

COMET AND COMET ONLINE REPORT

As the pandemic continued over the Norman Nicholson year 2021/22 (April 2021-March 2022), constraints were still placed on the printing and postage of *Comet*. This meant that the Spring 2021 issue of the magazine (published in May 2021) was an online issue only (downloadable for members from the Members Section of our website, as advertised in the May 2021 e-bulletin). By the end of the summer of 2021, however, the situation had improved enough to allow a printing of the magazine. Copies were sent out to members in October 2021. I expect the next issue of *Comet* to be published around the end of April.

Articles were as varied as usual, and beautifully illustrated with original images and photos. I'd particularly like to thank our new writers, Laura Day and Jack Threlfall Hartley for their work, both in written and visual form. I'd also like to thank Ken Cockburn for allowing me to publish the text of his 2021 keynote NN Festival Lecture, which contained a generous number of his poems, and the Edinburgh artist Cat Outram, for the inclusion of her inspiring images with Ken's text. As a former teacher I was also very pleased to publish Stephen Walsh's essay on teaching Nicholson in 2020 as well as Sue Dawson's forthcoming article on the creative way in which she provided a Virtual Visit of Millom for MA students from the University of Cumbria.

Comet Online continues to be a useful resource for the wider public, although I have been unable to add more recent issues to the archive. It is still my intention to do so, as I know that many people first stumble across Nicholson and our work in this way. I was pleased to note, for example, that Alastair Carew-Cox of Seraphim Press was able to use Christine Boyce's essay on the Norman Nicholson Memorial Window in his recent book about Christine's work. That essay appears in *Comet Online* and was first published in *Comet* in March 2009.

I continue to look for new and interesting angles on Nicholson's work and new writers. *Comet* provides a very good ground for testing new ideas, both from the academic community and from the general public. I would encourage you all to send in your thoughts, however slight or off the wall. You never know where they may lead!

Outreach Activities

I would like to mention a few of the Outreach Activities that the Society has been involved in over the past NN year, the most important of which was perhaps our

involvement in the Wordsworth Grasmere exhibition 'Still Glides the Stream', a community exhibition responding to Wordsworth's River Duddon Sonnets, first published in 1820. The exhibition included a showcase which featured Nicholson's response to Wordsworth and displayed key exhibits, including Nicholson's 1944 poem 'To the River Duddon', his typewriter, and the 1949 selection of Wordsworth's poems that Nicholson both edited and introduced. The exhibition was the first to be held in the new Wordsworth Grasmere museum and was featured in the press. Our showcase received a very favourable review in *The Morning Star*!

Many of the other outreach activities are mentioned in other reports, but I'd like to focus on a couple more too. In March this year the South Cumbria Musical Festival was held for the first time for three years, as it had been cancelled in 2020, because of the pandemic, and was not scheduled at all in 2021. The Society had agreed in 2019 to sponsor two new Speech classes in this festival in memory of Peggy Troll: the recital of a Norman Nicholson poem by children up to Year 6 of primary school; and the recital of a Nicholson poem by children in Years 7 to 9. The poems set were 'Road Up' for the younger children, and 'Wall' for the secondary school children. The prizewinners would receive a festival trophy and a book token, supplied by the Society. Unfortunately, the secondary school entrants withdrew or were unable to take part, but the primary school children gave some brilliant performances of 'Road Up'. The winner was Ben Chen, from Millom, who gave a really excellent performance, full of natural verve and expression, and very clearly recited. Another worthy performer was Florence Tyson, again of Millom, who came second and who performed in five of the speech classes in total. One of those was the 'Write and Recite' class, which she won with her own very skilful poem. Perhaps we have another Millom poet in the making there! The third prize-winner was Max Milburn, also from Millom, whose performance had real drive and energy. Glenn Lang and I represented the Norman Nicholson Society during the Festival Speech Day and were really delighted to have the opportunity to attend. The SCM Festival is held in Ulverston but is open to entries from the whole of this region.

Finally, although I was not personally involved in this outreach, I was able to hear both Brian Whalley and Laura Day present their papers on aspects of Nicholson as an apocalyptic poet at the Apocalypse Symposium held on the 19th March, 2022 at Sheffield Hallam University, via a Zoom link. Both papers were really well received and Brian and Laura did us proud! Laura also gave a lecture on Nicholson's 1981

collection *Sea to the West* in September 2021, as part of the Durham University Late Summer Lecture Series. Add to these the premiere of Nicholson's poem 'Fossils' set by composer Joel Rust and sung by the contralto Jess Dandy at the Oxford Lieder Festival in October last year and the Countrystride podcast in August 2020 with our former Chair Dr. David Cooper, Mark Richards and Dave Felton, and you'll see that Norman and the Society have had really good exposure this past year, in spite of the pandemic.

Antoinette Fawcett

7th April 2022