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with creative work by the children of Haverigg School

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Memories of Norman Nicholson by Maurice Payn

Looking back now I realise that I had the pleasure of being in Norman Nicholson's company on a good number of occasions over the span of twenty years.

Our first excursion together arose from my appointment in 1964 to Cumberland Education Authority as their first ever Education Adviser to develop the teaching of English in schools. Traditionally, there had been 'organisers' in PE, Art/Woodwork, HE/Cookery and Music to supplement skills that individual smaller schools lacked. Gordon Bessey, the then innovative Director of Education, was delighted to have added English to this range. 'This young man (it was 1964!) has the most interesting job in Cumberland', he was fond of remarking.

The Department of Education and Science in London took note of this and to mark their approval they organised the first ever residential English curriculum course for head teachers in primary schools in Cumberland. This was staged at the then recently refurbished and extended Newton Rigg College of Agriculture and Forestry in Penrith. It was a time of great optimism and enthusiasm in the education service.

After setting the context where does Norman Nicholson appear in all this? Traditionally, at DES/HMI courses, the most junior member of the team is given the job to run around and fetch and carry. Therefore, I was asked to motor from Penrith to Millom to collect Norman Nicholson, our speaker on the Sunday evening of the course.

continues overleaf

WINTER COMET—SUMMER SPIRITS

We hope that you will enjoy this issue of "Comet", the fourteenth since the NN Society was inaugurated, and that the wonderful mix of cheerful images and articles will bring some much-needed sunshine to these frosty winter days. There are reports on two Society events, the popular and well-attended Norman Nicholson Day, held in October 2010 at the Millom Network Centre, and the talk by Dr. Ian Thompson on his book *The English Lakes, a History*, which was held at Barrow Library in November and jointly organized by the NN Society and the Cumbria Library and Archive Service. We also have a heart-warming report by Sue Dawson on a project at Haverigg School based on Nicholson's poem 'Dunes'. The report is followed by some examples of the children's creative work, in the form of poems and photographs. We hope to include more examples of such work in the next issue of *Comet* and would like to remind members that we are more than happy to consider adult creative work on Nicholson's themes. We are very pleased to be able to publish Maurice Payn's amusing memories of Norman Nicholson and to remind ourselves of NN's importance to Cumbrian education. Many teachers must have met him on the in-service courses which Maurice describes and many children will have benefited directly or indirectly from Nicholson's sharp eye, deep local knowledge and warm sense of humour. It is entirely appropriate that his work still continues to inspire children locally, nationally and even internationally. We are also pleased to include articles by writers new to *Comet*, Dorothy Lambert, Charles Lambert, Glenn Lang and Alan Postlethwaite, all of whom have helped raise the wintry temperature with their words and have brought a summer spirit to this winter *Comet*. The editor looks forward to receiving more such articles for the Spring issue! Nicholson and Sport is the suggested theme. Anyone for cricket?

Memories of Norman Nicholson by Maurice Payn

Not being aware of a direct route to Millom I travelled via Coniston and was fortunate to see from these heights, in the distance, the now lost view of Millom Iron Works, celebrated by Norman Nicholson:

The five funnelled battleship of the furnace
The proud battery of chimneys.

All this was swept away two years later, and is a valued visual memory even before meeting Norman Nicholson.

This was all many years ago, but the memory remains so vivid of then collecting Norman Nicholson from his unusual home above his father's outfitters shop. It was Easter 1965 and beautifully sunny. But Norman Nicholson emerged in an overcoat of generous proportions, a voluminous scarf and cap and gloves, all arranged finally by his attentive wife, Yvonne, who on that occasion was not accompanying us.

The conversation, as I recall, flowed unbroken on that journey back to Penrith, much focused on how the landscape was shaped by the underlying rock structure—much of the substance, in fact, of his series of poems, 'The Seven Rocks'. One moment I regularly recall after forty years is at that point at the east end of Ullswater where volcanic rock dramatically gives way to limestone. That never fails to be my 'Norman Nicholson moment'.

We travelled via Gosforth, Cleator, Frizington, Ambleside, Ullswater, much of the Norman Nicholson heartland. The course director regretted that I had not had a tape recorder running throughout such a journey.

Subsequently, Norman Nicholson was a regular and highly valued contributor to teachers' in-service courses across Cumbria; to literature events at Derwent Bank and Hawse End on Derwentwater, when he participated with Seamus Heaney, Kathleen Raine, and Vernon Scannell; at celebrity dinners at Higham Hall, and in schools, where his visits were funded by the Arts Council Writers in Schools scheme.

He was very comfortable with all these events. All he asked for was transport, hospitality – and many of his hosts recall his company with pleasure – and a room for a period of rest before his reading and talk. I am confident that it was not his experiences in Cumbria of which he wrote in 'Black Combe White':

Sixty miles drive to a reading – arriving by dark
The audience sparse, the room unsuitable
And bed in a cold hotel....

(I suspect these echoes of TS Eliot's 'The Journey of the Magi' was rather over-dramatized to make the rest of the poem work – relief at being back in Millom.)

Having managed many of these events in Cumbria, through the 60s and 70s, I have recently been heartened to read in the introduction by Neil Curry to the *Collected Poems* the following: 'the boy reciter, famous in the old days in Millom was popular once more on the reading circuits of the 60's, and enjoying it immensely.'

Norman Nicholson has been rightly described as 'a performer'. His reading repertoire was fairly predictable, so predictable that I can treasure the reprimand I once received not to laugh prematurely at his jokes (few in number always) before he had reached the punchline.

Emerging from this round of chairing Norman Nicholson's readings and talks arose the opportunity to spend an afternoon with him in his bookroom above the outfitters shop in Millom. I had with me Leonard Clark, one of Her Majesty's Inspectors of Schools, himself a poet. Feeling rather like James Boswell organising events to show off Samuel Johnson, I sat back and enjoyed the experience of two poets exchanging views. I realise now that to have experienced that room with Norman Nicholson still inhabiting it was a rare privilege. I hear that the room is rarely open to

Memories of Norman Nicholson by Maurice Payn

view, and the gentleman's outfitters is now a tea shop.

Finally, the other plus I have had to increase my appreciation of Norman Nicholson's work is to have spent time in Millom in overnight blocks. Cumberland, and I use the former name deliberately, has a different perspective viewed from Millom. A view that informs so much of his work. That area, south of Gosforth is distinctive. It is not 'the Lakes', and Black Combe is its own mountain. To spend time at Ravenglass, at the old County Hotel in Millom, at the High Cross Inn at Broughton in Furness is to experience a distinct and different view of the Lakes. Norman Nicholson's view;

The sun has set
Behind Black Combe and the lower hills,
But northward in the sky the fells
Like gilded galleons on a sea of shadow
Float sunlit yet. (South Cumberland 16 May 1943)

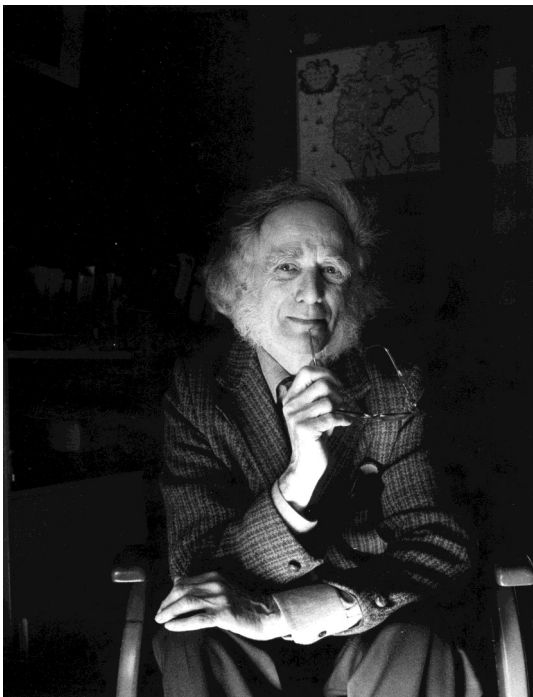
And the community in Millom, celebrated by Norman Nicholson, still existed. I never had a lonely evening in the town; the local teachers always looked after this traveller from such distant parts as Carlisle!

To sum up; it has been a great pleasure and privilege to have known and worked with Norman Nicholson. He was an English gentleman, courteous and kindly, soft spoken and considerate, with an appearance that at once matched his qualities.

I have been sorry, in 2010, to find him somewhat in eclipse. His work can be a real source of pleasure to Cumbrians, and to that wider world which, in recent times, through a series of tragic events, has come to acknowledge those characteristics of people in West Cumbria of personal dignity, regional pride, compassion and self help.

It is sad that Norman Nicholson's *Collected Poems* is now available in the series Faber Finds, 'an imprint whose aim is to restore to print a wealth of lost classics and authors of distinction'. To have died in 1987 and to be already among the 'lost' is sad, - but 'an author of distinction' - yes.

Maurice Payn, September 2010



Norman Nicholson

Photograph by Ray Troll

Thank goodness for Norman Nicholson!

The telephone call that everyone working in a school today really looks forward to (joke) came on a Tuesday morning. They say good news travels fast—so news quickly spread around Haverigg Primary School that the Ofsted Inspection would start on Thursday!

Fortunately the poetry unit during this important week included using our local poet Norman Nicholson to provide inspiration for our pupils' own creative writing. (That should hopefully impress the inspector!) The poem we chose to explore was 'Dunes', which is a perfect choice for our Year 6 pupils, as the school is situated close to the actual setting of this poem. We are in a very fortunate position at Haverigg Primary School to be so close to the coast and have access to many of the landscapes that Norman used as an inspiration for his writing. Whenever we use Norman's poetry we aim to provide the children with the experience of walking where Norman might have walked. Not only walking in his footsteps, but also taking the opportunity to teach them how to observe things closely and think about them in a different way, a fresh way, and then hopefully encourage them to write about it in their own unique way—like Norman would have done.

A vital part of our preparation for exploring the 'Dunes' poem was to visit the beach to make the links between the landscape and the poem more accessible for young children. Not only do we try to take them to the actual places which inspired Norman, but we also let them listen to the poem being read aloud while they are there, so they can enjoy the language and the imagery *in situ*. Next we ask them to take their own copy of the poem to a quiet place where they can just sit and look around them and quietly reflect on the language and imagery Norman used. Another method of providing a visual element to the whole experience is to allow the children to take their own photographs to record a range of different images they find linked to the poem. The photographs provide a visual prompt once back in the classroom.

While we visited the sand dunes Chris Powell (the Year 6 class teacher) provided a great deal of background information to the poem for the children. One example to ensure they understood the special properties of the marram grass mentioned in the poem was to explain its effective root system and discuss why Norman described it as:

...a fortified zone of grass.

An especially vivid image from 'Dunes' was made possible by looking carefully at the wooden steps coming up from the beach which are slowly but surely being covered by sand. The image of the dunes 'walking' towards the village of Haverigg was excellently portrayed by the evidence of these steps gradually disappearing under the constant movement of the sand! Or as Norman describes this:

*The dunes stalk the town
Month by month stretching an extra ripple...*

The highlight of our visit to the sand dunes was climbing to the top of the highest one and again pausing to observe and reflect on the panoramic views surrounding this vantage point. We asked the children to use their senses to help them fully appreciate the scene surrounding them. One of my favourite lines of poetry was inspired from this viewpoint. This is how Lewis and Khenya described the village:

*The snowdrop houses scattered at the edge of the brown,
cling on to the tip of the blue.*

We returned to the classroom to gather together our thoughts and ideas. There was also the more technical aspect of poetry writing to consider so the children were asked to think about the important features of alliteration, simile and metaphor in their use of figurative language when they came to creating their own ideas for their poetry.

An inspector calls! When he did the pupils were totally immersed in Norman's poem and enthusiastically answered questions with the excellent background knowledge they had gained

(A tale of an Ofsted experience) by Sue Dawson

while visiting the location of the 'Dunes' poem. They were very informative about the unique properties of marram grass and explained clearly how Norman had chosen his language and imagery carefully by comparing the sharpness of the grass to an everyday item like a knitting needle:

*The spiked marram's springy knitting-needles
Purl and entangle what concrete cannot conquer.*

The children went on to explain how Norman was able to create the image effectively for someone who may never have had the experience of seeing or touching this particular type of grass. Their recent experience of learning to knit also helped them to understand the importance of the '*Purl and entangle*' of the roots as a strong defence system. They also identified Norman's comparisons of animate to inanimate objects when discussing other examples of his imagery. And to top it all the class were able to create some excellent poetry inspired by their own experiences of the local landscape.

So thank goodness for Norman! By exploring his poetry we were able to showcase his work to the Inspector as an inspiration for the children's own creative writing. We could also demonstrate by using the writing of a local poet how we can encourage children to 'see' things differently as an aid to developing their own imaginative ideas in their writing. The Inspector (a Literacy specialist) was impressed and commented on the 'very good' poetry he saw as a result of this unit of work. More importantly the staff as well as the children thoroughly enjoyed the whole experience of using the local environment as our 'outdoor' classroom to be able to understand and enjoy Norman's poem 'Dunes'.

Sue Dawson

Haverigg Primary School—Creative Writing

The crescent moon of brown
forever controls the flow
and ebb, it shall ride white horses
till it meets the long lost tyre.
Like the giant's finger nail
it separates the blue
from the green.
Whilst the roar of the waves shouts
his name out loud.

Lewis B and Rachel



The sky is like a
giant goose casting
its feathers all over the village.
The marram grass is like spiky swords
thrusting through the sand,
keeping it safe.

Tomas and Lauren B



Haverigg Primary School—Photos and Creative Writing

The bear's back, raked grass
so real you can stroke it,
is combed and ebbbed
towards the blue.

Lewis D and Khenya



Azure paint coats the sky.
Dabs of white cotton wool
scatter across the horizon.
The scratch of a giant
pulls the marram from the grains
The sand runs down the dunes
like a dry brown river.

Martha and Sophy



All photographs taken by the children of Haverigg School except for the winter photograph right which is of a snowy Black Combe seen from the beach at Haverigg, January 2010, by Antoinette Fawcett.

Haverigg Primary School—Dunes Project



ADDITIONS TO THE NORMAN NICHOLSON ARCHIVE AT THE JOHN RYLANDS LIBRARY, MANCHESTER

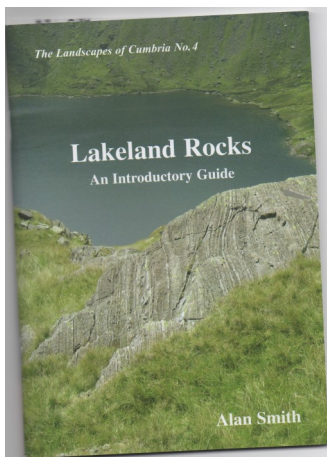
Fran Baker, literary archivist at the John Rylands Library, Manchester, has news about a new purchase of Nicholson letters:

'The John Rylands Library has acquired a new addition to its Norman Nicholson archive: 164 letters from Norman to Sylvia Lubelsky, a friend he met in the sanatorium. They date from 1932 to the 1980's (although there is a strong emphasis on the earlier years). There are also some manuscript poems, quotes from the work of other writers, cuttings and 8 presentation copies of publications inscribed by Norman to Sylvia. The collection will be included in the annual return to the National Register of Archives so will come up on archive material relating to Norman Nicholson.'

A full description of the Norman Nicholson Archive (papers, book collection, relationship with Tom Kelly, Matt Simpson and David Wright, as well as papers relating to Neil Curry's Faber edition of the Collected Poems), excluding the new additions, can be found online at: <http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/specialcollections/collections/mla/collection/>.

“I am interested in hills” by Alan Postlethwaite

In 1964 Norman contributed a set of six talks for the BBC “*Lift Up Your Hearts*” breakfast-time programme. When the text of the series appeared in booklet form under the title “*Enjoying It All*” [Waltham Forest Books: 1964] the then Bishop of Manchester, William Greer, contributed a Foreword in which he wrote: *If you have a friend who is a lover of the Lakes and of the countryside, send him this book as a Christmas Card. He will be more grateful than for a conventional card at double the price.* By the time I read this recommendation I must have already bought a copy for myself and, as a poverty-stricken curate, was then in no position to bestow Christmas largesse on anyone. I can, however, attest to the personal debt of gratitude I owe to that little book which speaks to me as freshly now as it did when first read.



Norman introduced his first talk with a reference to Psalm 121 and remarked that when the Psalmist said he would lift up his eyes, he wasn't really very interested in the hills. “*His strength came not from the hills but from the God who had made them.*” But, said Norman, I am interested in hills. He then goes on to say why hills matter to him: “*in the bare, unpopulated, uncultivated parts of the earth's surface, you can see our physical environment reduced to its simplest terms: rock, water and air*”. He tells how he lives among hills - “*always changing, always in motion*” - and enjoys them for the sense they give him of being part of a great plan “*where every end is a new beginning and every death a new birth*”. In the following talks Norman takes his listeners to the seaside to reflect on the variety and origin of the pebbles lying there; to the Lakeland towns to note how the materials of nature, the stones and the slate, are employed as the building

materials of human society; he invites his hearers to recover a sense of being in step with the cycle of the seasons; to recognise the importance of personhood as valued in the kind of community that he loved Millom for being; and finally to understand that our mortal existence is part of the same elemental pattern of dying and being re-born.

All this and most particularly Norman's assertion of his fascination with rocks and the Lakeland landscape came back to me when I opened the recently published ***Lakeland Rocks - An Introductory Guide*** by Alan Smith. Written by a retired academic and Past-President of the Cumberland Geological Society this stylish illustrated booklet provides a concise distillation of the complexities of the geology of Cumbria. The author has provided all the splendid photographs and maps. But as a preface to three of the main descriptive sections of the book, Dr Smith chooses an extract from Norman's work. The chapter headed ‘Skiddaw Rocks’ quotes the phrase “*The bulged and buckled mud . . .*” from ***The Seven Rocks*** alongside a brilliant photograph of an outcrop of bulging and buckled mudstone on Lord's Seat. To introduce his chapter on the sedimentary rocks of south Cumbria Dr Smith uses a description from Norman's ***Portrait of the Lakes*** - “*the Silurian rocks are not very assertive*” with an accompanying illustration of the rounded wooded ridges of High Furness. Another phrase from ***The Seven Rocks*** introduces the section describing Lakeland's granite rocks, “*The granite pate breaks bare to the sky*”. Norman had Eskdale granite in mind when he wrote this line and Dr Smith has a photograph alongside of the bald pate of Great Bank in Miterdale.

When for Norman it was “sea's to the west” in every other direction it was hills. I believe he would be delighted to know that his appreciation of them and his imaginative evocations of their distinctive origins and character are considered so apposite as to feature in an academic geological text.

Lakeland Rocks - An introductory Guide by Dr Alan Smith is published by Rigg Side Publications: price £4.99 [ISBN 0-9544679-3-7]. Copies are available post free from the publishers at 10 Grange Park, Keswick, Cumbria CA12 4AY.

Alan Postlethwaite

Norman Nicholson Day 2010 by Dorothy Lambert

The Programme for the October 2010 Norman Nicholson Day had three extra words on it alongside the time-slot 10.30 – 12.00. They were 'Choice of Activities'. How three words can make such a difference! I'm still not sure whether it was the word 'Choice' or 'activities' that had me looking in the diary, but it doesn't matter much, because I decided I had to find out. And I'm very happy that I did.

There were two opportunities on offer for the morning session and I had already chosen mine. A creative workshop led by Simone Faulkner in which we were promised to be enabled and inspired to design and create a relief clay 'tile' representing elements of Norman's work. Furthermore these 'tiles' could be incorporated into the planned Norman Nicholson Garden at the Millom Network Centre where the event was taking place. Another three exhilarating words were 'regardless of experience', of which I had none whatsoever in the clay department!

What I did have, which never fails to inspire, was a copy of *The Pot Geranium*.

What I wouldn't be doing was seeing much of my husband Charlie, who had chosen the other option: *The Writing; Images; Sounds of Norman Nicholson*. His usual activity on Saturdays being the *Writing; Images; and Sounds* of his own reporting at football matches!

We arrived early at the contemporary Millom Network Centre (MNC) on a quiet crisp and radiantly sunny Saturday morning, each filled, for totally different reasons, with anticipation for the day ahead.

We were not disappointed. From the minute we arrived there was a sense of suppressed excitement. Little did we know what a fantastic day had been arranged for us. Or how much effort had been put into devising an ambitious and creative hands-on activity which would incorporate the start of the NN Garden, inspired by the man himself, and making sure it worked for everyone who loved Norman's writing.

Glenn Lang greeted us with a broad smile, registered our places and took us towards the light and airy dining area for refreshments.

We were not alone. Clearly visible through the wall of windows was a perfect, uninterrupted view of the Millom Caretaker, Black Combe. A stunningly appropriate location for a NN Workshop. We had met before, but only on the page.

Other participants started to arrive from near and far, some solo, some in twos and threes, some friends, some strangers - but not for long, and one participant who had taken the time to collect a basket of fragrant, new windfall apples to share from her garden.

The common denominator – Norman.

We all moved into a comfortable room where Dr David Cooper, Chair of the NN Society, briefly explained the events for the day so that we could get started on our *chosen activity* as quickly as possible.

Those of us who had chosen the Creative Workshop made our exit from the Centre and quite literally went back to school.

We walked and talked through the corridors of the adjacent Millom School with our overalls at the ready for a fun, exciting and practical workshop, 'regardless of experience'.

Simone and Stan were ready and waiting for us. Our precisely measured clay was carefully placed in front of us. We gathered around the front table to watch the various stages of Simone's demonstration, which would enable us to design a unique tile, from scratch.

Images of Millom landmarks were available to use as a guide for our designs. Everyone chose a building and got to work creating their own version. Except for me.

All that was on my mind was a red geranium, not a building, but a poignant and personal landmark from Norman, and it wouldn't go away. And I had no idea how to draw one either!

NORMAN NICHOLSON DAY 2010 by Dorothy Lambert

Sim and Stan to the rescue. They really meant it when they said those three words. Whether it was realising an idea, a technical skill or fun, they were there to inspire and guide us with their ingenuity and enthusiasm for Norman our subject, all the way through the workshop.

Sim printed a picture of a pot geranium. Stan arrived with various shapes and sizes of seashells to impress the clay, and when the tile started to represent a pot geranium, two coloured glazes appeared, together with a demonstration of how to use them. Professional expertise enabled this workshop to deliver so much in such a short time. It really was a fun, exciting and practical opportunity for all, 'regardless of experience'. A promise delivered with great care.

All this and there was still lunch to look forward to. A fresh and well-presented buffet lunch had been prepared for us, including an array of desserts, fresh fruit and wide range of drinks.

We were all back in the same smart dining area, chatting animatedly with our lunch-mates about what had been happening in each workshop, and just how much we had all enjoyed ourselves, creating, and/or learning more about NN and what he had to say that mattered to us the most.

What mattered to me the most was the inspiration and subsequent effort behind the creation of the programme itself by the whole team, and the efforts of Paul and Sue Stewart who managed our catering and our immaculate surroundings. You all took the time to provide everything we could possibly need to make the most of this event.

The quality and range of the material we had been presented with was the best it could be, and the people who provided it for us did so with such enthusiasm, dedication and expertise. The whole day felt like a poetic banquet had been placed before us, created by a master chef. Everything on the menu was exquisite.

The creation of a NN Garden had been mentioned when we arrived and that our input would be appreciated, if we had time to go and look. So I had asked Stan during my time in the art room what was happening in relation to our tiles and the proposed Norman Nicholson Garden. Half way through my workshop we went outside to have a good look at the space available.

The Manager of the MNC, Paul Stewart, had indicated that input, ideas, or thoughts from the Members of the Norman Nicholson Society would be valued to make the most of this opportunity and space, for the enjoyment of the people who use the Centre and to acknowledge and recognise Norman and his work.

After spending most of my afternoon session in the garden space, taking photographs and looking around, I felt that something tangible which could be used by the people visiting the Centre would create more interaction and lasting interest in NN than something placed on the wall, and that the children from the school would be a fantastic source of inspiration and would get to know Norman and their village at the same time. It would be interesting if the 'something tangible' became a focus for reflection.

I just about managed to see Sue Dawson's presentation. Sue teaches at Haverigg Primary School. Her presentation revealed the true value of Norman's work when used as an educational resource, across the National Curriculum, at this school.

Many examples of the children's work were shown to illustrate the successful multi-media approach, enhancing their ability to express themselves using their own imagination after visiting many of their own local sites which Norman had described in his era.

A valuable educational website has been built as a result of this work, which will make the resources available to other schools covering a wide range of subject areas. Norman's work covers all points of the compass in education too.

It was a fruitful day, full of interest; interesting and interested people, and achievement and creativity. Good enough to find a place in my own treasure chest.

Dorothy Lambert, November 2010

Photographs of NN Day 2010 by John Troll, Glenn Lang and Dorothy Lambert



Nicholson Courtyard
Work in Progress.

Thanks to funding from:
 Cumbria Waste Management, Environment Trust,
 Aggregate Levy and Landfill Tax, RDPE,
 Cumbria Community Foundation & The Big Lottery.

Please feel free to have a look.

With Thanks to:
 Wildly Rural,
 Dream Landscapes,
 Lowther & Dawson



A Favourite Nicholson Poem by Charles Lambert

GLEN ORCHY

Sunday, late summer, 1968. Me just finished with school and looking forward to university. Norman on holiday in Scotland, his day spoiled by serious news from home.

The poem *Glen Orchy* ambushes you like a sniper. You advance upon it like Norman on that Sunday morning, clear of mind and light of heart. Good days already in the bank *eleven days of Highland brightness*, and that *bright* motif illuminating the mind. Loch Awe is *electro-plated*. Ben Cruachan is *faceted like cut-glass*.

The river itself is one of those multi-layered spectacles that Nicholson so brilliantly describes in poem after poem, a procession of precision that in this instance links *crag and brae* with *birch and rowan, leaf and berry* until the stanza ends, with the finality of a cataract falling into a deep pool, on the downward beat of *the churned froth of heather*.

Except that that is not actually the end of the stanza, although by rights it should be. And the poem is not an evocation of the values of the fells, the walls or the weeds, although it starts out as if it would be.

Then is tacked on at the end, like the wink of an old man hinting at more than meets the eye, the tap on the side of the nose. The word to the wise. Norman has more, because the day had more for him.

Then indicates a change of gear. A change of mood. To be exact, a change of everything. One short word achieves a lot.

He stops at the shop to buy a paper, *glancing for the cricket scores*. A different report catches his eye. Actually, it does much more than catch his eye. It *headlines clean at me*.

The image is one that I rank among Nicholson's most powerful, like the local baritone who *hurled his voice like an iron quoit (At the Music Festival)*. There's an element of solid object heading straight for me, while the movement of the headline conjures up the pell-mell pace of the massive printing presses that were part of my working life for a decade spent as a newspaper reporter, headlines hurtling over the rollers towing the reports in their wake.

Millom Ironworks to Close in Four Weeks Time.

How did this cataclysmic headline find its momentum? *Like a snapped spring*. Few objects create such force from a standing start. Few objects are so useless afterwards. No springs, snapped or otherwise, would be fashioned from the output of Millom Ironworks from now on.

And now. Again, there is more, tacked on at the end of the stanza to indicate that this is not the end of the tale. *Then...and now*.

And now? Nicholson looks back to his 1968 holiday in Scotland, his Sunday by the Orchy, and sees what? The wonderful light, yes. The familiar Nicholson theme of *ten thousand years of after-Ice-Age weathering*. But here is where the sniper (having taken aim in the second stanza) now squeezes the trigger. Both these familiar Nicholson concepts – the light and the timelessness of the landscape – take on a momentum of their own, no static presence now, they *crash on an Arras Wood of smokeless furnace chimneys*. Destruction meets the already-destroyed, the Arras Wood (I guess) being the site of the 1917 battle, Lancashire regiments to the fore, which claimed an even higher daily mortality than the Somme.

*Blundering among the dead trunks, five hundred men
At one stroke out of work.*

A Favourite Nicholson Poem by Charles Lambert

It is an apocalyptic picture, this vision of five hundred men blundering around the wasteland. It links with Nicholson's recurring anxiety about the fate awaiting mankind in general, whether in Millom (*A bleak depopulated shore* - 'On the Dismantling of Millom Ironworks') or elsewhere (*toe- and finger-counting men on unpolluted islands* - 'Comet Come').

But it is the thudding finality of the poem's destination that reverberates. *At one stroke out of work*. It's as if the bright glitter of the river and the years of after-Ice-Age weathering were always destined to end in this. And there is no tap on the side of the nose at the end of this stanza. This is where it ends.

Just like, in my own lifetime, it ended for the coal miners of Bold, Agecroft and Parkside, the ship-builders of Birkenhead, the red-brick mills of Oldham. And even the printers of my old newspaper.

'Glen Orchy' is among my Nicholson favourites because it twists together Nicholson's zest for life, his fascination by the natural world, his empathy with the working man, and his unparalleled talent for telling a tale.

Charlie Lambert
December 2010

'Glen Orchy' can be found in the *Collected Poems* (1194, ed. Neil Curry; p. 358)

[The poem itself has been redacted from this online version of the article. February 2019.]

“Norman Nicholson’s Millom: People and Places” by Phil Houghton

If there is a *place* in Millom that is about its *people*, then it is *Millom Network Centre* - again, the chosen venue of the Society's 2010 Norman Nicholson Day. It was in this clearly people-focused environment, that the Society delivered its aim for more member-focused events, where they could enjoy an informal day, taking part in a creative making activity, reading and discussion.

The day's informality was set by a relaxed and warm introduction from Society Chair, Dr David Cooper, who welcomed members and invited them to take part in the day's programme, drawing on the planned activities—clay plaque making; the archive material, considering Nicholson's Southbank Show appearance of 1984; recorded readings in Nicholson's own voice and access to reference material, made available in the form of copies of the wide range of Nicholson's published writings and the Society's own archive material.

The morning session saw members form two groups, respectively engaging with the making and the watching, listening and reading activities.

Simone Faulkner led the creative volunteers in the creation of Nicholson-and-Millom-inspired clay plaque work, quickly harnessing the energy and inspiration of the members, delivering impressive results, captured from the mosaic of individual thoughts, expressed in clay during this over-all-too-soon session.

The second group enjoyed an open, watching, listening and reading session with plenty of opportunities to experience, what was for many, new and previously unseen Nicholson material. There was good opportunity for discussion and interaction, with the access to the published works of Nicholson and the Society's archive material launching many discussions around the room.

Unexpected triggers for new thought, included the past frequency of Nicholson work in the public domain, tracked by a series of *Radio Times* extracts - small traces of a not too distant time, when Nicholson was part of a wider conversation - almost a challenge and an encouragement to the Society to continue with its work and aspiration to extend awareness and access to Nicholson's work to a wider audience, today.

The afternoon sessions saw the collected members form two reading groups, to consider various Nicholson poems - possibly one (or in fact two - *groups*) of the largest gatherings of the *Collected Poems*, in one room, ever - that is, outside of Faber's on-demand print, mail-order post room (whilst the group's original, dust-jacketed copies were certainly unwrapped and clearly already much used).

The day's texts were:

South Cumberland, 10 May 1943 (*Five Rivers*)
 South Cumberland, 16 May 1943 (*Five Rivers*)
 A Street in Cumberland (*Rock Face*)
 The Pot Geranium (*The Pot Geranium*)
 Great Day (*A Local Habitation*)
 The Shadow of Black Combe (*Sea to the West*)

It was a great privilege to be part of the blend of members drawn to attend from afar, from across *Greater Lakeland* and indeed *Nicholson's Millom*—people with their shared experience of place and indeed personal and often, first hand knowledge of Norman - man of Millom. This layering of views drew out poetic interpretation, formal comment on structure and rhyme, personally-derived meaning and, in keeping with the day's theme, a real sense of *place*, embodied by the frequent activity of trying to specifically locate the poem's theme, vantagepoint or setting, within its exact geographical context, in the townscape of Millom.

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If evidence were needed that Nicholson is still relevant to a wider audience, then it was delivered in Sue Dawson's presentation of the Haverigg Primary School / CLEO (Cumbria & Lancashire Education Online) project, which, through pupil engagement and much commitment from school, staff and volunteers, has secured an amazing archive of memories and interviews with those who knew Nicholson personally. Like the tiles of the morning's activity, these assemble to build a picture of Nicholson, through the words of those who knew him.

Aspiration was also seen as a key outcome for pupils, giving an understanding of the achievements that one can make in life - by considering Nicholson's example. Whether through writing or other work-endeavour in their future lives, the pupils' current work, focusing on written responses to the places of Millom and its landscape, certainly captured the inspiration achieved by the project - producing excellent writing, which Norman, and Yvonne, would surely have approved of.

The CLEO web site will soon provide open web access to the project outcomes and will contribute significantly to the ongoing conversation on Nicholson and his work - watch this space.

The day drew to a close, and the attending members, thanked earlier by the Chair, agreed there had been real opportunity to spend time together in discussion, with good access to a wide range of Nicholson material and activities, in the ever welcoming surroundings of the Network Centre, whose hospitality and good food had again made the day a memorable one amongst *Nicholson's Millom: Places and People* (members returning home with the "great white sun", of the day's wonderful weather, "in the dirt of *their* fingernails" - or was it clay?).



Photos by Glenn Lang and John Troll

Dr Ian Thompson *The English Lakes: a history*

by Glenn Lang

An enthusiastic group of members and others ventured to the Record Office and Local Studies Library in Barrow-in-Furness on a dark evening in late November to hear Dr Ian Thompson, author of *The English Lakes: a history* give an illustrated talk about the way artists, writers and climbers have over three centuries changed the public perception of the area from that of 'horrid mountains' to 'vales of peace'.

A Barrovian by birth and upbringing, Dr Thompson is a philosopher and landscape architect who currently teaches at the University of Newcastle. His talk was a fascinating and thought-provoking synthesis of his two disciplines. Dr Thompson explained that when his agent first suggested to him that he should write a book about the Lake District he had immediately read Norman Nicholson's *The Lakers* and that his first reaction was that Nicholson had been there before him and had written such an excellent book on the subject that he would not be able to compete. On further thought, however, he had realized that, almost sixty years after the publication of Nicholson's book and coming from a different academic standpoint, he might be able to approach the subject differently and possibly add something to Nicholson's ground-breaking study. His book, published by Bloomsbury in 2010, certainly confirms this and is well worth reading. It is also very well illustrated.

The talk, which was free for members but also open to the general public for a small fee, was staged by the Norman Nicholson Society in partnership with the Cumbria Library and Archives Service. Special thanks are due to Helen Towers, Cumbria's Reader Development Officer, for her help in organizing and promoting the event, and to Bloomsbury Publishing for providing wine and other refreshments. The event was successful in bringing awareness of the Nicholson Society to a wider audience and it also raised a small sum for Nicholson Society funds. We hope to develop more such events in conjunction with the Cumbria Library and Archive Service and other partners in the future.

*Glenn Lang
December 2010*

POSTPONEMENT OF AGM

As members will already know, the Annual General Meeting of the Society for 2011 has been postponed from January to Saturday 26th March 2011, because of current wintry conditions, and to enable as many members as possible to attend the meeting. In addition to the general business of the society there will be a play-reading of Nicholson's *Birth by Drowning*, led by Ann Thomson and with books provided by the Cumbria Library and Archive Service.

Further information about the event will be sent out in March. Please contact the Membership Secretary, Peggy Troll (peggytroll@clara.co.uk), or the Secretary, Glenn Lang (glennlang50@hotmail.com), if you have suggestions for agenda of the AGM or for future Society events.



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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. Memories of Norman and Yvonne Nicholson are particularly welcome, also reflections on specific poems or prose-pieces. We also welcome creative writing on themes inspired by Nicholson's work.