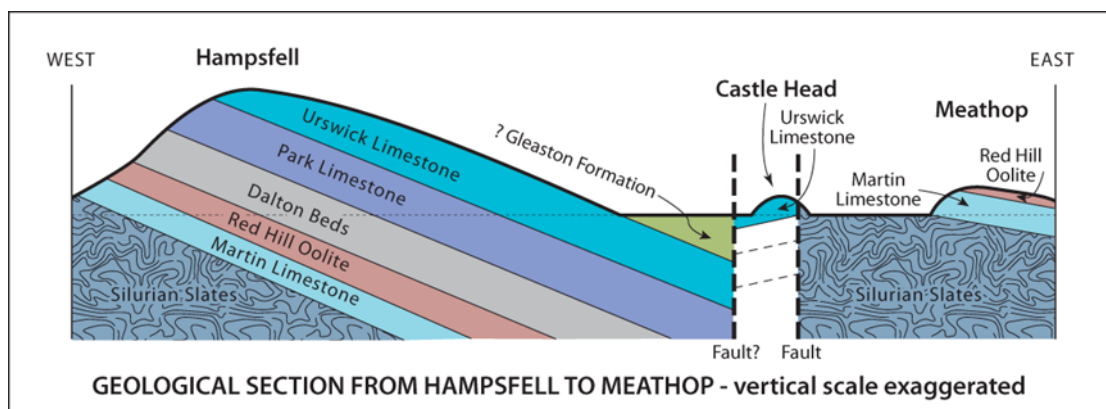


Figure 3. Section across the sequence in Figure 2 showing the vertical offsets due to faulting

Up to date: Quaternary, Pleistocene, Holocene and Anthropocene

Think of the Quaternary period as being the last 2 million years. It includes the 'ice ages' of the Pleistocene with erosion by rivers as well as ice and the deposition of moraines and drumlins. Sediments in the river valleys and estuaries of southern Cumbria are mostly Holocene (11.6 thousand years before present). According to some, we now live in the Anthropocene, where humans have altered the landscape. We shall examine some of the links between events in the Anthropocene and Nicholson's poetry in Part 3.

Brian Whalley

Notes

1. Although Nicholson gives rather scant mention to Otley in relation to both Sedgwick and Wordsworth in *The Lakers*, a fuller biography is by Smith (2007) who also mentions the 'spat' between Sedgwick and Murchison in more detail than here, as well as Sedgwick's disagreements with Darwin.
2. The modern classic is *The Map that Changed the World* by Simon Winchester (2001). A very readable book about geological investigations and historical aspects is Richard Fortey's *The Earth: An Intimate History* (2005) and see also Dartnell (2018). A detailed, rather technical, history of the geologists who helped to unravel the geology is by Oldroyd (2002).
3. Geologists of the day who believed that rocks were only sedimentary were called 'neptunists', those

by Brian Whalley

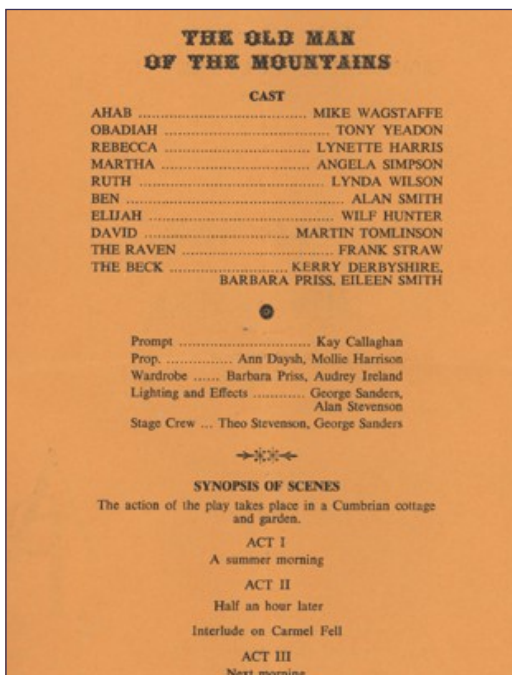
favouring a volcanic origin were 'plutonists'. There is a good discussion of this, in the 'Early Discoveries' chapter of Leeder and Lawlor's excellent 'GeoBritannia' (2017) and Wikipedia entries. The complexity of strata and correlations can be seen in the Wikipedia entries 'Ordovician', 'Borrowdale Volcanic Group' and 'Windermere Supergroup'.

3. My point is that the absolute dates given were not known until the middle 20th century after developments in physical chemistry and instrumentation. Accessible information is in Wikipedia under 'Radiocarbon dating' and 'Radiometric dating'.
4. The absolute dates of these granite plutons are being refined as instrumentation and interpretation improves. Their locations can be seen in their names and in Fig. 2 of Part 1.

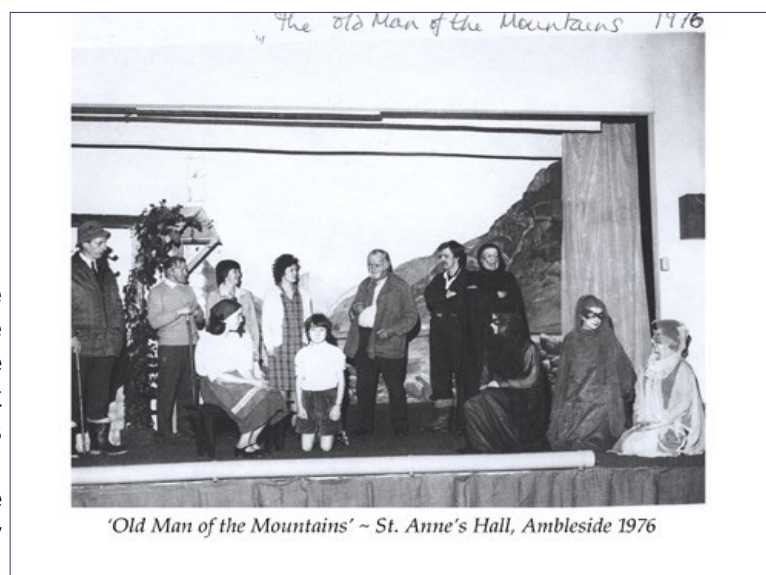
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The Old Man of the Mountains—Ambleside, 1976



In 1976 Norman Nicholson was 62, and an active writer, with a number of books still to be published. Many of us remember him from this period, including new NN Society member Kerry Darbishire, who was one of the voices of the Beck in a 1976 production of *The Old Man of the Mountains* (1945), staged at the St. Anne's Hall in Ambleside and directed by Joyce Cockcroft. It is wonderful to see the evidence of that performance and to realize how much Nicholson's *drama* was still appreciated at that time, more than thirty years after it was first written and performed. Kerry is third from the right (below), sitting on the stage, dressed in black. She met Norman on that day and



remembers him being 'quiet and gentle and charismatic'. She adds that the director and the cast were 'quite nervous, obviously hoping that the great writer would approve!' Kerry's mum was the prompter and Kerry felt that Norman was 'the image of an old man of the mountains, dressed in tweeds with wiry white hair and bushy eyebrows'...

Project 14 Update by Charlie Lambert

It must have been soon after the last edition of *Comet* was mailed out that my mobile phone buzzed and a voice announced itself as Nick from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

Isn't it astonishing how many emotions one can experience in a matter of nano seconds? First, surprise, because I expected the verdict on the Society's application for £500,000-plus to arrive by impersonal email. Then, excitement, because I figured that the email option would certainly apply if it was bad news, but a personal phone call had to indicate success. Then, dismay when the tone of Nick's voice, more than his choice of words, told me that the news was not what I wanted to hear.

As I suspect all members know now, we were unsuccessful. Our plan to buy Norman's old house and turn it into a place worth visiting was turned down.

But, we always knew that this was a possibility, and that the majority of Heritage Lottery applications fail first time around. For those few moments it was intensely disappointing, but before that conversation with Nick was over I was able to glean valuable feedback about our application and establish that we were welcome to try again.

The Society's committee met in October and agreed that we should post a second application. We believe massively in this project. We think it is important for the legacy of Nicholson and his inspirational writing. We also believe it is important for Millom because our aim is to create a

creative hub for the town and beyond. It's worth pointing out that the Copeland Growth Strategy for 2017-2020 identifies culture and heritage as key drivers for the future of the borough, specifically referencing Norman Nicholson, which encourages us to believe that Project 14 is exactly the sort of initiative which that strategy wants to see.

There was a lull through the autumn and winter. The Heritage Lottery Fund announced a freeze on applications while it finalized changes to its grant policies. The new look was unveiled online towards the end of January, and we attended a briefing on this in Lancaster last month. The changes are not huge, but there are some new criteria and a different application method. It is clear that simply preserving the home of a poet will not be sufficient to give us the funding we need. We need to show that Nicholson House will have a constructive impact on the wider community, that we can engage people who might have no interest in literature, that what we propose will contribute to a feeling of wellbeing generally, and that we have logical and sustainable plans for the mid and long-term future of the building. These are all challenges which we are only too happy to embrace.

We have added two very knowledgeable individuals to our team as unofficial advisers, people with experience in this field who are happy to review our next application as it takes shape. As I write, our next step is to meet our Lottery officers and ensure we understand completely why we missed out last time, in the context of the new criteria



Signs of hope in the spread of crocuses—a Nicholson flower flaunting a Comet colour!



Heritage Lottery Officer Nathan Lee explaining the new objectives of the National Lottery Heritage Fund

recently unveiled. Then, the Society's working group consisting of Sue Dawson, Janice Brockbank and myself, backed up by the full committee, will start the serious work.

The questions I can hear being posed are 'how long will this take?' And, 'when will we have a decision?' I wish I knew, especially as it is now three years since we as a Society

decided to pursue the Heritage Lottery option. We have learned that this does take time. As Janice observed wryly: 'If only getting our hands on half a million pounds of public money was easy!' The Heritage Fund's wheels, understandably, revolve slowly. For our part, we will not delay, but we will not rush. Rather than posting the first possible application, I would prefer to post the best possible application.

Charlie Lambert

Member News

We are very proud of the fact that the Norman Nicholson Society has attracted an increasing number of practising poets and writers into its ranks and are pleased to be able to share with you some of their recent news.

The poet **Kerry Darbishire's** latest collection, *Distance Sweet on my Tongue* published by Indigo Dreams, came out in August 2018. She and the poet Geraldine Green have planned an Indigo Dreams Tour for 2019, which included readings in Hawkshead, Lancaster and Brantwood this March. There will be more readings coming up in the summer and autumn, watch this space! Kerry also tells me that the new Handstand Press Cumbrian Anthology, *This Place I Know* (which she co-edited with Kim Moore and Liz Nuttall) is a wonderful celebration of Cumbrian poets and has been very well received! Kerry was delighted to be a Runner Up in the latest Mslexia women's poetry prize, judged by Carol Ann Duffy, with her poem 'Planting Parsley with my Father'.

See pages 15 and 27 for more interesting information about Kerry.

Phil Houghton's poem 'Before the lark' recently won a national competition, sponsored by Candlestick Press. Candlestick Press is known for its 'Instead of a card' Poetry Pamphlets, which at only £4.95 per pamphlet provide beautiful and interesting little booklets that are definitely much nicer and more stimulating than a run-of-the-mill card. Readers of *Comet* may remember that a poem by Nicholson is also featured in this series, in *Ten Poems about Cricket*. This was part of the inspiration behind our Chair Charlie Lambert's AGM talk last year.

Phil's poem is included in the pamphlet *Ten Poems for Breakfast* and was published in February this year: <http://www.candlestickpress.co.uk/poet/houghton-phil-m/>. Phil shares space in this anthology with poets such as Charles Simic, Elizabeth Bishop and Billy Collins! This is how the pamphlet is advertised on the Candlestick Press website: 'Some of us skip breakfast protesting that it's too early to eat. But it can never be too early for a poem, and this enticing mini-anthology of poems selected and introduced by Ana Sampson offers delights that anyone would wish to be awake for – including three new poems that were winners in our breakfast poem competition.' Congratulations, Phil!

Creative Writing at Cockley Moor by Antoinette Fawcett



On Saturday, September 15th 2018, members of the Norman Nicholson Society were able to participate in a wonderful day of creative writing, led by the poet and writer Kathleen Jones, who is one of our honorary Vice Presidents. The venue, once again, was Cockley Moor, where we were able to spend a fruitful and atmospheric day, thanks to the generous hospitality of Hilary Rock (sitting to the right of Kathleen Jones in the photo above). The theme of the workshop, was 'Inside/Outside Landscapes', picking up both on Nicholson's poem 'Cockley Moor, Dockray, Penrith' and on the works of art, especially by Winifred Nicholson, inspired by this house and its surrounding landscape, high above Ullswater, encircled by fells, fields and forests.

Cockley Moor was the home of Helen Sutherland (1881-1965), the well-known patron of the arts, whose support of the Pitmen Painters is the subject of a popular play by Lee Hall. As readers will recall, this beautiful house was known to Nicholson and was formative in his development as a young writer and poet. Nicholson spent time there in the war years, writing 'Cockley Moor' in tribute. Not only did Sutherland's patronage enable him to meet other writers and artists, and to be immersed in the work of modernists such as Ben Nicholson, Picasso and David Jones, but the connection with the Cockley Moor set was also a vital element in his friendship with the poet Kathleen Raine. The mutual inspiration these two young writers undoubtedly gave each other at a crucial time of growth has left its traces in both their work.

Those of us who were at the workshop were equally inspired by the range of poems and art which Kathleen had chosen as stimuli for our own creative processes. Kathleen drew on Norman's writing, but also on poems by Kathleen Raine, Roy Marshall and Eavan Boland, as well as on the paintings of Winifred Nicholson and the Danish artist Anna Ancher (1859-1935).

We are immensely grateful to Hilary Rock for making her home available to us again, and also to Kathleen for her expert leading of the workshop and her insights into essential creative and artistic processes. It was a deeply nourishing day which will continue to give us food for thought long into the future. And some of us will have come away with pieces of writing we will want to cut and polish!



The NN Society Autumn Event 2018 by Antoinette Fawcett



For most of his life Norman Nicholson was not a lonely and frail individual, shut off from society in his garret, although there may indeed have been periods of when he needed relative isolation, to develop his writing and to recuperate from the tuberculosis which struck him in his mid-teens. The evidence points overwhelmingly to the fact that Nicholson was

fully engaged in the social, ecological, and artistic concerns of his region and well beyond. Nicholson was on friendly terms with a number of writers and artists, and had a particularly strong bond with the sculptor Josefina de Vasconcellos, and her husband Delmar Banner. Josefina's life and work was the theme of the Norman Nicholson Society 2018 Autumn Event, at Haverigg School on the 20th October.

Why make Josefina the focus of this event, when there is still so much to explore in terms of Nicholson's own work? Nicholson seems to have been peculiarly sensitive to the visual arts, as his relationship with Percy Kelly also shows, as well as the extraordinarily rich visual imagery of both his poetry and prose. As a sculptor, Josefina had an affinity with the material world, and in particular with rock, stone, clay and wood. Nicholson clearly shared some of those affinities—especially with rock and stone. Both Nicholson and Josefina had strong spiritual beliefs and both—in different ways—tried to make their art act in the world. Josefina took her social concerns beyond art into social action, setting up a number of trusts, including the Harriet Trust, which was based on the shores of the Duddon Estuary and provided holidays for handicapped and deprived children. It is quite likely that her decision to bring the old Fleetwood fishing trawler, the Harriet, to Millom for that purpose was influenced by her friendship with Norman.

We were delighted that one of the UK's foremost sculptors, Shawn Williamson, who was Josefina's assistant and mentee, was able to join us for the whole day. Shawn delivered a fascinating lecture about Josefina's later work, when he assisted her in the development and carving of many of her masterpieces. We were also treated to a presentation by Chris Powell, the Harriet's first warden, who had many personal memories of Josefina and who had often driven Norman to visit Josefina and Delmar at the Beild, their house in Little Langdale.

The day included a walk to the Haverigg Dunes to view Josefina's last sculpture, 'Escape to Light', a massive, powerful and moving masterpiece, dedicated to the 'heroic lives lost in sea rescue in the British Isles'. Shawn gave us such deep insights into the meaning and artistry of this work, which he had helped Josefina to carve, along with a team of volunteers which included our own dear Peggy Troll.



We rounded the day off with a discussion of some of Nicholson's poems that reveal his sculptural eye. No wonder, then, that Josefina and Nicholson found they had so much in common with each other. And, thanks to Doreen Cornthwaite's generosity in letting us view a rarely-seen sculpture by Josefina (see the photo above), we discovered the face of an almost boyish Nicholson in the bronze bust she created in 1954. David Boyd and Judith Gale showed us several more De Vasconcellos sculptures, which were wonderful to see in their metal and stone.

We are grateful to our speakers for their insight and enthusiasm, to Haverigg School for allowing us to use the venue, and to Doreen Cornthwaite, David Boyd and Judith Gale for enabling us to see such masterly examples of Josefina's work. Thanks also to our cake providers, Sue and John Troll, and to Sue Dawson and Janice Brockbank for tea duties! You all made this a memorable day!

AF

The Millom Christmas Tree Festival

The theme for this year's Christmas Tree Festival at St George's Church, Millom was *Peace on Earth and Goodwill to all Mankind*. With the centenary of the end of WW1 in November 2018 this seemed an appropriate theme. Society members Sue Dawson and Dot Richardson were joined this year by Janice Brockbank whose contribution to the planning stage and whose calligraphic skills were greatly appreciated during the preparation for the festival.

Initially the theme did not seem to lend itself to Nicholson's poetry and after some discussion we finally selected a poem 'The Evacuees' (*Collected Poems*, pp. 53-4) as it appeared to be the most appropriate. Nicholson's poem was written during WW2 when a significant number of people, particularly children, were evacuated to this area. Similarly in WW1 the people of Haverigg and Millom welcomed over 800 Belgian refugees into their homes and communities. During times of conflict the communities of Millom and Haverigg had offered the *Peace* of their homes and showed *Goodwill* towards the evacuees who came to live here. Nicholson ends the poem with the hope for the future of the evacuees:

Grant that in the future they may find
A rock on which to build a house for heart and mind.



During the discussions about the tree festival Dot was able to recount her own personal memories of the time when the evacuees arrived in Millom during WW1. Nicholson writes:

They saw the strangers on the station, the sea-
mist on the hill,
In the windless waiting days when the walls of
Poland fell.

Here is Dot's recount of the arrival of the evacuees in her own words:

I was told by my mother, years later, that my father had volunteered to meet the evacuees and help them off the trains at the railway station. He

returned home very upset after seeing these young innocent children carrying luggage, gas masks and labels fastened to their clothes. He imagined how distraught their parents must have been and how he would have felt saying goodbye to his young family of three.

It was also possible to carry out some local history research in the school log books at Haverigg Primary School and to include information from them on the tree decorations. For example on September 18th 1939 it was recorded that the school was closed in order to prepare for the evacuees arriving in the village:

School re-opened

Nineteen evacuees (Juniors and Infants) registered

The visiting Headmistress of South Shields has decided to send one member of her staff to visit the school—for the time being. Miss Wilson attended today.

Then in December 1939 a school governor of Haverigg Girls and Infant School recorded:

On the 20th December Mr. Floyd wrote: 'All is going very satisfactory at this school. It is a pleasure to see the evacuees looking so happy and so settled in their new surroundings.'

When carrying out the research into the evacuees in this area it was fortunate for us that Haverigg Primary School still has the original Evacuees Attendance School Register from the Boys School from 1939. This Register provided a few names and addresses in Haverigg where the boys were billeted. It was decided to include every evacuee's name we could find on the Christmas tree who had stayed in the area, with any details about the homes where they had lived. Many of these

by Sue Dawson

children came from the North East. The names and details were written on to brown luggage labels which was reminiscent of the labels worn by the original evacuees.

Dot was able to recall a number of children's names that she remembered from her school days. These particular decorations created a lot of interest, especially for local people who could recall some of the names they had found on the Nicholson tree.

In addition to the local research Charlie Lambert, the society's chairman, circulated a media notice to newspapers on the North East in the hope of stimulating more interest. Local social media websites were also contacted and these resulted in a number of names and addresses being submitted via the Nicholson website.

Four years on
They came to this little town
Carrying their bundles –

These lines from the poem provided the inspiration for a number of tree decorations based on the items most likely to be carried by the evacuees as they arrived in the town. These included plain suitcases, brown paper parcels tied with string and identity card and ration books. In keeping with the wartime period some of the decorations were made from crepe paper and brown paper. To add some authentic details at the base of the tree we included a collection of items in a suitcase which an evacuee might have brought with them in 1939. These included: a biscuit tin, a game, a gas mask box and a much loved teddy bear!



This year's contribution to the Christmas Tree Festival proved to be a very interesting project to be involved with. It provided local history links to Nicholson's poem which stimulated memories for many people who came to see the tree. It reminded them of a time when many children who were sent to live in this area were given the *Peace* of people's homes and shown *Goodwill* by local residents who took the evacuees in during a time of conflict. We also learned that some of the children evacuated to this area never returned home to their native North East after WW2 but remained living in Millom.

Finally I will close the recount of this years Christmas Tree Festival with Dot's own memories of Millom in 1939 which were stimulated by Nicholson' poem:

We enjoyed playing new games with our evacuee friends and many of them made Millom their home until the end of the war. Some remained here and to quote Norman from The Evacuees poem: 'Grant that they may find a rock on which to

build a house for heart and mind.' Many found the rock here in our small town. Eighty years later I can read 'The Evacuees' and remember Millom during the war. Norman describes the town, the people and the atmosphere so accurately. Very happy we chose this poem as the theme for our Christmas Tree 2018.

Sue Dawson

Note: The photos in this article were taken by Sue Dawson and portray the NN Society Tree.



Member Poem: 'Mayday' by Frankie Ward

Mayday

Eskmeals dune creates the lagoon
 of highwater tide
 where once the terns
 dipped
 and tipped
 sand eels
 flashed
 whitebait
 up and away –
 but now no more.
 No more
 little, arctic, common
 swallows of the sea
 where once
 they swerved
 and turned
 hovered
 delicate
 in sea breeze
 plummeted quick
 to lift
 silver from the sea.

Local people say the RSPB will disagree
 but local people say the terns are no more
 because they used to take the first clutch
 two, three eggs. Local people turned out
 to take the eggs, but not beyond Mayday.

The terns would lay
 would lay
 would lay again.

When the chicks had hatched, by then
 there was food.
 Sand eels.
 Whitebait from the sea.

A London delicacy. Terns' eggs: the harvest
 stopped by law, and those first chicks hatched and died
 of hunger too late for terns to lay again.
 Who knows? It's also true
 there are no sand eels any more.

Nicholson to be taught on a new MA programme at the University of Cumbria's Ambleside Campus by Penny Bradshaw

The University of Cumbria is launching a new MA at its Ambleside campus which focuses on the literary landscape of Cumbria, and which will feature the work of Norman Nicholson.

The *MA in Literature, Romanticism, and the English Lake District* is a year-long taught Master's programme, which will be offered from September 2019. Literary texts from the eighteenth century to the present will be studied, and the course will explore the ways in which these texts have played a crucial role in shaping not only our perceptions of Cumbria, but also our responses to the natural world more broadly. Along with considering the region's rich literary heritage and its legacies, the programme provides opportunities to consider related questions about the Anthropocene, and the role of literature in addressing issues such as climate change, species loss, and environmental catastrophe.



Studying Nicholson?

The programme begins with formational writers and poets, such as William Wordsworth and John Ruskin, and moves on to explore the two centuries of writing which make up Cumbria's complex and shifting literary landscape. Norman Nicholson is a key figure within that landscape, and within the continuum of writers and poets for whom this region has been a source of inspiration and creative power. He is important both in his poetic engagement with the legacy of Romanticism and in the new imaginative directions which are explored within his poetry. Nicholson's poetry will be considered in detail on the second semester module *Poetry and Place*, but Nicholson will also feature elsewhere on the programme, as a significant and perceptive commentator on the evolution of this cultural landscape.

For more information about the programme please visit our website: www.cumbria.ac.uk/maliteratureromanticism

Or email the programme leader, Dr Penny Bradshaw, at: penelope.bradshaw@cumbria.ac.uk

Penny Bradshaw

The Norman Nicholson Society Christmas Lunch 2018

The Society Christmas Lunch, held at the Netherwood Hotel, Grange-over-Sands on December 8th, was as festive and pleasant as ever. The food was delicious, the log fire blazed, speeches were made, and there was the time to sit and relax in the company of fellow members of the Society. The Netherwood staff looked after us very well indeed and the weather was atmospherically misty, creating ink wash views of the estuary, visible through the dining room windows.

A highlight of the occasion was the presentation made by Antoinette Fawcett to Doreen Cornthwaite, Norman's cousin, in grateful recognition of her unstinting support of the Society and of Norman's reputation over many years. Thank you, Doreen!



A visit to Dew, Beck and other Poetry Stones

Lyla and I had a short break in Ilkley in November. We left Sheffield and, by way of 'Sir Fred Hoyle Way' around Bingley, arrived at the south of Rombalds Moor in time for a picnic lunch (in the car!) as the sun started to shift the mist. Crossing a field, past a TV mast and into a recently cut wood on a gravel path we come to a view across the moor towards the Dew Stone. More correctly perhaps, the two stones that have Simon Armitage's 2012 poem of that name. Cut by Pip Hall as part of a project funded by the Ilkley Arts Festival, it is one of six 'Stanza Stones' composed by Armitage, sitting in and on the moors between Marsden and Ilkley. A book of the same name written with Pip Hall and the local landscape architect Tom Lonsdale charts the composition, cutting and siting of these stones (Armitage et al. 2013).



Trees had been felled since the stone was placed and the effect of emerging through a tunnel has now gone. However, the low afternoon sun illuminating the slabs produced a memorable reading of the poem.

The following day, under similar lighting and after the mist had gone, we visited 'Puddle', a couple of steps off a slabbed walking track across the moor. The very low light almost rendered the poem invisible unless it was searched for. I'm

sure many people just walked straight past.

Later in the afternoon we finally located 'Beck', 20m away from the main path. (You need to be aware of the little wooden signs and approach from the Cow and Calf car park.) But after a splash, scramble and slip in the reeds below we found the rounded bolder. This was carved *in situ* under not very pleasant conditions, as can be seen in the book. Unfortunately, the poem is now difficult to discern, let alone read, balancing on slippery stones.

Seven years of moss and lichen growth with encroaching gorse cover made 'Beck' a less enjoyable poetic experience than 'Dew' or 'Puddle'. Or indeed 'Mist' which we viewed on the moors above Haworth in wind and occasional rain the following day. The experiences are part of the poetic pleasure and you can see why Simon Armitage was so keen on the project in his local patch.

We have yet to read 'Rain' and 'Snow', both near Armitage's local moors east of Marsden, but we look forward to a visit. I was pleased to hear Simon Armitage talking about Norman Nicholson on Radio 3 recently (as reported on the Website) as Armitage clearly has not only the local view but also Nicholson's affinity with landscapes, stone and rock as exemplified by the stanza stones project.

After the Cockley Moor creative writing day, Lyla and I tracked down the poetry stone of Kathleen Raine's poetry extract engraved onto local stone, also by Pip Hall, in Hallinag Wood on the Ullswater Way. Unfortunately, the experience was a bit like that at 'Beck'; the carving was fast

by Brian Whalley



disappearing under a moss blanket. In fact, the setting could be anywhere as even Ullswater was hardly visible. For me at least, the linkage between poem, stone, landscape and reader is lost. I place these visits and perceptions together because I am sure that Nicholson's poetry could gain from such a combination. Could this be achieved? We already have an example. On the path around Hodbarrow is a slab with an

extract from 'Hodbarrow Flooded', together with identifiers for places, plants and birds, courtesy of the RSPB. This is at an open site and is free of vegetation: location is important for long-term clarity. The aesthetics are rather different from the Stanza Stones however. There are existing places around Millom where poem-stone elements are brought together. Norman and Yvonne's gravestone is one, the plaque in the gardens near the bowling green is another, although the sandstone commemoration in the Market Square lacks any poetry. It would be good to commemorate Norman's local presence with local stones inscribed with extracts from his poetry (copyright conditions permitting). Perhaps, when No 14 has been acquired, it might also be possible to have a stanza stones tribute in the Millom-Haverigg-Silecroft area.

In the meantime, there is another possibility. Visiting friends at Tarland in Aberdeenshire we were introduced to an app, 'The Singing Land' (IOS and Android). At 30 pre-programmed locations visitors can hear fiddle music, ballads/stories and poems about the Howe of Cromar on a mobile device. You have actually to be at a location to hear the pieces by Paul Anderson and Shona Donaldson but the websites listed below give a flavour of the experience. If Tarland can do it why not 'Nicholson country'?

Brian Whalley

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Daniel Hay—Librarian and Curator, Whitehaven Public Library and Museum by Antoinette Fawcett

For quite some years now I have been aware of the important role that Daniel Hay played in Norman Nicholson's professional life, but the depth of his admiration for Nicholson's writing only became clear to me when I was carrying out my research into Nicholson and Translation at the John Rylands Library in 2016. As part of the research I was also able to consult papers in the Whitehaven Archive, which had been collected by Daniel Hay over a period of nearly thirty years, from 1946 to 1973. These papers form a record of Hay's correspondence with Norman Nicholson, and include letters from Norman and carbon copies of Hay's replies, as well as scrapbooks and folders of cuttings of articles and reviews relating to Norman Nicholson and his work (Archive Reference: DH/267). In amongst all this correspondence, not as yet catalogued at an individual level, I was hoping to find clues about the translation of Nicholson's works. I did, indeed, discover a key letter from Norman to Daniel which confirmed that Nicholson had a reading knowledge of Italian. I have described this in both a talk for the Society and in an article in *Comet* (Vol. 10: 2, p. 15), so I will not expand on this detail within the context of this current piece. What I want to do here is to briefly set out some of the facts I have gleaned about Daniel Hay which will, hopefully, be followed up in a further article.

Daniel Hay was the Borough Librarian and Museum Curator in Whitehaven, Nicholson's nearest Cumberland town of any size. Nicholson had recourse to Hay's help many times over the course of those thirty or so years, particularly when he was carrying out research for his topographical books. Indeed the 'Introduction and Acknowledgements' to *Greater Lakeland* (1969) not only lists 'Mr Daniel Hay' as one of the 'librarians and staff' of various libraries scattered throughout Cumberland, Westmorland and Furness who had given much-appreciated help to Nicholson, but Daniel Hay is singled out for special praise: 'Mr. Hay's letters, in particular, are always erudite little essays on out-of-the-way aspects of local studies, only a small part of which, unfortunately, could be packed into this book' (*Greater Lakeland*, p. 13). In an article Hay wrote for *Library Review* (1st January, 1967, p. 9), he was equally full of praise for Nicholson:

No living Cumbrian has won such world wide esteem as Nicholson. His books have been translated into French, Spanish, Portuguese, Norwegian, Danish and Welsh. He is by far the most outstanding writer that Cumberland has produced in the present century.

I sense a passionate wish to defend and promote Nicholson's reputation in those words, rooted in a genuine esteem for his writing. This is what is motivating me to find out more about Daniel Hay who, as noted on the [Whitehaven and Western Lakeland website](#), was 'a brilliant local historian' as well as a librarian and curator.

I know from Hay's own writings that he was a Scot by birth, 'a native of Cairney, Aberdeenshire', and that he was born in about 1910. As a child, after his father's death, he moved with his mother to Wick in Caithness, where he grew up and went to school. When Daniel was 15, or perhaps 16, in 1925, he was offered a part-time job at the Wick Library, to record issues in the children's library. That job later became a full-time position as a library assistant. Daniel would serve at Wick Library until he was appointed in 1933, at the age of 23, as the librarian at Whitehaven Borough Library. He continued at Whitehaven for the remainder of his career, with a hiatus during the 2nd World War for war service, which he characterizes with dry humour as being 'uneventful and undistinguished'. My guess, based on the articles Hay wrote for *Library Review*, is that he retired in or about 1973, when he was 63 or so, since an article published in 1979 describes him as a 'former librarian', whilst an article from 1972 simply gives his name (i.e. he was then still writing in his professional capacity). The fact that business correspondence with Nicholson stopped in 1973 also supports this.

I am hoping that more information about Daniel Hay will emerge (please do contact me if you know any other details). I have the impression of a kindly and intelligent man who did more than any other Cumbrian librarian to support Nicholson's works. We should know more about his story! **AF**

Kerry Darbshire, *Distance Sweet on my Tongue*

Indigo Dreams Publishing 2018, pbk, 69 pp., £9.99—reviewed by Antoinette Fawcett



Kerry Darbshire is a poet who is well known in Cumbria, and nationally, for her deft and atmospheric poetry, which is completely rooted in this area. Like Norman Nicholson, Kerry is Cumbrian to the core and her poems convey a similar love of landscape and richness of imagery. I was very struck by the wide range of subject-matter in Kerry's most recent collection, *Distance Sweet on my Tongue*. These poems may be rooted in Kerry's Cumbrian childhood, but they also reach back into a much more distant past and take us to landscapes that are not always local or regional.

I very much admired Kerry's poem about the Lascaux Caves, which returns us to the origins of visual art and convincingly imagines the artist as a woman:

...Imagine the artist
 - the predator, burning cow fat on a ledge
 to light the ladder balancing a palette of iron oxide
 and mud ochre, holding her breath to blow colour
 in assured muscular sweeps until a unicorn appears
 on the bone-white calcite.

Blink and perhaps you won't notice that the artist is a woman, and that the woman is also a hunter, a predator, someone who has both literally participated in the hunt for the creatures now portrayed on the cave walls and is metaphorically hunting down the sweeping, 'finely drawn' images she is painting onto the cave walls, blowing life and colour into them with her own breath. I was particularly struck by this poem because it has such interesting parallels with Nicholson's own 'Cave Drawings', which is clearly a response to the same prehistoric paintings. Nicholson's artist is imagined as a young boy, too sick at present to follow the hunt, but re-creating it in swift scratches on 'the brand-bright rock', making a horse that is 'lish' and 'live', moving in the 'crocketty light'. These two poems are worth looking at together to see how two very different poetic sensibilities have engaged with the subject-matter and how both poets are clearly energized and inspired by their imagining of the atavistic and essential artistic impulse of human beings.

There were other poems I found both memorable and moving that are not at all reminiscent of Nicholson's work, although like Nicholson Kerry also uses domestic imagery to bring larger issues and themes into focus. I particularly like 'Army Blanket', which addresses the blanket itself in the second person, and manages to include in a mere 15 lines its history and possible fate. This history overlaps with the speaker's own history and that of her father, whose histories in turn are included in national and international history. The themes are weighty but are dealt with lightly: war, love, authenticity of place and material, and a questioning of our current values. Seeing the old army blanket for what it truly is makes us ashamed to prefer 'fluffy synthetic' bedroom décor to the truthfulness and rootedness of this shabby heirloom, which carries memory in its coarse and heavy texture, but risks being replaced by ephemera that weigh 'nothing in the scheme of things'.

Kerry's vivid and precise use of language and imagery would undoubtedly have attracted Nicholson's admiration, as they do mine. Her work in this collection repays repeated readings and I suspect I will find new favourites each time. And can Kerry be the first poet to have immortalized 'lzal toilet paper' in a poem? That wouldn't surprise me at all!

AF

FORTHCOMING EVENTS, REMINDERS AND ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Sat. April 13th 2019: The Meeting Room, Millom Baptist Church, 5 Crown Street, LA18 4AG : ***Cumberland and Westmorland*** and AGM 10.30 for 11.00 am

Registration followed by the AGM of the Society and lunch. After lunch there will be two talks: a talk by the poet Phil Houghton on '*Cumberland and Westmorland at 70*'; and a presentation by Max Long, a Cambridge University graduate student who has studied Nicholson's topographical notebooks. Lunch will be provided.

The full timetable with directions to the Baptist Room is enclosed with this issue.

Sat. and Sun. 29th and 30th June 2019: Millom—The Norman Nicholson Festival

Speakers include the poet **Sean O'Brien** and **Dr. Andrew Frayn** of Edinburgh Napier University. Workshops and readings by a variety of poets and artists, including **Patrick Wright** and **Harriet and Rob Fraser**. Guided walks and guided visits of Number 14. Possibility of visiting the Millom Discovery Centre, St. George's Church (and the Norman Nicholson Memorial Window by stained glass artist Christine Boyce), and the local nature reserves which were the sites of the Millom Ironworks and the Hodbarrow Iron Ore Mines. More details will be released soon. Do support us! There is good accommodation in the Millom area.

Reminder

Members are reminded that **membership fees** are due on April 1st. Membership runs from April 1st to March 31st each year. See the enclosed membership form for details.

Photos

The photos in this issue were taken or provided by Andrew Frayn (p. 6), John Churchill (p.7), Jim O'Rourke (p. 8), Kerry Darbishire (p. 15), Charlie Lambert (pp. 16-18), Brian Whalley (p. 19, pp. 24-5), Sue Dawson (pp. 20-21), Penny Bradshaw (publicity material from the University of Cumbria, p. 23), Doreen Cornthwaite (p. 23), Stephen Darbishire (p. 27).

Acknowledgement of sources

Most of sources are acknowledged within the context of each article.

The image on page 4 was designed by Alan Roper for the festival 'When Percy Met Norman'. The figures in Brian Whalley's geology article are his own: Figs 1, 2 3: Brian Whalley CC BY 2019. The information about Daniel Hay in the article on p. 26 was derived from his many articles for *Library Review* and from information available on the Cumbria Archive website. A further article will examine Daniel Hay's life in more detail.

Comet Online

The editor has been working in conjunction with a team from Lancaster University (Bartek Baranski, Computer Sciences; Dr. Paul Rayson; and Dr. Christopher Donaldson) to digitize past issues of *Comet* with the aim of making these available to the general public in an easily searchable and downloadable format. This is still in the project stage, but we hope to be able to make the project live before too long.



Comet: The Newsletter of the Norman Nicholson Society. Editor: Antoinette Fawcett, 3, Burlington Street, ULVERSTON, Cumbria LA12 7JA.
antoinettefawcett@hotmail.com

Please note: membership enquiries and enquiries regarding receiving *Comet*, or about receiving or buying past issues, can now also be addressed to Antoinette Fawcett (as the current Membership Secretary).

Grateful thanks to all contributors without whose efforts there would be no newsletter. We are always searching for new articles and new contributors: essays, poems and creative writing, reviews, letters, memories—all are welcome!