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Comet

Comet: the Magazine of the Norman Nicholson Society

'This is the shore, the line dividing / The dry land from the waters...'

The quotation above, taken from Nicholson's 'On Duddon Marsh' (*Collected Poems* p. 193), seems to imply a strict dividing line between the elements of land and sea, with the shore forming the space between them. But Nicholson's work as a whole shows how intimately all the elements intertwine, in a constant cycle of change and metamorphosis. Even in 'On Duddon Marsh' the firm opening statement is contradicted by the actual situation: Duddon Marsh may *seem* to belong to the earth, but twice a year, at the spring and autumn equinoxes, the tides are higher than usual and the marshland is flooded by the sea. To all intents and purposes, it *is* the sea. This is both expected and unexpected—the 'three hundred tides' of the rest of the year which don't flood across the marshes create the illusion of a clear division between sea and land, yet the remaining tides, which can nevertheless be mathematically predicted, break that illusion. There is a paradox in this which must have appealed to Nicholson both as a poet and as a man whose leanings were scientific (his school reports demonstrate consistently good results in mathematical and scientific subjects). It seems appropriate, therefore, that this issue of *Comet* continues to explore some of the scientific and geomorphological background to Nicholson's thinking. Brian Whalley's series on Rocks continues, this time with a focus on 'Sand on the Shore (and in the town)'. Ken Cockburn's Festival lecture and reading also made reference to the shore and the tides. You can read the edited version, 'The tide slides backward', in this issue. Ken tells us that he feels 'at home' in Nicholson's poems – 'not the specifics, perhaps, but his choice of topics, and the way he writes about them: family, place, geology, botany, shorelines and coastlines, horizons empty and busy with islands.'

Place and place names, geology, botany, wildlife and history are important themes in Jack Threlfall Hartley's account of his involvement with Nicholson and his work, and with the Icelandic landscape and people. The Norse element in Jack's work reflects and responds to this constant theme in Nicholson's work. Jack uses his article 'Northern Words, Northern Places, Northern Stone' to give a personal report on his preparation for and involvement with the Festival: 'a refreshing reminder of the level of passion and interest that Cumbria's landscape and culture still provokes'.

This issue of *Comet* also contains a wide range of reports, brief notices and reviews, and shows that in spite of the Covid-19 pandemic we have been able to further our aim of making Nicholson's work better known through a variety of events, in different media, and through our collaboration with and links to other organizations, including Wordsworth Grasmere and the Alliance of Literary Societies. Charlie Lambert's article on our 'digital activities' provides an excellent introduction to some of our activities this year.

Our friends and members are also creatively active: this issue features the new book about Christine Boyce's artistic work; a poetry pamphlet by Kerry Darbishire; and a magisterial book about the Solway by Ann Lingard. And, after a full year of pandemic-induced digital issues, *Comet* is in print again!

The NN Society AGM—April 24th 2021—Report by Antoinette Fawcett

This year's AGM day was held online, via the Zoom platform, as a result of the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic. The minutes of the event have been sent to all members by email and will be placed online in the Members' Area of our website. This is where you can also read the reports presented by the Officers of the Society to the AGM, as well as many other materials exclusive to members.

One of the major elements of AGM business this year was to do with the election of the committee. Two committee members took the opportunity to resign from the committee: Dot Richardson and Chris Donaldson. Dot has been a long-standing member of the committee, having served the Society for eleven years in that capacity. She was also the Society Treasurer for many years, before the current Treasurer, Brian Charnley, took on the role in 2017. Dr. Christopher Donaldson had been our University Liaison Officer since 2018, taking over from Prof. Alan Beattie, our first ever University Liaison Officer. Our Chair, Charlie Lambert, expressed thanks to both Dot and Chris for their years of service, for which the Society is extremely grateful. Two committee members stepped down from the roles they had fulfilled for a number of years, but remain on the committee. Glenn Lang had effectively been the Society Secretary since 2010, taking over the role informally in the first instance from the previous secretary Margaret Forsman, being confirmed in the role of Meetings Secretary in 2011, and finally agreeing to be Society Secretary in 2012. Janice Brockbank had taken over Glenn's role in September 2019, but this AGM represented the first chance to officially confirm Glenn's resignation and to elect Janice. Antoinette Fawcett had also stepped down from her role as Membership Secretary, having handed over to Brian Whalley in September 2020. Antoinette continued to help with the transition until the new membership year opened in April 2021. Both Brian Whalley and Janice Brockbank were confirmed in their new roles. Brian Charnley was re-elected as the Society Treasurer.

We were delighted to welcome two new committee members: Laura Day and Jack Threlfall Hartley. Laura was elected unanimously as our Youth Representative, a new role on the committee. Jack was also elected unanimously, initially without portfolio. Jack has subsequently agreed to take on the role of University Liaison Officer.

The day continued with an online lecture by Dr. Penny Bradshaw, of the University of Cumbria, on 'Nicholson on Wordsworth: Centenary Reflections'. If you missed Penny's marvellous talk, you can still catch up with it by following the link to the video recording, which you will find in our Members' Area. It's easy to sign on for this extra membership feature—just register on the website with the email details and name we know you by, and after a checking process you will be able to access all the extra materials we have there. *AF*

Online Festival 2021

The Norman Nicholson Society held its first-ever online festival in June, 2021, featuring the poet and translator Ken Cockburn; the Curator of Wordsworth Grasmere, Jeff Cowton; Jack Threlfall Hartley, doctoral student at the University of Oxford; and Laura Day, doctoral student at the University of Durham. Additionally, there were talks and presentations by Charlie Lambert, Chair of the NN Society, and by Kathleen Jones, Fellow of the Royal Literary Fund and Vice-President of the Society. The Festival also included an evening of poetry readings, featuring the poets who had appeared in our Lockdown Poetry Anthology. You can still catch up on quite a bit of the Festival by going to YouTube and searching for Norman Nicholson Society. And the Lockdown Poetry Anthology is still for sale from Amazon or from the publishers at a reduced rate: email postmaster@thebookmill.co.uk for details. *AF*

‘The tide slides backward’ by Ken Cockburn

This piece is adapted from a talk given for the Norman Nicholson Festival 2021, when I read a selection of my own poems, prompted by my reading of Nicholson’s. I had hoped to travel to Millom to give the talk in person, but in the end it was delivered online. My thanks to the Norman Nicholson Society for the invitation to speak.

I don’t know Millom, and I’m sorry not to be there to discover it and get a sense of how the place links to Norman Nicholson’s poems. But I feel at home in those poems – not the specifics, perhaps, but his choice of topics, and the way he writes about them: family, place, geology, botany, shorelines and coastlines, horizons empty and busy with islands.

As a title I chose Nicholson’s line ‘The tide slides backwards’ from his poem ‘Landing on Staffa’. It seems to sum up two key elements of his work; careful observation of natural phenomena, and a sense of time slipping, so that events from the past are experienced as vividly as those in the present. His poems allow us to sense our place within the slow movements of the landscape – rivers, scree, the growth and decline of forests – movements lasting far longer than a human life-span. They ask how we can come to know a place, if and how our experience of place can be influenced by an understanding of its past, and how we can make a home for ourselves in a shifting and indifferent world.

I grew up in Kirkcaldy, a town of about 50,000 inhabitants on the south coast of Fife. From most of that coast the opposite shore of the Firth of Forth is visible – Edinburgh and the farming country of East Lothian – but Kirkcaldy itself lies on a short stretch of coast facing east rather than south, so the view is of an empty horizon as described in Nicholson’s poem ‘An Absence of Islands’, whose opening lines links his view with mine:

> Look west
> from Cumberland,
> east from the North Sea shore
>
> *Collected Poems* p. 292

Although the poem is describing ‘absence’, his image of ‘the sea’s grooved disc’ suggests not emptiness but content, sound specifically, as if with the right needle the surface of the sea could be played like a record, releasing the sounds pressed into its surface.

The poem’s imagery of sea-birds and heavy industry is familiar to me. Kirkcaldy was famous for its linoleum production – my mother had an office job in a factory before she married – but by the time I was old enough to pay attention to such things the big factories had closed. Fife was an important coal-mining area, and in Seafield Colliery Kirkcaldy had one of the largest pits in the area. That too is now long closed.

Unlike Nicholson, rather than feeling rooted in my home town I dreamt of escape. I have written few poems about Kirkcaldy, but it features in a sequence of ‘flyleaf’ poems, written about particular books, and reading material more generally, that I encountered at different stages of my life. When I was nine or ten I discovered Marvel comics and read them avidly for a time. I was taken with the superheroes’ transformations and vulnerabilities, one of my favourite characters being Prince Namor, the Submariner. The poem connects with certain themes in Nicholson’s work, especially the disappearance of what turn out to be transient industries, as well as their lasting effect on the landscape.

‘The tide slides backward’

On the flyleaf of *Submariner #36* (c.1971)

Once at Easter or maybe autumn
with the railway-line on my right
and on my left the flat silver-gray of the firth
I walked past Stark’s Park and the Teil Burn
across the Auchtertool road
almost as far as the colliery gates
(the road running on till it twisted
under the railway-bridge and uphill)
to the paper-shop which I’d found stocked everything

Captain Marvel, Iron Man, Doctor Doom,
the Daredevil, the Avengers and the X-Men,
occasional villains who’d been transformed
into titular if flawed heroes, mutants
whose power derived as likely as not
from an accident in the lab
(a touch of the Jekylls about most of them)
and which, whatever it enabled them to achieve,
removed them from the everyday ground

and there were those of mythical stock
like Atlantean Namor the Submariner
whose real source of power whatever
superhuman strength he had accrued
lay in his uncontrollable rage
and though I don’t remember much of the story
I remember that when he found at the end of #36
his wife fatally injured and at the start of #37
his wife untransformably dead, I understood
whether or not she’d appear in the odd flashback
neither willpower nor weird science would resurrect her.

Now, passing through on the train
no shop to be seen and the pit
long since closed, I imagine
the abandoned tunnels that run for miles
beneath the sea-bed, and think
how deceptively easy it was in the end to leave,
and that however you try to return (willpower
or weird science), the scene’s as altered as was, say,
the original Doctor Strange from his later, redrawn, self.

by Ken Cockburn

The next poem is also set on the Fife coast, but a little further west, between Aberdour and Dalgety Bay, where Edinburgh is visible. The poem was written about twenty years ago when my children were young. By then I'd lived in Edinburgh for over a decade, so I had become more used to looking north across the sea to Fife rather than south to Lothian.

View of Edinburgh from Fife

We begin to keep faith with our ruins.
Mid-October, sun silvering the firth
sweetness of berries and the still green trees
parting for the old chapel and graveyard —

angels and the bones' memento mori
time-worn on the lichen-patterned tombstones
the kids play among, on the tidy grass
a single yellow dandelion shines.

This shore, sea to the south, I grew up on but
having crossed it took years to adapt
reading in the opposite direction
as if Edinburgh were, say, Urdu.

From the beach the bridges are to our right
that is, OK, west, while the east opens
on a space of the imagination
we fly or go overland to forget.

The city's a metallic silhouette
so approachable, the water so calm
my daughter says, really, as if we could
let's jump in a rowing boat and go home.

I came across Nicholson's 'The Megaliths' in the early *Selected Poems* (1966), but it was written about twenty years earlier. It is an untypically pessimistic poem, in which the standing stones are repositories of death, whose main function is to stand in contrast to the changing colours and sounds of life around them: 'The human winds blow by them…' (CP p. 150).

My next poem, 'Shandwick Stone', takes a more optimistic view, wondering what we can learn from the past. The stone in question can be found in Easter Ross, overlooking the Moray Firth north of Inverness. It's an example of what are called Pictish stones, more recent than Nicholson's megaliths, and carved with elaborate figures, objects and patterns. These stones dot the landscapes of eastern Scotland and were created between about 600 and 1000AD. We can think of them as a repository of memory, or perhaps of lost knowledge, because today we can only speculate as to what they might have meant. In the poem I see the stone as a (semi-) permanent witness to change.

‘The tide slides backward’ (continued)

Shandwick Stone

As jets without the black box of memory
startle sheep in deserted glens
the stone hunters stalk their various prey.

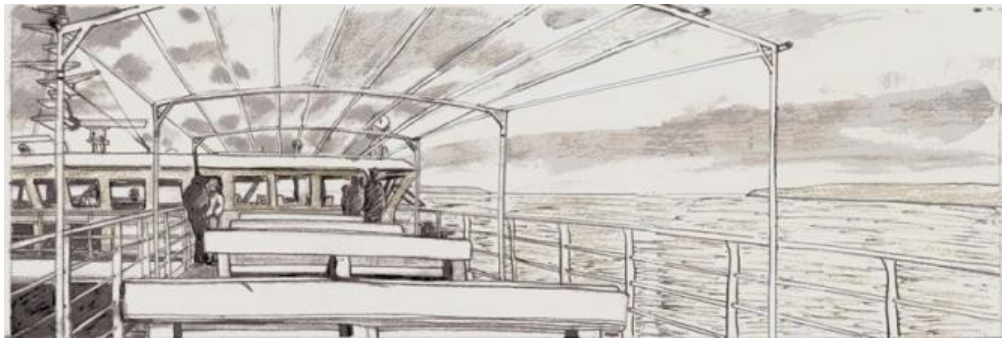
Chaotic and recurrent as the tides
incised patterns swirl underneath them.
The Pictish beast, that composite

bird-fish-mammal, harbours a smile
having already weathered eras and elements
untraceable by radar.

The rain-clouds gather above an unyielding sea.
Wildflowers and seeding grasses rustle
in anticipation of the next downpour.

Further north, Orkney is somewhere where past and present mingle in a kind of equilibrium; and the future too, given the islands’ involvement in the development of renewable energy. Although today they might seem remote when viewed from London or even Edinburgh, they have been central at different historical periods; a kind of travel hub between Scandinavia and the west coast of Britain and Ireland for travellers in the Neolithic Age when structures like the Ring of Brodgar arose, and again for the Vikings (who left their graffiti within Maeshowe, an ancient chambered cairn). Perhaps, with the melting of the Arctic ice, and new trade routes opening up north of Russia, they will again be considered at the centre rather than on the edge.

The poem is in four stanzas, and each of these is matched by made a print by Cat Outram, created for an exhibition at Edinburgh Printmakers Workshop a few years ago, which linked poets and printmakers. The poem, and the images, try to capture different aspects of the islands: Sea, Shore, Past, Farm.



Orkney

we sail past Stroma’s empty fields
the Maidens grind the sea-gods’ salt
binoculars to scan the scene
the latent power the races hold

by Ken Cockburn

divers down among the wrecks
I don't know what it is I've found
a haar drifts in across the rocks
the crab's blue shell fades in the sun

the Romans came and saw and left
Vikings named themselves in runes
a hoard of shards the dig unearthed
the sacred grove is made of stone

unfurl your banner to the breeze
starlings wheel across the sky
a spotted orchid in the verge
the wind is in the blades and flags

‘The tide slides backward’ (continued)

Orkney was settled by the Vikings, and the dialect spoken there still has traces of their language, as too does Nicholson’s poem ‘Cornthwaite’. According to the OED, *thwaite* comes from the Old Norse noun *þveit* or *þveiti* meaning a piece of land or a paddock, literally ‘a cutting’ or ‘cut-piece’; *thwaite* then is a piece of ground, especially one cleared from forest or reclaimed for arable farming. ‘Cornthwaite’ was his mother’s maiden name, familiar to him from his ‘baptismal card’ and which inspires a meditation on an ‘umpteenth great-grandfather, / Off-come from a northern voe’ arriving in Cumbria and undertaking the formative acts of clearing and growing, similar to the acts of the poet as he writes (CP p. 354).

Like Cornthwaite and many others in Cumbria, most Scottish place-names are derived from languages either no longer spoken at all, or with few contemporary speakers: Brythonic, Latin, Norse, Gaelic. More often than not the original meaning of a place-name is opaque to us. At one level, it doesn’t matter; ‘Glasgow’ is a city in the west of Scotland, and if its name comes from the Gaelic ‘glas ghu’, green place, that has no great practical relevance for us when we see the word on a road sign or hear it on the news. But as ‘Cornthwaite’ shows, understanding the meaning of a place-name can be a way of recovering what that place meant to those who named it and how their lives were defined by it, as well as opening up a space from which we in the present can consider the place, and our own relationship to it, from another angle.

Incidentally, I remember the Marvel comics we valued the most were those which told the ‘origin stories’ of the characters – how the heroes had acquired their powers – recognising the value of going back to the source, as a way of understanding more deeply the thing we know in its present form.

Some place-names are so old that we can no longer trace their source. That is often the case with rivers which, given their importance for navigation and settlement, were some of the earliest landscape features to be given names. This poem offers some of the ways we might think about the Ness, the river after which Inverness is named.

Ness

Rivers hold
the oldest names

we have the word
but lack its sense

Ness might mean
now or headland

a murmuring
of running water

lake of the falls
the name of a goddess

or just a lost tongue’s
word for river

by Ken Cockburn

The River Ness has a vast catchment area, as everything that flows into Loch Ness eventually feeds it, and nearly all of those waters are named in Gaelic, still a living language albeit with far fewer speakers than even 100 years ago. This poem takes the names of some of the smaller lochs around Loch Ness and plays with their meanings, sometimes obliquely and sometimes more directly. I'm attempting a kind of linguistic archaeology, seeking out shards of meaning relating to perceptions of landscape.

Chorus the dawn
at Loch nan Eun

Silver glitters
Loch nan Lann

The berries ripen
at Loch nan Oighreagan

The snail's defences
at Loch Duntelchaig

Grinding the grains
at Loch nam Bràthan

Pass between summits
at Loch a' Bhealaich

The climb is steep
from Loch ma Stac

The grey breath
of Loch Liath

This next poem stays with Gaelic place-names, this time found on the inner Hebridean island of Jura, around Loch Tarbert on the west coast. Each verse contains a place-name featuring colour, extended by material from Maclennan's Gaelic-English dictionary relating to the colour word. For example, *bàn* means white in landscape terms, but is also used to describe fair hair and unploughed land. The poem tries to conjure images of people living in a landscape that is now more or less uninhabited.

from *Gleann Badraig*

above Aoineadh Bàn
the fair-haired girl
treads untilled slopes

‘The tide slides backward’ (continued)

scarcely spring at Liath Dhoire…
old greybeard dreams
of sea-trout and mugwort ale

after sheltering in Uamh Dhearg
two men with bloodshot eyes
emerge sworn enemies

the end of a lamentable day…
night inks the sky
over Eilean Dubh

thankful for buoys
and buttercups
at Rubha Buidhe

I would contend that words – place-names – can help us better understand a place, but can too many words cast a veil over such understanding? We will bring prior knowledge to many places we visit, and Nicholson’s poem ‘Landing on Staffa’ (CP pp. 355-7) questions the value of seeing somewhere through a literary viewfinder. His experience of visiting the island of Staffa – just about visible from the north end of Jura – is spoiled by the descriptions of others.

He writes, ‘the air is blurred by words… / Quick eyes are dimmed by / a cataract of known appearances’. When he tries find his own words to describe his experience of the island, he manages only what he calls ‘knick-knack conceits’. After eight lines of unencumbered, unselfconscious description of the islands nearby, he pictures himself ‘scurrying south’ to familiar scenes prized for their plainness: ‘streets, pavements, schoolyards, / railings, allotments…’ (CP p. 356). All of these he can see directly, unspoiled by ‘the describers’ (CP p. 355), yet he realises the irony of his own ambition: he yearns to find ‘just one single stone / that must have lain for ages undescribed – / and then describe it’ (CP p. 357).

Is writing about a place a way of claiming and enclosing it? Does a writer’s description block appreciation by others? I don’t think Nicholson is seriously suggesting that – the poem is more self-deprecating than despairing, and Staffa is perhaps a special case, given all the attention it has received for two centuries and more.

Nonetheless Nicholson is right about stones; even those lacking the scale and drama of Staffa are powerful. To return to Jura, that same landscape features a number of raised beaches, long beyond the reach of the tide, but remaining sterile so uncolonized by plants. This poem acknowledges a debt to Hugh MacDiarmid’s poem ‘On a Raised Beach’, from his collection *Stony Limits* (1934).

by Ken Cockburn

stones from a raised beach

this stone is a song, from the beginning of the world

this stone drones a ground bass

this stone is a gate, always open, always opaque

this stone is prelapsarian

this stone is unmoved by the moon

this stone is at the peak of its powers

this stone might fell a Goliath

this stone has outlasted empires and languages

this stone has dismissed evolution

this stone is silent

this stone is a star

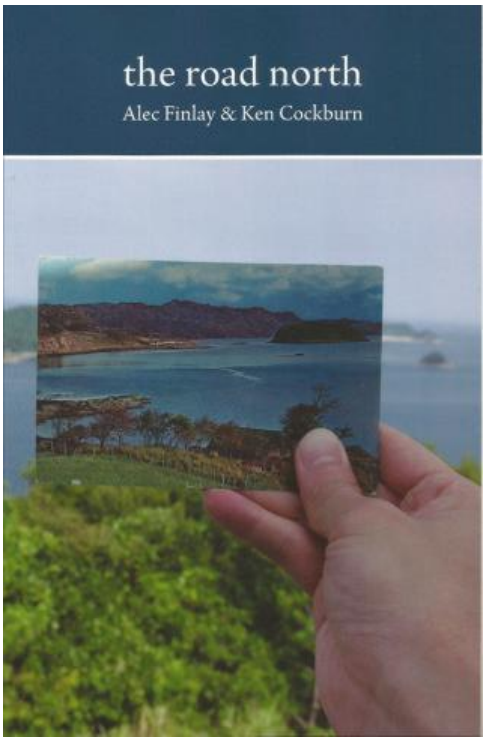
this stone goes straight to god

this stone is a song, for the end of the world

Rather than 'blurring', writing can draw our attention to what we otherwise overlook or take for granted. In *Sea to the West*, the poem that follows 'Landing on Staffa' is 'Glen Orchy' (CP p. 358). In it Nicholson is able to let the place be itself, while making space for his own concerns. He describes the river 'glittering below / Hollowed and pendant shelves of sandy stone', but it is here, in 'the village at the foot of the glen' that he buys a newspaper and first hears of the closure of Millom Ironworks. He comes to 'read' that landscape in a very particular way, based on his own associations. I was trying to do something similar with Seafield Colliery and the Submariner.

This next poem employs this type of association in an intended or deliberate rather than chance fashion. I wrote *The Road North* with Alec Finlay about a journey we made around Scotland in 2010–11, when we took as our guide the Japanese poet Basho's *oku-no-hosomichi*, translated as *Narrow Road to the Deep North* or *Back Roads to Far Towns*. This describes a journey made by Basho and his friend Sora in 1689 around the northern part of the main Japanese island of Honshu. His book is in 54 sections, and for each we chose a site in Scotland; a mountain for a mountain, a castle for a castle, a harbour for a harbour, and so on. For each site we chose a tea and a whisky. Our aim was to see our own country afresh, to clear what has over time become 'blurred with words'.

‘The tide slides backward’ (continued)



The front cover of the book is a photograph by Tomohiko Ogawa, taken in Japan, where he holds a postcard of Scotland, matching one landscape to another. Below is our poem about Basho’s Shirakawa, a mountain pass that separates Edo (the old name for Tokyo, and which signifies city culture more generally) and Oku (the ‘deep north’ or ‘back towns’, the highlands, the sticks, the boonies). We connected Shirakawa not with a single place, but with the Highland line where the hills rise and there is a linguistic watershed as English and Scots give way to Gaelic.

anticipation each day mounting…
we were guided toward Shirakawa
through green Perthshire glens

if you’re travelling
in the north country fair,
where the wind hangs heavy
on the border-line…

people ask us the way
to the Shirakawa Barrier
and we reply, take it easy,
the Shirakawa Barrier
is everywhere

the map’s watershed
is Shirakawa,
reading the names of
burns running south-east
allts flowing north-west

lovers’ beeches’
gully-carved hearts and initials
are Shirakawa,
an intimacy
between settlement
and elsewhere

Comrie’s confluence of
Lednock, Earn and Ruchill
is Shirakawa:
Edo to the east
in the orderly market-town,

by Ken Cockburn

Oku to the west
in twilit deer, pheasants
lacking road-sense,
tumbledown gardens
and close-ranked pines
any wee road
where your fingers
brush meadowsweet verges
is Shirakawa,
when you let the wheel turn
through the glen
with all your attention
on the encounters and minor
dramas of PAS-
SING PLACES

any one-street village with
shops stocking FANCY GOODS
and a butcher's that sells
a new brand of oatcakes
is Shirakawa

any clicked latch
of a gate that
makes a space
for things to come
is Shirakawa

It's an odd paradox, but reading those Scottish landscapes through that Japanese text created in me a strong sense of understanding and belonging. I believe too that Nicholson felt some sense of belonging in that place where he heard such bleak and startling news.

Nicholson's experience of Staffa notwithstanding, I am receptive to the idea that writing can open us to a place. I think that is probably the effect of Nicholson's own writing on visitors to Millom and Cumbria more generally. Certainly I feel my experience of Edinburgh, a city about which a great deal has been written, has been enhanced by the views offered by previous writers, a chance to see beyond or beneath the sometimes overpowering dazzle of the present day.

This last poem set in Edinburgh's Old Town. It was written 25 years ago when my older daughter was four, and it shares with Nicholson's work a sense of substance and transience; this place existed long before we were here, and will remain long after we've gone, but just as it helps shape us so we help to shape it.

‘The tide slides backward’ (continued) by Ken Cockburn

Close

The bus is due all right, but keeps us waiting.
The utter narrowness of Fleshmarket Close
slopes away behind us, the ghosts of butchers
faint amid newspapermen, fanatics of now.

My daughter races down it; at the foot,
a silhouette against the buzz and flicker
of the street, she lingers for a moment.
A single step could snap this contact-line -

She shouts I’m not to move and runs towards me,
then soon the bus arrives. We move across
the junction of the Old and New Towns, where
the airy Bridges touch the High Street rock.

Poem Credits

Submariner, View of Edinburgh from Fife, Shandwick Stone from Ken Cockburn, *On the flyleaf* (Luath, 2007)
Orkney, Ness, Lochs from Ken Cockburn, *Floating the Woods* (Luath, 2018)
Colour verses, stones from a raised beach, from Charles March, *Gleann Badraig* (Distanz, 2018)
Shirakawa, from Ken Cockburn & Alec Finlay, *The Road North* (Shearsman, 2014)
Close, from Ken Cockburn, *Edinburgh: poems & translations* (The Caseroom Press, 2021)

Image credits

Drawings by the artist Cat Outram (2013). The images are ‘FERRY’, ‘FARM’, ‘BEACH’, ‘BRODGAR’ See Cat Outram’s website for more examples of her work and information about her and her practice: https://www.catoutramprintmaker.co.uk/ . See also Ken Cockburn’s website for further explanations about their collaboration and some detail about his poem ‘Orkney’: https://kencockburn.co.uk/tag/cat-outram/.

Rocks 7: Sand on the Shore (and in the town) by Brian Whalley

In this geological exploration of Norman Nicholson's poetry, I now want to look at movement of sediment onshore rather than coastal erosion (as in 'Rocks 6', *Comet* 15.2, Spring 2021). I'll start by taking one of Nicholson's geologically-named poems, 'Dunes' (from *Sea to the West,* 1981; *Collected Poems* pp. 332-3). You can imagine Nicholson standing near the shore at Haverigg watching 'The waves of the sea / Flood up the staggered shore,' then 'ebb back to the strand', while his memory of the locality even includes the occasional time of flooding. It is only in the last three lines of the first stanza that the true subject of the poem emerges: 'The waves of sand / Flood, swell, impend, and do not ebb at all'. Unlike the waves of the sea, the sand does not move backwards under a predominantly on-shore wind but produces 'The dunes that stalk the town, / Month by month stretching an extra ripple' (CP p. 332).

Everyday experience will have given you an intuitive feel, quite literally, for the grain sizes (silt, sand, gravel) noted in *Comet* 15.2. The field known as sedimentology, like most earth sciences, is both observational and descriptive. It is also experimental and rooted in explanations from physics and engineering. I shall keep away from equations but will use diagrams to show how some observations can be 'explained'.

A much earlier poem than 'Dunes' is 'The Council of the Seven Deadly Sins' (in *Five Rivers,* 1944; CP pp. 79-83). It starts with an everyday observation about the wind blowing the sand inland and creating miniature dunes within the town:

> Across the shingle to the land
> The winds from the sea blow the sand
> And little dunes like mole-hills rear
> Day by day in the town square.

Wind speeds and sand movement

A good question, therefore, is 'what wind speed is necessary to move sand?' and of course the 'scientific' answer is that 'it all depends'. Upon what? We might formalise a little thought into a 'functional expression' such as: particle movement is a function of its (size, angularity/ roundness, shape, density, the frictional surface in which it lies) and a function of the (wind 'speed', its fetch, and frictional obstacles upwind). You'll find a bit about this in NOTE 1[1].

If we take a quartz sand grain (which specifies its density, γ) and size (s) as 250 μm (micrometres) this gives a mass that needs to be moved. If it is rounded (R) and spherical (Sp) in three dimensions, then it will tend to roll, but if its shape (sh) is cuboid and angular (for the same mass) then there is likely to be more frictional resistance to movement – unless it is on a 'smooth' surface – when it may slide. Of course, sand grains lie together on a beach or in the desert where there will be other grains and larger pebbles giving a rough surface from which an individual particle has to be removed. Intuition tells us that this will be easier if the sand surface is dry rather than damp—but you see how complex the various situations can be.

Figure 1 shows the main processes involved. The forces acting on a grain are in A and a conventional explanation is that if the wind acting on the surface is strong enough then 'lift' may be produced (the Bernoulli effect). The sharp gradient in velocity just above produces the Saffman lift 'force' or effect. The turbulent boundary layer (thickness δ, in B) is of the order of a few cm above a beach where the 'roughness', d, will be a few mm in depth) and a particle ejected into this zone will move around by rolling ('creep') or enter the turbulent layer by 'saltation' (C). Descending grains may give a particle just about enough extra momentum in order to eject it from the bed; this is 'reptation'. The understanding of fluid motion in boundary layers is complex and is important in the design of aircraft and F1 cars as well as particle entrainment in air and

Sand on the Shore (and in the town)

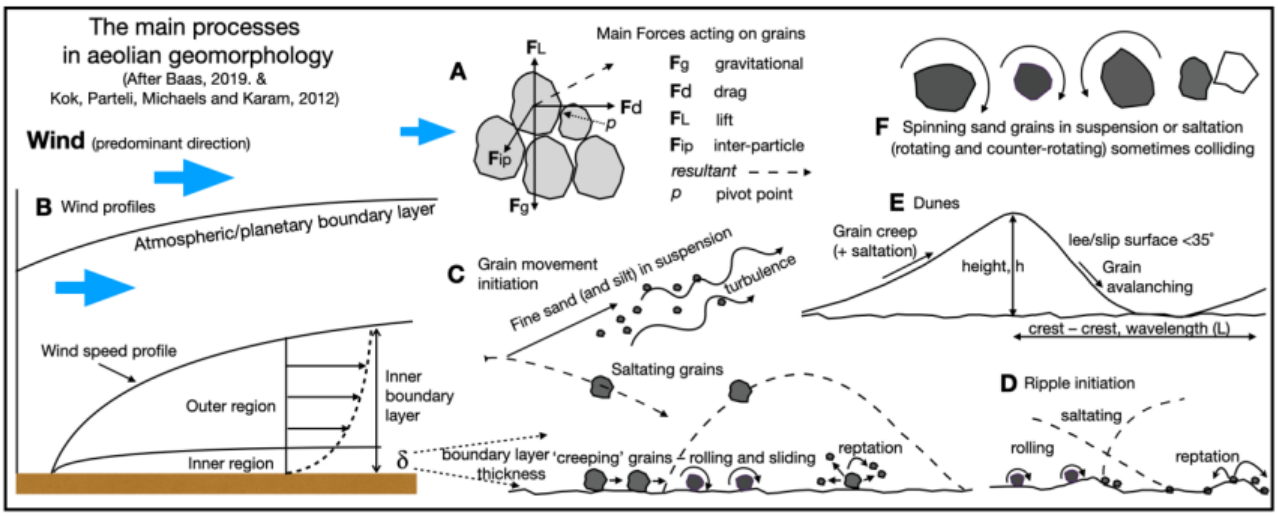


Figure 1. Diagram summarizing the main components of sand grain movement and removal from a beach. Lettered components are referred to in the text.

water flow. The boundary layer (see Figure 1 above) contains turbulent air motion and eddies and may also contain still air or winds in the opposite direction to the prevailing (as behind a wall, which is why sheep huddled behind a wall in a snowstorm may become covered by snow drifts).[2]

Returning to our sand grains, on a still day no grains are blown around, but at what wind speed might we expect to get grains airborne?

Figure 2 (below) is sometimes called the 'Bagnold diagram' and comes from work by Ralph Bagnold.[3] It was experimentally derived, although the data points are not shown here. In the first instance it says that the larger the particle to be moved the greater the force (as wind speed) required. This can be expressed as an equation showing, for a particle diameter, the threshold velocity that must be exceeded. For small sizes (< 0.08mm) the curve turns 'upward', for fine sand and silt sizes the surface is relatively smooth and particles may be held together. On a beach with a strong wind you can often see 'streamers' of fine sand being blown along. Although the height of these streamers are rarely more than 10-15 cm they can be a nuisance for bare-legged children on a beach![4]

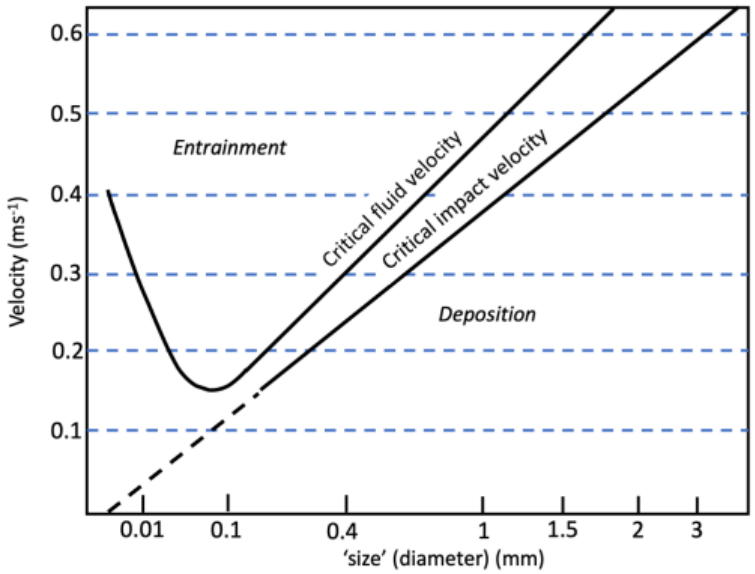


Figure 2. Relation between critical drag 'velocity' and impact threshold velocity for 'wind' speed and particle size (diameter). The critical fluid velocity may also be thought of as drag on the moving fluid.

At A in Figure 1, there is a force, F_{ip}, the 'interparticle force'. This is a composite of various effects such as the Van der Waals forces*, especially notable for silts and clays. But F_{ip}

may also include friction between particles, especially if they are angular. If the sand is damp then a thin film of water (meniscus) may wrap around the grains (in 3D) giving an 'apparent cohesion'. If the sand dries, then F_{ip} < and it becomes easier to eject grains for a given wind.

Sand grains, once ejected from the bed by impact may become entrained in the air stream and will 'saltate' (Latin, *saltare*, to jump) in the shallow boundary layer zone unless the wind speed decreases, so the grain drops from 'entrained' to being deposited. This might also be because of an obstruction, a pebble on a beach. As air is a fluid, it is not surprising that a similar relationship holds for denser fluids such as water, whether on a beach or in a river.[5]

Ripples and Dunes

Not only do sand grains move by being lifted off the bed by saltation, they can also 'creep' by rolling and sliding across the solid surface in the 'boundary layer' of the turbulent air stream. An effect noted by Bagnold in a drawing of the 'saltation' is that some grains may be impact-ejected up-wind. High speed photography has confirmed that this process, 'reptation', occurs as a splash effect over a few grain diameters by ballistic impacts of descending grains. Sand grains, once moving, rolling or saltating, follow the wind direction but rarely as flat sheets. Variations in wind speed and in the variations of grain sizes on a beach, give rise to ripples (a few cm from base to crest and with a wavelength (L) of a few tens of cm, (Figure 1 D) that can migrate downwind. Dunes, as Nicholson noted, also migrate but are larger than ripples (Figure 1 E), a metre in height to tens of metres (for example at North Hawes on Walney) and even, as megadunes, a few hundred metres high. Dunes can move downwind; grains moving (creeping, saltating) up the slope (Figure 1 E) avalanche down the steeper (lee) face. Most dunes in the British Isles have been naturally stabilized by vegetation but in the poem 'Dunes' Nicholson seems to be pleading for, or endorsing, a deliberate programme of dune stabilization: 'Plant, then, the green, plant marram, plant buckthorn; / Let sea-holly not be uprooted; / Entrench the town behind a fortified zone of grass' (CP p. 333). Here, as in the first stanza of 'The Council', the implication is that dune formation and encroachment were notable, if not commonplace in Millom and perhaps Haverigg at one time. I am not aware of this encroachment at present but perhaps residents might have evidence or memories of it happening. I'd be interested to hear as it might tie up with the build-up of shingle ridges at Haverigg Point – to which I shall return in a subsequent article.

Spinning Grains, Dust and Teapot drips

Dust-silt deposits are found in various places in the British Isles, usually called 'brickearths' in southern England or more generally by the German 'loess' (i.e. löss, not lo-ess) or by the French 'limon', and have been found in the limestone pavements around Morecambe Bay (Vincent and Lee 1981). Loess is generally taken to be the result of glacial grinding, deposited outside the main ice-sheets, with particularly thick deposits in the mid-west of the USA, Alaska and China. Particles in a turbulent airstream may interact on contact (Figure 1 F). With angular particles, the impact loadings on grains spinning at several hundred times per minute is considerable. Hence sharp edges and corners are knocked off and gradually the grains become rounded.

High speed photography does indeed show that grains spin and that they exhibit an aerodynamic effect. The Magnus effect* can generate more lift, making sand grains (and golf balls) travel further. The Magnus effect is seen in variety of sports when it is generated by imparting spin to balls. It should be no surprise that aerodynamic (and fluid dynamic) interactions between moving objects/fluids will generate interesting effects and patterns.[6] The Wikipedia

Sand on the Shore (and in the town)

entry for Von Karman vortex streets* shows some interesting examples and if you have ever wondered why some teapots fail to pour cleanly from their spouts it is because flowing fluids may adhere to a solid surface at certain velocities: see Coandă effect*. It's in the spout design: you need to maximize the speed of the tea stream out of the pot, so a deep V-spout is best.

Whilst we are on the topic, the pioneer numerical weather forecaster, Lewis Fry Richardson asked, 'Does wind have a speed?' and surmised that:

> Big whorls have little whorls
> That feed on their velocity,
> And little whorls have lesser whorls
> And so on to viscosity.
> in the molecular sense.

This returns us to the turbulence and eddies in Figure 1 and the complexities of particle entrainment in varying wind conditions. And that in turn brings us back to Nicholson's awareness of sand in his local environment. His mention of sand ripples and dunes is also found in other poems: 'And the windy sand / Flings its dry rain / On the dune where my dream / Is rooted deep as the roses' ('Song' CP p. 32); in 'On the Lancashire Coast' (CP p. 194); and, of course, mirroring Blake, in 'Windscale' where Scafell looks down 'And sees hell in a grain of sand, / and feels the canker itch between his toes'.

Winds and water, the same only different

We have looked at wind-blown sand and dust here and noted that field observations can give us a first look at theory and experimentation. As water is a fluid too, we find the same sort of grain-rounding in turbulent water flows. Angular pebbles, perhaps left over from glacial action, in the high fells make their way intermittently downstream:

> Wide cataracts of rock
> Pour off the fellside,
> Throw up a spume
> Of gravel and scree ....
> The water abrades,
> Erodes; ...
> But the solid rock
> Is a whirlpool of commotion...
>
> 'Beck' (CP p. 319-20)

The beck will eventually transport the abraded fine sand and silt to the mud of the estuaries: 'And there on the coast of Cumberland mingle / The fresh and the salt, the cinders and the shingle ('Five Rivers', CP 11-13).

Present-day observations and long periods of geological time are once again wrapped together in Nicholson's poetry of place.

Brian Whalley
August 2021

Notes

1. We might express this more concisely as:

$$p_v = f(s,A,R,sh,\gamma,d).f(U,z,\delta)$$

In principle, it would be possible to set up a series of partial differential equations to 'solve' the expression but in practice investigators over the years have used experiments, in the lab and field to find out what is

going on.

Many years ago I used a similar expression to help describe the overall form (F) of a particle (such as a sand grain) independent of its size (s) (Whalley 1972):

F= f(sh,A,R,Sp,T) where:
sh shape
A angularity, on a continuum, is related to roundness R
Sp sphericity (or roundness in two dimensions)
T surface micro-textures

2. The atmospheric boundary layer (Figure 1 B) is usually perhaps 3000m above the surface of the earth, but this may be reached sometimes by gliders if they can get high enough via thermals or a power aircraft tow. In Derbyshire, where I go gliding, I take off from the airfield at 1300' and am launched to 1000' above it; it can be gusty and turbulent but sometimes we can reach 'wave' just above the boundary layer at perhaps another 1000' (yes, we still use Imperial and knots!). The prevailing wind is forced upwards and, if not too strong, the air flow is nearly laminar, rather than turbulent. 'Wave' is often shown by lenticular clouds across the sky.

3. Brigadier Ralph Alger Bagnold (1896-1990), brother of the novelist Enid Bagnold, was an undergraduate before WW2 and was involved in expeditions to North Africa, where he became interested in the entrainment of sand and the formation of desert dunes. His work in Libya gave rise to the Long Range Patrol (later Desert) Group, which reconnoitred Axis troop movements for Wavell's Eighth Army. Bagnold wrote *The Physics of Blown Sand and Desert Dunes* (Methuen, 1941) from which Figure 2 is derived. There is more on Bagnold and his book in Wikipedia, which also has additional information on a number of topics in this present article, marked in the above text by *****.

4. Videos showing sand 'streamers' on a flat beach: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bt5eU51LpGc; and saltating sand grains: https://vimeo.com/34616908.

5. One of the important features associated with equations used in fluid flow is that they can be used under a variety of fluid and pressure conditions. The difference between moving water and air is that their viscosity and density can be used for different conditions. This is a matter of observation. But values can be used for different planetary conditions. The dunes on Mars were observed with orbiters and the Curiosity Rover explored the Bagnold Dune Field in the Gale Crater 2015 - 2017. It had long been known that there were dust storms on Mars from terrestrial observations. The book *The Martian* by Andy Weir (and the film, director Ridley Scott) has the hero injured by debris in a Martian storm. However, wind velocities on Mars are generally 15-30 km/hr peaking (Viking Lander) up to 115 km/hr. But as the Martian atmosphere is 'thin' and the gravity only 38% of Earth's the high velocities can entrain particles by the same processes as in Figures 1 and 2. It is usually dust particles (generally < 0.063 mm, silt size and smaller) that can travel considerable distances, to the British Isles from the Sahara, for example.

6. For an example of 'bending like Beckham' see: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YIP03W081Hw Fluids moving; and https://gabrielportolesi.wordpress.com/2013/04/23/the-magnus-effect/

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Scientific signs used in this article:

< less than

µm micrometre

Northern Words, Northern Places, Northern Stone

Test trench and sieving frame at Kongsstaðir farm in Skiðadalur, northern Iceland, July 2021.

This summer has been a varied one for me as I looked to gain experience and contribute my skills in a range of environments. For a few weeks in June, I was assisting on an archaeological research project in a valley in northern Iceland. The idea of the project is to focus on two particular valleys and their long-term socio-environmental contexts, from the settlement period (c872-930) to the 16th century. On the long drive up from Reykjavík, over mountain heaths and through bands of rain, I was trying to tune in somehow (oh, the wonders of modern technology) to BBC Radio Cumbria.

I finally managed it as we drove along the fjord-side road and neared our final destination, Svarfaðardalur, inland from coastal Dalvík, in central north Iceland, just south of the Arctic Circle. We wound along between crag and seashore, hemmed in one second then exposed to sky the next, meandering through the fertile lowlands which abut the sea, the long, deep channel of Eyjafjörður—the island-fjord—the capital of the north, Akureyri, at its head, and the peaceful, bird-sanctuary-island of Hrísey (brushwood isle) guarding its toothed jaws before Eyjafjörður flows north to the open ocean and the Greenland Sea.

On the BBC Radio Programme was the society's chair, Charlie Lambert, advertising the launch of the Norman Nicholson Audio Archive, and sharing some of Nicholson's performative presence with the audience. Ken Cockburn and I spoke about Nicholson's capacity to connect to other people and places through his exploration of the particular. In anticipation of my talk at the festival the following week and inspired by the landscape I was newly arrived in, I was moved to talk about the power of the ocean as a connecting factor across time, space and culture. It was fitting that Nicholson and his seascapes appealed to me while I was researching the wider oceanic networks of a small valley running to the sea in northern Iceland, and thus far more connected to the rest of the world than it might initially seem.

The wetland and flooded *tjörn* (tarn) at the mouth of Svarfaðardalur. Eyjafjörður, Hrísey, Kaldbak, and the open ocean beyond.

As we drove along Eyjafjörður that night in June I couldn't help but think of Nicholson's poem 'Fjord' from *Sea to the West*. The fjord of the poem is clearly a Norwegian one, and yet the collection's title speaks of further connections across the sea. 'Vestur um haf' (west over sea) is the term used in Old Norse-Icelandic

by Jack Threlfall Hartley

sources to describe routes taken from Norway over the sea to the British and Irish isles. And so the sea to the west of Nicholson's Norwegian fjord is in fact the North Sea, populated by the Shetland, Orkney and Faroe Islands and of course by mainland Scotland and northern England, connected to these North Sea outposts via the historical sailing route that rounds Cape Wrath and descends via the Hebrides to the Irish Sea. Further west over sea from these landmasses is, of course, the Icelandic fjord where I was thinking of Nicholson in the summer of 2021.

Saxifrage and mosses surviving in harsh conditions high on the fells above Svarfaðardalur at c1000m elevation.

In 'Fjord', water, ice and rock combine in the forces that shape the past, present and future of place. The tides are 'calculable' by those that dwell near the sea and can thus be predicted; yet they 'roar and storm' around these northerly waters, generating a sense of primeval wildness and seeming to connect these northern latitudes via ocean currents and tempestuous weather. Nicholson's fjord is just a degree above freezing and has barely thawed since the last ice age, the colossal environmental process that shaped our landscapes to such a dramatic degree. On Eyjafjörður's eastern side rises the mountain of Kaldbak, transparently translated as Cold-Back. According to Icelanders and Eyjafirðings (especially those that live on Hrísey, the fjord's island), this fell is one of the most powerful places in Iceland, with a fierce aura, a magical light and a majesty that is not to be taken lightly. Fjordside, under the shadow of this mountain—with Nicholson's words in my ears—rock, ocean, ice connect these northern words, these northern places and this northern stone.

The beautiful view and working conditions at the house of Laugasteinn (Pool-Stone).

I attended the online festival and made the finishing touches to my presentation against the snowy, mountainous backdrop of Svarfaðardalur. The river gleamed in the valley bottom, the ocean sparkled on the horizon and mountain flowers bloomed bright. Birds and arctic foxes were my companions as I hiked and the scraping of my trowel the sound-track as I worked.

As I looked out at the mountains or the wagtails that frequented the garden, I wrote of migratory birds in Nicholson's verse and how they generate a sense of at-homeness which can span geographical space, rooted in the seasonal movements which characterise

Northern Words, Northern Places, Northern Stone by Jack Threlfall Hartley

Spectacular sunshine at midday at midsummer. Marsh marigolds molten in the light. 'No sunset, no onset of the dark. […] the sea eases almost tideless fingers / Among the ribs of fells' ('Midsummer Fires on the Sognefjord', CP p. 352).

a place, the year-round fluctuations which are more than fleeting or superficial.

As I lived and worked in locations that feature in Iceland's medieval literature, I thought about the role of the place names that have endured nearly unchanged for a thousand years, and I wrote about the significance of historical language in Nicholson's poetry, how place names preserve the memory of a place and are a store of language, history and culture ready to be explored.

The festival was a fantastic opportunity to speak about my interest in Nicholson's verse and it was a privilege to be able to speak in such excellent company. I particularly enjoyed the discussion after Laura Day's paper, which provoked much thinking on the aural qualities of poetry and speech. For me, the festival was a refreshing reminder of the level of passion and interest that Cumbria's landscape and culture still provokes. As a speaker, I really felt as though I was sharing my ideas in a warm and encouraging environment and I only hope I can do so in person before too long.

Jack Threlfall Hartley

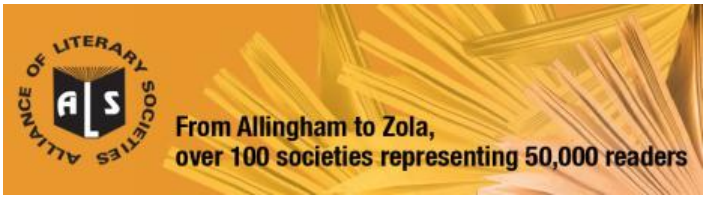
News in Brief

The Wordsworth Grasmere exhibition 'Still Glides the Stream', was open to the public from 10th June to 12th September 2021, having been postponed for a year, due to the Covid pandemic. It was an exhibition that featured the responses of local groups, artists, musicians and academics to Wordsworth's Duddon Sonnets. The Norman Nicholson Society was also invited to take part, specifically because of Nicholson's own creative response to Wordsworth's work in general and to the Duddon sonnets in particular. Our showcase featured various items which connected Nicholson's creative practice to Wordsworth and presented Nicholson's lifelong engagement with Wordsworth's life and work. Each group or artist involved was invited to participate in an online celebration of the exhibition, which was presented on YouTube on the 28th July. The videos are still there and form a good virtual introduction to the exhibition. See here for the web-link. Do watch our section, and help to increase our views!

The Royal Society of Literature has now included a piece about Norman Nicholson in its Fellows Remembered section: https://rsliterature.org/fellow/norman-nicholson/

Nicholson was elected as an RSL Fellow in 1945, following the granting of the prestigious Heinemann Award for *Five Rivers*. At the age of 31, Nicholson was a remarkably young Fellow. Even in recent times, the RSL has had to work hard to elect younger writers, creating a 40 Under 40 initiative in 2018. At that time, the average age of Fellows was 70! Only three were aged under 40, and there were no writer Fellows under the age of 30. Being elected as a Fellow of the Royal Society meant that Nicholson was recognized as a prominent and important writer of his time at a relatively young age. It is really good to see that on record on the RSL website. *AF*

Alliance of Literary Societies AGM—22nd May 2021 by Antoinette Fawcett



The Norman Nicholson Society was represented at the Alliance of Literary Societies AGM, which this year was held completely online, via the Zoom platform. Unfortunately the weekend programme, which was to be hosted in Highgate by the Hopkins Society and the Betjeman Society, had to be postponed due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Since the decision to postpone that programme of events, a further decision has been made to also put the conference element of the ALS AGM weekend online. It will take place on the 2nd October.

The minutes of the ALS AGM will be presented in time for next year's AGM, so this report will focus on a few highlights of the Zoom meeting, with a particular emphasis on items that are of relevance to the Norman Nicholson Society, and which we can learn from.

The ALS President is the biographer and writer Claire Harman who opened the AGM with the President's Address, in which she expressed the Alliance's disappointment that for the second year running we had not been able to meet in person and noted that while many Societies had been able to 'tool up' and use the Zoom platform to replace some in-person events, many people, including herself were undoubtedly feeling 'Zoomed Out'. She noted, too, how many societies had been able to use social media platforms to increase their reach, and felt that this was a positive development. The ALS has its own Social Media accounts (Facebook, Twitter and Instagram) and will re-tweet or re-post items of relevance from all its member societies. Claire also stressed that the links with connected organizations, such as LitHouses or the Royal Society of Literature, were extremely important as they help to increase the visible presence of the ALS and the furtherance of the aims and motivation of the ALS and its member societies.

Claire Harman—President of the Alliance of Literary Societies. Photo by Caroline Forbes.

Linda Curry chaired the online AGM very ably and gave her own report on the year's activities. She shared the sad news of the loss of the ALS Treasurer, Julie Shorland, who suffered a stroke in December 2020 and passed away in hospital in January 2021. Julie had given tremendous service to the ALS, serving as its Treasurer for over twenty years, and also taking on the role of Membership Secretary. She was a lovely, gracious and welcoming lady, who made Glenn and I feel very comfortable as new representatives of the Norman Nicholson Society at our first AGM weekend in Haworth in 2016. The Alliance has set up a Julie Shorland Memorial Grant of £100 annually, to be given to a member society to pay for a project or as a contribution to a project.

Other news was more cheerful, and two items in particular are heartening for the Norman Nicholson Society and the House Project/CIC. The George Eliot Fellowship reported that after nine years of campaigning they hoped to make a start on their George Eliot Visitor Centre in July. There have been some ups and downs since the May AGM, but more recent reports in the Coventry and Nuneaton press suggest that success is very close at hand, as the project has been awarded funds from the government Towns Fund. Similarly, the Edward Thomas Fellowship was able to report on the successful opening of an Edward Thomas Study Centre at Petersfield Museum, in collaboration with the Museum. It is open to the public on Wednesdays and on the first Sunday of the month, and to researchers by appointment.

Another bright point was the report of the Philip Larkin Society that they will be holding a full year of celebrations in 2022, to mark the centenary of Larkin's birth. Next year's ALS AGM weekend will, appropriately, be hosted by the Philip Larkin Society, in Hull. Nicholson's links with Larkin are well-known, of course, and not entirely happy! *AF*

Countrystride Goes to Millom—by Antoinette Fawcett

Do you ever listen to podcasts? And if you do, how and where do you listen to them? A podcast is very much like a radio programme, but you don't need a radio to tune in! You do need some kind of internet connection, either via a computer, tablet or smartphone — and then you're ready to go. And there is an immense range of options, from language-learning to programmes about art and nature. Best of all, a podcast can devote loving attention to subjects which radio—even BBC Radio 4—would perhaps not explore in any detail.

One such podcast is Countrystride. It is produced in Cumbria by David Felton and presented by author, illustrator and ex-farmer Mark Richards. Countrystride does exactly what its name suggests: it strides into the countryside—specifically in Cumbria—and goes on a walk guided by someone who knows the area well. There have been 63 audio dispatches to date, exploring the landscape and heritage of Cumbria, from its fells and lakes to its margins and seascapes.

In August, Countrystride went to Millom, in the company of Dr. David Cooper, our former Chair and now Senior Lecturer in the English Department at Manchester Metropolitan University, where he teaches Place Writing and English Literature. David's own doctoral thesis can be said to have re-set Nicholson Studies, with its emphasis on Place and Space, and its recognition of Nicholson's importance as a writer rooted in the landscape about which he wrote.

David proved to be as knowledgeable and enthusiastic about Nicholson's work as ever, and a great guide to Millom's history and landscape. The conversation with Mark Richards showed all four characters at their very best: Nicholson himself; the town of Millom and its surrounding landscape; David, who was relaxed, charming and very convincing about the man and the place; and Mark, who was a perceptive and well-prepared conversation partner and presenter.

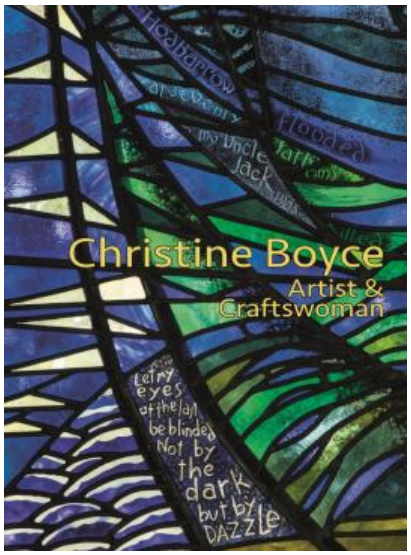
The immersive sound recording is by David Felton, producer, broadcaster, photographer, writer and publisher, and the accompanying illustrations for each podcast are by Mark Richards himself, and include the very atmospheric black and white drawing of Millom, above. It's a view that will be familiar to many who visit the nature reserve where the Ironworks once was.

The podcast is still available and can be enjoyed online at the Countrystride website, or on all popular podcast Apps, including iTunes, acast, Pocketcasts, Spotify and Podbean. Look for Countrystride #61 NORMAN NICHOLSON.

David Felton also publishes books by Mark Richards, based on the Countrystride walks, which highlight heritage and culture alongside landscape commentary. These can be found on his Inspired by Lakeland website. There is a whole range of books and other products there, all of potential interest to members of the Norman Nicholson Society, including a beautifully illustrated (and waterproof) Literary Walking Tour of Ambleside by Dr. Penny Bradshaw of the University of Cumbria. You can buy it for a very reasonable £6.00 here.

AF

Christine Boyce: Artist and Craftswoman—A Review by Antoinette Fawcett



The book that celebrates the life and work of Christine Boyce, the creator of the Norman Nicholson Memorial Window, was published in June this year, and it is absolutely beautiful!

Christine passed away, at the age of 91, in November 2019, just a few weeks after a Norman Nicholson Society event in which she presented her archival materials at the Cumbria Archive Centre, Carlisle. She particularly focused on the Nicholson window, which she considered to be the summation of her life's work as an artist and craftswoman.

Christine Boyce: Artist & Craftswoman is an essential book for fully appreciating Christine's life and work, and understanding the Nicholson window in that context. The book has been edited by Alastair Carew-Cox, who is also the photographer. The photographs and illustrations are the jewel of this book, presenting not only the stained glass but also the full range of Christine's artistic work. In the case of the stained glass, these photos enable you to see the work in much greater detail and with more precision and clarity than is often possible with the naked eye. Almost every window that Christine created is featured in the book, particularly those based in Cumbria. Alastair has taken new photographs of each window, and for the Norman Nicholson Window was even able to obtain permission to remove the protective grille, to allow the designs to be seen in their full beauty.

The book includes chapters by Dan Boyce, Christine's husband, on Christine's life and work, and on her last commission, for Upper Denton Church. There is a chapter about Christine as a student, teacher, artist and friend, by Mark and Daphne Roberts, and another very informative chapter by William Waters, on Christine as a practising artist and craftswoman, followed by a further chapter by Waters on Christine's vital role in helping to save and conserve the William Morris Dossal at Lanercost Priory Church. The last two chapters present Christine's work on the Nicholson window, with an introduction to the poet by Angela Davies, and an edited version, with new illustrations, of a piece that Christine first wrote for *Comet* in 2009 (4:1). The book concludes with a very generous selection of further images, which includes photos of work that would otherwise be hard to view, as it is privately owned.

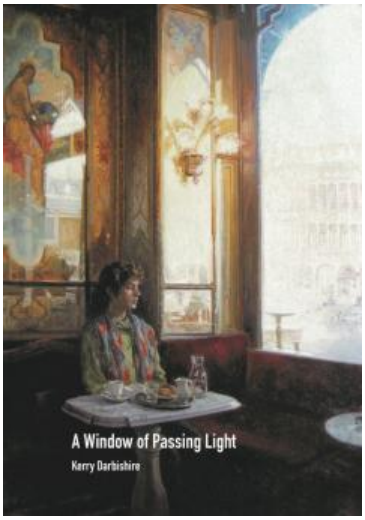
The book can be bought directly from Alastair Carew-Cox, Seraphim Press, for a very reasonable £20.00 plus postage and packing (use the contact form on his website: https://alastaircarew-cox.com/contact.asp). Alternatively, it can be found on Amazon, for the same price. It would make a brilliant Christmas present, and should form part of the library of every lover of Nicholson's work.

Congratulations Kerry!

NN Society member Kerry Darbishire has a new poetry pamphlet coming out with with Dempsey and Windle on October 1st called *A Window of Passing Light.* It is a collection of painterly and ekphrastic poetry, with a beautiful painting by Kerry's husband, Stephen Darbishire RBA, '*Portrait In Venice*', forming its front cover. See here for further details: https://www.dempseyandwindle.com/kerrydarbishire.html. The cost will be £8.00, including postage and packing.

'Subtle, playful, delightful. Using pictures as catalysts for empathy and self-knowledge.' Heidi Williamson

'As painterly as the images they respond to, these deft poems draw us in and invite us to *'Imagine/ walking over the surface and the brush/ is a journey.'* Sarah Doyle



Digital Activities—Feeding the Hungry Beasts

Millom, wrote Nicholson in *Greater Lakeland,* is 'remarkably inaccessible.' And of course in the year of that book's publication, 1969, and for many years afterwards, that remained true. But today Millom is startlingly *accessible,* thanks to digital technologies which have transformed the way we all connect with one another.

Zoom describes itself as a 'video teleconferencing software program' (spelling straight from San Jose). For us, Zoom and the other inventions from Silicon Valley are the new passport to the south-western tip of Cumbria. It is an irony that Nicholson himself would probably have appreciated – that the locking down of societies created the unlocking of new routes direct to Millom. Thanks to Zoom, the people who attended our second two-day festival, held online in June, came not just from the whole of Britain but also from Canada, New Zealand, India and indeed the USA.

Earlier this year the Society's committee took the decision to purchase the Pro version of Zoom, allowing us to extend our live video sessions beyond the 40-minute limit imposed by the free version. It meant that our festival could still hear from guest speakers Ken Cockburn from his home in Edinburgh and the Wordsworth Trust's Jeff Cowton live from Grasmere. Laura Day appeared from her home on the far side of Cumbria and Jack Threlfall Hartley delivered his talk on Nicholson's Nordic influences appropriately direct from Iceland.

Our website www.normannicholson.org has been operative for seven years and is the place to go for in-depth information about Nicholson and the Society. It's often the first landing place for people searching online for information about Norman. Type 'Norman Nicholson Poet' into Google and chances are our website will be among the top three or four responses.

It was by finding the website that Karen Seward realised that the Society existed and from there she was able to get in touch and make the magnificent donation of £5,000 in memory of her former teacher in Barrow, Wilf Kimber, who inspired her love of Nicholson's poetry. Karen, now a very successful lawyer based in London, made the donation through another digital outlet, GoFundMe, which at the time of writing has raised over £6,500 towards our project to buy and restore Norman's house in Millom.

That total has been somewhat static for the last few weeks but I am convinced that Nicholson supporters will eventually take us to our target of £10,000! If you'd like to give the fund a boost right now, it's reasonably straightforward – go to https://www.gofundme.com/ and search for Norman Nicholson House.

That £10,000 is a relatively small proportion of the £500,000-plus cost of the project. Responsibility for the project is now with the Norman Nicholson House Community Interest Company, set up by the Society last year after taking advice from Cumbria CVS (Cumbria Council for Voluntary Service). This has served to expand the Nicholson online 'empire' still further – the company has its own website www.normannicholsonhouse.co.uk as well as its own Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts. It's all about spreading the word and being 'findable'. You never know who is 'out there'.

The Society, of course, has had its own Facebook and Twitter accounts for several years and these in turn help us expand our reach. It's rewarding to see our news being retweeted by organisations with huge followings, like Wordsworth Grasmere and the University of Cumbria. These tweets have included details of the Norman Nicholson Trails App, launched by the Nicholson House company at the end of March with the help of a £20,000 grant from Copeland Council via the Government's Towns Fund. Here again, digital technology is having a wonderfully positive impact, allowing people to explore Nicholson locations in and around Millom, using their

by Charlie Lambert

smartphones to pick up the route from GPS signals along with information, pictures and audio as they go.

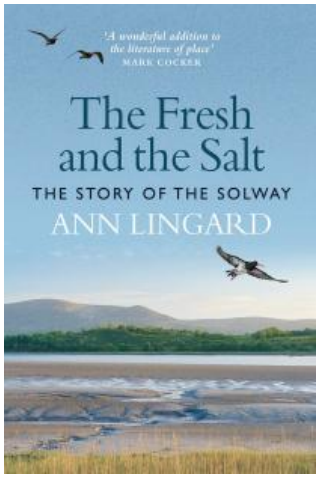
The latest step has been the creation of the Society's YouTube channel where you can find recordings of the main speakers' talks at this year's festival and a video of the memorable evening of poetry, also at the festival, when poets who contributed to our lockdown anthology *The Unpredicted Spring* came together to read and discuss their work. This was another opportunity for us to capitalise on our investment in Zoom. As well as our own Cumbrian poets Martyn Halsall, Kerry Darbishire, Anne Banks, Marion Bowman, Susan Cartwright-Smith and Pauline Yarwood and our editor Kathleen Jones, we could see and hear poets from across the UK as well as 14-year-old Mehak Vijay Chawla who read her compelling and original poem 'Saviours Burning the Midnight Oil' from her home in Delhi. Go to YouTube and search for Norman Nicholson Society.

The potential of digital communication seems endless. We have recently launched our own audio archive, located on the Society's website and locatable at https://www.normannicholson.org/audio-archive.html. Here you can listen to Nicholson himself responding to the award of the Freedom of Copeland in 1984, or giving a talk on the BBC Third Programme in 1952. You can also find interviews with Melvyn Bragg and Neil Curry, and hear recollections of Norman from people who knew him personally, including our late and much-missed friend and former chair Peggy Troll.

And it's also due to the impressive flexibility and capacity of digital resources that you can find every edition of *Comet* from the start in 2006 up to 2012 without leaving your laptop, tablet, PC or smartphone. Go to the University of Lancaster site http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/nns/about-norman-nicholson/ and they are all a couple of clicks away. Further *Comets* will be added when time allows. The intention is to provide a freely accessible archive of past editions to all.

These resources are wonderful but they are hungry beasts and they do take a lot of feeding! So it was gratifying recently to see the Norman Nicholson Society described as 'an incredibly active and innovative society' by Marty Ross, chair of the Alliance of Literary Societies. To remain both innovative and active over the last very demanding and distressing 18 months has been a real challenge, but thanks to the potential of communications technology in its many forms, we have kept busy, active, and shown just how delightfully accessible Millom now is, in this digital age.

Charlie Lambert Chair & Media Editor



The Fresh and the Salt: The Story of the Solway

Ann Lingard's lovely book about the Solway has been described by Cumbrian writer Karen Lloyd as 'a cabinet of curiosities, an engaging portrait not only of place but of a particular way of seeing; one that sets out to investigate and celebrate much more than that which lies merely upon the surface'. Fans of Nicholson's work will recognize that Ann's striking title is a quotation from his poem 'Five Rivers'. Not only that, Nicholson's work is mentioned several times in the course of the book. Ann quotes from 'The Seven Rocks', *Cumberland and Westmorland*, and from David Cross's book about Percy Kelly and Norman (*Cumbrian Brothers*). *The Fresh and the Salt* (2020) is published by Birlinn (https://birlinn.co.uk/contributor/ann-lingard/). It is a beautiful hard-back, with many interesting photos, and would make a wonderful birthday or Christmas gift for anyone interested in nature and in the interaction between humans and their environment. ***AF***

FUTURE EVENTS

October 27th—Evening Zoom Event.

Antoinette Fawcett will lead a seminar discussion on Nicholson's poem 'To the River Duddon', which was featured in the recent exhibition at Wordsworth, Grasmere. Full details will follow soon, by e-bulletin, on the Society website, and via our social media channels.

Christmas Lunch 2021

If the situation regarding the Covid-19 pandemic has eased and it seems safe to hold a social event again, we are hoping to celebrate Christmas at the **Netherwood Hotel** in **Grange-over-Sands**, as we have done for several years in the past. Do keep an eye out for our decision about this.

January 2022—Norman's birthday

Norman's birthday is on the **8th January**. He will be 108 years old! We are hoping to celebrate this in some manner, either virtually or with an in-person event, according to what seems appropriate and possible.

Spring 2022—AGM Day

The date of our Spring AGM will be set early in the New Year. We will inform you about this and any events planned for 2022 as soon as possible. 2022 will mark the 50th Anniversary of *A Local Habitation*, published by Faber in 1972. We intend to theme some of our events in 2022 around this book and on the notion of locality. Do feel free to contact any member of the committee with ideas on this topic or for any future events.

WELCOME TO NEW MEMBERS

We are delighted to welcome the following new, and returning, members to the Society: Karen Seward and Stephen Gummer—London
Claire Askew—Cumbria
Nick Matthews—Rugby

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to **Ken Cockburn** for generously sharing his poems with us in his article in this issue, which is based on the talk he gave during our **2021 Online Festival**, and to **Cat Outram** for permitting her beautiful drawings of Orkney to be published along with Ken's piece.

Thanks also to **Mark Richards** and **David Felton** of **Countrystride** for permission to publish Mark's drawing of a view of Millom from the Ironworks Nature Reserve; to **Alastair Carew-Cox** for permission to reproduce the cover image of *Christine Boyce: Artist and Craftswoman;* to **Kerry and Stephen Darbishire** for the cover image of Kerry's forthcoming pamphlet, *A Window of Passing Light*; and to **Jack Threlfall Hartley** for the photos in his article. Copyright in all of these images is retained by their authors.

Next Issue of *Comet*: I am hoping to receive pieces that relate to the theme **Norman Nicholson and Song**. The deadline for submission is: **January 14th 2022.**

Please note: membership enquiries should now be addressed to Prof. Brian Whalley, 11, Church Fold, SHEFFIELD, South Yorkshire S6 1TZ.

Email address: **nnsmembership@gmail.com.**

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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!