

***Comet, The New Comet, the Comet Bulletin and Comet Online
plus some Outreach Activities
AGM Report 2023-2024***

Introduction

In my Comet report for last year's AGM I expressed the hope that there would be two printed issues of *Comet*, appearing approximately in June and November 2023. As matters turned out, this proved to be impossible, not because of a deficiency of material, but because of a lack of time and energy, especially caused by my commitments to other areas of the Society's work, particularly the biennial festival, the Symposium and the regular bulletins that members receive. The work that members of the committee do for the Society is, of course, entirely voluntary, and sometimes it is hard to balance questions of personal health and wellbeing against the desire to serve the Society to the best of one's abilities.

The printed issue of *Comet* which appeared in the Autumn/Winter of 2022 (Vol. 17.1) proved to be the last. By spring of this year, 2024, I realized that the best way forward would be to publish *Comet* online, between the bulletins which I had continued to send to members approximately every two months.

I had already tested the water by publishing the bulletins online, starting in February 2023. The viewing statistics, which I can access from the Sway website, showed that members gradually adapted to this new form of communication and by February 2024 the number of views of the bulletin (148) gave me the confidence to feel that this form of internal publication would reach the majority of our members. I therefore published *The New Comet* online on 6th March 2023 and have received positive feedback on the new format. In less than a month the first issue of *The New Comet* has been viewed more than 120 times.

I have given a detailed rationale for this significant change in the last two bulletins, so I shall simply summarize some of the most important points here. First, I should say that in order to make clear the relationship between the bulletin and the Society's magazine, both of which I edit, they will now be called *The Comet Bulletin* and *The New Comet*, in order to stress the relationship between them. In other words, I want to reassure members that they have continued to receive much of the content that used

to be published in the printed magazine, but in another format. Personally, I feel that the Sway format gives a very professional feel to the material, which is an improvement especially for the bulletin.

Rationale for change

- Efficiency and adaptability

The website format can be as long or as short as is necessary and can reach members very promptly once the content has been written, edited, and laid out. It has the advantage, too, that corrections can be made to the text, if necessary, without invalidating the links that you are sent.

In the case of *The Comet Bulletin*, I am happy to send links to anyone, whether they are members of the Society or not. This helps us to spread the word about Norman Nicholson and about our activities.

- Timeliness

Because *Comet* only appeared twice a year, it became increasingly difficult to pre-warn our members about our events or other news via this format. This was the reason I had supplemented the magazine with the Bulletin for many years. There is now no reason why news can't appear in a bulletin fairly quickly and separating *Comet's* functions into the literary and the news-oriented in the two new formats will make it easier to keep you all up to date.

Although Society news does appear on our website and via our Social Media channels, not all our members subscribe to Social Media, and not everyone remembers to check the website for updates. Sending you direct links to *The Comet Bulletin* and *The New Comet* means that you can now be almost instantly updated on our news.

- Attractiveness and ease of use

The website can be read on any kind of device, from a personal computer or laptop, to a tablet or phone. This means that you can read it at leisure, wherever you happen to be, whether you are at home or in some other location. You can increase the size of the text for ease of reading, or you can use the Accessibility View to improve the experience if you have visual needs.

There is a Navigation button at the bottom of the screen which allows you to navigate easily to the different sections of either *The New Comet* or the *Comet Bulletin*. This means that if you wish to focus on a particular story, or to return to a specific part of the webpage, you can do so without having to scroll through every single part.

- Reduction of costs

A major and increasing expense for the Society has been the printing, postage and packing of *Comet*. An example of the way that costs have increased since 2017, when we last voted for an increase in our subscriptions, are the postage rates for a second class large letter that year as compared to this year.

In 2017 the cost was 98 pence (under 100g). In April 2024, the cost is £1.55, an increase of 57 pence. Although I tried to keep *Comet* under 100g, with its envelope, that wasn't always possible, even though I had instructed the printer to print on lighter paper. Damp weather and colour images seemed to make the magazine put on weight! Incidentally, in April 2024, if the weight of a large second class letter is a fraction over 100g, the cost is even more, at £2.10 for postage.

- Time-saving effects and workload spread

Although the amount of work involved in producing *The New Comet* and the *Comet Bulletin* remains the same for me as editor, the fact that there is no pressure now to produce a 32 or 36 page issue of *Comet* twice a year, means that I can choose to put shorter issues online, ad hoc, between the bulletins. The recent *New Comet* was a good example of that. It contained an editorial, four articles, biographical notes on the contributors, and acknowledgements. By comparison, the last printed issue of *Comet* contained fifteen articles, some of which were long and scholarly, an editorial, several short fillers, information about future events, and more. Layout for the printed version of *Comet* was very time-consuming.

Bringing out shorter, more focused online *New Comets*, should enable me to catch up with the backlog of work caused by not being able to work on *Comet* for a full year. Once that backlog has been cleared, it will mean that essays, articles, and creative writing will appear more regularly. It will also help me to spread the workload over the course of the year.

- Privacy

Sway websites are private websites which cannot be discovered via an internet search. That is an advantage, in my opinion, as they enable us to share things amongst ourselves, without some of the risks implied in more public forms of sharing.

Possible disadvantages of the change

- Not everyone has digital online access.

I do intend to make plain printed copies of *The New Comet* available to the very few members who have no computer or smartphone access. As far as I know, there are only one or two people in this situation.

I don't intend to print out the Bulletin, as this is an extra benefit which I have provided to members for many years, but it is not essential in the same way that *Comet* was. The bulletin has always been digital, but was previously sent as a PDF rather than appearing on a website.

- Printed materials form a more permanent record

The Sway website is dependent on my own Microsoft 365 subscription and is not tied to the Society's own website in any way. This means that the archive of articles, reports, news, creative writing, and other ways of engaging with Nicholson's work will not continue to accumulate in the same way as our printed archive did. Additionally, as far as I know, there is no longer an obligation to supply copies of the material to the British Library and other copyright libraries, as we have been doing since 2006.

To counteract the problem of a possible loss of archive, I will make a plain PDF of each issue, based on the layout on the website, but not containing the images. This can be sent directly to any member, if they wish to build their own archive, and can also be downloaded directly from the Members' Area of the Norman Nicholson Society website. I will contact the copyright libraries to ask them if they would like the plain PDFs.

I also have PDFs of each Bulletin, which can be sent to members if they request them. These contain the same text as the online version, but have no images. They are not based on the website, but are produced as Word documents prior to any work I do on the website (i.e. the document forms the basis of the bulletin, not vice versa).

- Website stability

Sway is a feature of Microsoft 365 and I have noticed once or twice that it can lose function and stability, even when I am actively working on a publication. I have found that the website usually recovers within a day, but the occasional instability can be frustrating.

I have also discovered that if I change the settings of the specific bulletin or issue of *The New Comet*, the link I created to the webpage becomes invalid.

Please do contact me if you have any particular problems and I will try to solve them, as far as I am able.

- What would happen to *The New Comet* and the *Comet Bulletin* if I can no longer edit them?

As the Sway website I use for these two publications are linked to me, as explained above, the back issues would no longer be available to members if I can't maintain my subscription. That also means that anyone who picks up the work of editing the Society's publications in the future will not be able to access them.

Any future editor would have to work out their own system for keeping in touch with the Society's membership and wider circle of friends.

The Comet Bulletin 2023-24

There have been **seven bulletins** since the last AGM, six of which have appeared online, while one was sent as a supplementary PDF attachment to our members in April. This means that our members have received updates about every two months. I have also sent out brief items of news via emails.

You may be surprised by the amount of material published in this format over the past year: **a total of 20,197 words** and a number of genres, including obituaries or tributes, reports, member news, notice of events, and more. By contrast, the current issue of *The New Comet* has **6,233 words** (multiply that by about three to get a sense of the length of the usual printed *Comets*; annually that also meant about 20,000 words of content written and/or edited for that publication).

Since February this year the e-bulletin has been published under the new name of *The Comet Bulletin*, to make clear the separation between its function and that of *The New Comet*, but also to show that the two are linked.

The New Comet

There has been just one publication of this online, re-born *Comet*, published at the start of March this year. *The New Comet* will contain articles, essays, creative writing, book reviews, and other pieces of a literary, creative, or scholarly nature, but no Member News or notice of events, which are more suitable for the bulletin.

I have currently made *The New Comet* available to all those who are on our mailing list, but I intend to create a members-only mailing list later this year, so that this new form of *Comet* will continue to be a member benefit. The bulletin will be accessible to a wider audience.

Comet Online

Comet Online is a website hosted by the University of Lancaster as the result of a project undertaken in 2018 and 2019 in collaboration with the University's School of Computing and Communications. It contains all the issues of *Comet* up to Summer 2012, but in a redacted format to ensure that copyright laws are not infringed. Individual articles can also be downloaded there, as well as information about NN-related archival resources, and an index of articles and contributors up to 2018.

Each issue of *Comet* that appears on that website had to be carefully prepared and redacted, and each article within each issue had to be put, by hand, into a format which made it searchable. If the opportunity presents itself, this website will continue to be updated until it contains the full *Comet* archive. Meanwhile several back issues of *Comet* are available on the Members' Area of our own website. I can also always supply PDFs of the back copies, from Vol. 1 through to Vol. 17, to any member who requests them.

You can find the Comet Online archive by searching for Comet Online: Norman Nicholson Society Newsletter, or by going directly to this link: <http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/nns/>.

Editorial opportunities

In the February 2024 *Comet Bulletin* I mentioned the fact that I would be happy to let members try their hand at editorial work. In terms of the bulletin this could, for example, involve editing news from our members (and therefore acting as the contact for Member News). For *The New Comet*, it would, for example, be possible to have a sub-editor taking charge of book reviews or creative writing. Please do contact me at my usual email address if you think you might be able to take on an editing role.

Images

Images and photos are subject to the same copyright laws as literary works. Fortunately, the private nature of the Sway website makes this less of a problem than publishing images on a public website. It is, however, an image-hungry form of publication, as the images help to break up the blocks of text that would otherwise be difficult to digest in this format. I will soon run out of suitable images!

Could members please send me relevant digital photos and images, with full permission to include them in the Sways, so that I can start building up a bank of images?

Possible subject matter: flowers, rocks, Millom townscapes and landscapes, the wider Cumbrian landscape, historic images, artworks, events, and so forth. The possibilities are limitless and provide a way in which you could be involved in the work of the

Society and exercise your own creativity. Don't wait to be approached, just send me an email with details of what you would like to contribute.

Outreach activities not mentioned in other reports

In addition to all the publications detailed above, Glenn Lang and I have been involved in a number of networking and outreach activities which are briefly summarized here. In **April 2023** we represented the Society at the **Alliance of Literary Societies' AGM** weekend in Winchester. There is an online report on the weekend's activities on the ALS website (<https://allianceofliterarysocieties.wordpress.com/2349-2/>) where you will find a nice photo of the ALS President, BBC presenter and journalist Jim Naughtie, as well as a photo of Winchester Cathedral, a lamppost (the first biogas lamppost in the country, installed in 1895 to deal with gas discharges from the sewers below), and various ALS representatives, including those from the NN Society. In **May 2023** I gave an online talk in discussion with Rebecca Slack of the Cumbria Biodiversity Data Centre on 'Norman Nicholson and the Flora of West Cumbria' for the Deep Time project, reaching a broad audience beyond the Society. In late June Glenn Lang represented the Society at an event organized by **Wordsworth Grasmere** to further the links between the Wordsworth Trust and local organizations based in the Furness, Duddon and Millom areas. This has resulted in a collaborative event between the WT, the NNS and the Millom and District Local History Society which will take place at **Holy Trinity Church, Millom on April 20th**. Full details are published on our website.

I am also aware of the great work of our **Youth Representative, Dr. Laura Day**, who gave a talk at the Armit Museum in August 2023 on 'Norman Nicholson and Cumbrian Poetic Landscapes'. I know that some members joined our Society as a result of that talk.

Last year was a year of fantastic achievements for the Norman Nicholson Society and its sister organization the Norman Nicholson House CIC, from the successful end of our targeted Fundraising Campaign via GoFundMe in January 2023 (which fell into the previous membership year), to the publication of a new personal selection of Nicholson poems by our former Chair Charlie Lambert in March, and the hugely successful Festival in July followed by our first all-day Symposium at the University of

Cumbria in September. The year ended with our now traditional Christmas lunch at the Netherwood Hotel, Grange-over-Sands, at which we were able to thank Charlie for his long years of service, while the New Year opened with an online celebration of Norman Nicholson's birthday on January 8th with a set of readings in which quite a few of our members took part.

We are now in a process of change and renewal, following the resignation of Charlie Lambert as our Chair, with effect from October 2023, to enable him to focus all his energy and attention on the House Project. We look forward to our continued collaboration with the Project and to its successful continuation after the good news regarding the purchase of the House on 29th February this year.

As I said at the end of my report to the AGM last year, we are doing our utmost to keep Nicholson's work in the public eye and to make it clear to potential new readers that he continues to have great and perhaps even increasing relevance for our current era.

Antoinette Fawcett

March 31st 2024