

Comet: the Newsletter of the Norman Nicholson Society

Nicholson's Second Visit to his East Coast Cousins

by Paul Nicholson

* **Nicholson's Visit to East Coast Cousins**
by Paul Nicholson

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'I spent one holiday with Sobey cousins at Birmingham and another with Nicholson cousins at Wheatley Hill in County Durham', wrote Norman in his autobiography. The latter visit took place in his earlier years yet it is not widely known that he did make other journeys at a later stage in life to renew old friendships and to do his part in ensuring that direct family relationships survived. One of these forays included an unreported visit to stay with cousins in Wheatley Hill shortly after the end of the Second World War.

The cousins were my father, his sister and brother. Their father, my grandfather, was Fred Nicholson to whom Norman refers in 'Seventeenth of the Name' and who was brother to Norman's father, Joe.

I cannot remember the exact year he came to see us, although I believe it to be 1947. Regrettably, none of his first cousins are still living although they did continue to remain in contact for many years until Norman's death. His cousin Sadie never failed to send him an annual Christmas gift of a pack of Basildon Bond paper and envelopes that always returned filled with treasured news of his literary progress and snippets of Millom history as it unfolded over the years.

My father and aunt were frequent visitors to Millom and the surrounding area during the in-between war years, both being drawn back by family connections

continues on pages 2 and 3

SENTIMENTAL NOSTALGIA? NOT AT ALL!

In the chapter "Today" in the prose book *The Lakers* (1955) Nicholson moves from considering the problem that civilization is often regarded as essentially urban and that the countryside is perceived as being a place of recreation for the town, to laying the blame for at least a part of the false relationship of human beings to nature at Wordsworth's door— not Wordsworth as he really was, but the stock Wordsworth, who by the 1950s had become "part of general furniture of the average modern mind". For Nicholson this stock figure of the poet is linked for ever to certain kinds of stock poetry: "one or two of his poems, in particular "I wandered lonely as a cloud", have become the accepted types of what a poem is expected to be." More tellingly still, Nicholson shows how, at the time when he was writing, stock expectations produced stock 'creative' responses from all kinds of amateur and professional writers. Even children, when asked to write a poem, would produce clichéd sentimental and nostalgic responses, very far from their actual lived experience. Nicholson is, of course, not being scornful about children's poems as such, but about the kind of culture which has produced verses such as: "I love thee, Cumberland,/The land where i was born;/And now that I am far away/My heart is sad, forlorn" from an eight-year old child who had probably never left Cumberland in all her life and who "found it necessary to imagine an absence she had never known and to pretend to a regret she had never felt" (*TL*, 209). How glad Nicholson would have been to have seen the situation so altered by 2008, when different models of poetry, and a very different kind of teaching, enable children to see the world freshly, clearly and sharply, through their own eyes, and to convey their thoughts and feelings in lively language or in bright unusual painted images. This season's "Comet" presents winning work, in both senses, in words and pictures, entered into the 2nd NN Schools' Writing Competition, and awarded prizes at the Festival Day in October. We hope readers will enjoy and be inspired by their zest! **AF**

NORMAN'S VISIT TO HIS EAST COAST COUSINS (continued from page 1)

and an abiding love of the Lakeland area and particularly Kendal, Ulverston and Cartmel where connections to the Hadath and Brennan families existed before the time that furnace and shack were spied by my great grandmother Maria who was to spend her married life in very different surroundings than existed with her Brennan parents at Beetham. Ulverston provided its own direct Nicholson family history in which 'trade' is evident and William Nicholson is noted in Piggot's 1828-9 Commercial Directory as the operator of a carrier service from outside the Brown Cow (renamed and now rather sad,) every Monday through Broughton, Bootle, Ravenglass, Calder Bridge and Egremont, to Whitehaven.

Norman's visit during that stark time shortly after the war was awaited with eager anticipation. I was an old seven and this was to be the first time I met this new and often talked about man. "What shall I call him?" I asked my father who replied, "Uncle, of course", which served at the time, although Norman clearly pointed out to me years later that I was then old enough to drop the 'uncle' and I was relieved to do so.

Wheatley Hill was one of the larger villages in the East Durham coalfield and, as mining villages go, prosperous. Coal mining was a reserved occupation during the war; although many men served in the forces and those who were fortunate to return able bodied were able resume their occupation. Those that suffered long term injury were looked after largely by and within the community. Our village grew rapidly, as had Millom many years previously when Richard Nicholson struck out to find fortune in haematite and helped 'lay down the road to the town', although I have no record of the date my grandfather and his brother George left Millom to make their own way in life in a new mining area.

They were both young, that much is clear, and may have been seduced by offers of similar work above ground as supervisors; weighing, checking and recording the coal brought up from rich black seams deep below ground. They exchanged ferric oxide for carbon and the Irish Sea for the North Sea but left behind the solid beauty of Cumberland and Westmoreland, apart from during their own infrequent visits to Millom to visit their mother and siblings.

So it was that Norman's generation kept the greater family together and the build-up to his visit was such that I, and my own cousin Michael, were agog with excitement as we awaited the arrival of this new 'Uncle'. So much had been said about him and his work – although his importance as a poet and author did not strike me until much later when I was able to appreciate his work. I was soon to find out why my Nicholson heritage mattered so much in a countryside littered with older generations that Norman believed were descended from Vikings who settled in North Lancashire. My father had his own view on that subject, stating that whilst Vikings were the originators of our name; our branch reached the west coast via the western isles, particularly the Isles of Skye, Raasay and Lewis. Either view will do!

It seemed as if most of Wheatley Hill turned out on the day of Norman's arrival, with every Nicholson standing by at the bus stop. Michael and I were freshly laundered and polished and when he arrived and passed down the line there were many handshakes, hugs and cries of welcome. He was clearly pleased to be with family again, yet years later it seemed that Norman had not quite understood or accepted why any of the family should have left Millom in the first place. There was no indication then of anything other than happiness tempered with the effort it had taken for him to make such an arduous journey from one coast to the other. I recall sitting and listening as much discussion took place around a blazing coal fire about the times the cousins had experienced together when they were young. Perhaps a little of the storyteller arose in my aunt as she often regaled us with her memory of riding the 'Ratty' then jumping off to gather bluebells before jumping back on again and my father recalling with a smile the accuracy with which their grandmother could hurl her crutch when

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annoyed.

Following Norman's visit to Wheatley Hill my local family spent much more time in the southern Lakeland area and that which had been North Lancashire. As had Norman's first cousins before the war, I was taken on annual family holidays often staying at Levens or Kendal, but never missing Millom out of the schedule. Aunts and uncles of various generations welcomed us; one being my very old 'Aunt' Nellie who lived in one of the almshouses that line the river Kent in Kendal. They discussed her around that blazing coal fire and I soon found out for myself why they all loved her so. She was full of hugs, fat and jolly, made the best raspberry jam and caught wasps by drowning them in a jammy jam-jar half filled with water. Black Combe features in Norman's writing, and so it was that my father informed me that we should do that which he had done several times over the years, by climbing to the summit where I would probably see Ireland and far down the Lancashire coast. It was a long and tiring walk for young flat feet but worth the effort, particularly when I saw aircraft flying into Haverigg below me. No such view for Norman on his visit to Wheatley Hill. The village was dominated not by a black combe but a black spoil heap. No home for a slagbank braggart but ideal for rooks and crows, and seagulls blown in whenever east coast storms forced them inshore.

There came a time during his visit when it was suggested we should take a run out into the country to Crimdon Dene, a local beauty spot unravaged by mining or, later by new roads and the encroachment of housing. As we entered the dene with its pungent undertone of wild garlic and massed array of wild growth I recall Norman becoming animated and pleased to name everything we pointed out. No bee orchid here but weeds to gladden his heart. We were good on weeds in Durham, and Norman brought Crimdon Dene alive for me as we ambled our way through listening to his expert commentary.

This was a visit of lasting memory to cousins that also embraced their enduring love of cricket. Never a ball smacked from here to Windermere, yet Norman's uncle Fred was a founder member of Wheatley Hill Cricket Club and we all enjoyed our 6d Saturday cricket teas between innings. Shortly after the visit my grandfather collapsed and died; not a mile below ground but at the cricket field. At least he did not die red or black but in umpire white.

The time came to say goodbye to Norman. The welcoming committee turned out again, although this time rather subdued, though with smiles of renewed kinship and promises of reciprocal visits. The Wheatley Hill cousins and their families later moved out of the village long before the mine fell under the axe that destroyed the community yet returned the countryside once more to farmland. Later in life I exchanged letters with Norman now and then, and received a number of signed copies of his works, but it was my aunt who kept in close touch with Norman until his death. She became very friendly with Peggy Troll to whom I am grateful for being asked to chronicle these memories.

On boarding the bus to Durham, Norman ruffled my hair and that of my cousin Michael before handing us each a ten shilling note. I couldn't imagine such treasure existed; both the note and the man.

Paul Nicholson

REMINDER

The **Norman Nicholson Birthday Party** will be held on **January 10th 2009** at the Bradbury Centre, Millom with the following provisional timetable:

12 noon – 1 p.m.	AGM
1 p.m.	Lunch
1.30 p.m. – 3.p.m.	Primary Approaches to Nicholson Senhouse Poets Favourite readings

NIMBY or: *Nicholson in Millom backyards*

The abbreviated badges of society are often proudly or otherwise worn, sometimes providing convenient buzzwords for a cause or a concern. Here Nicholson is far from a NIMBY, in the possible derogatory sense of the word, on the contrary, we find him very much *in* his backyard, and he's not alone.

The crags rise up, embodied by the yard walls, enclosing a small patch of Millom—Nicholson's backyard. Echoes of elements of "The Seven Rocks" are present in the yard's slate floor (see "The Seven Rocks III: Coniston Flag", last 6 lines), and their grindings in the soil, collected and carried in from the fells and undoubtedly a sprinkling of sinter dust and the soot from the household fire ("A Garden Enclosed", *The Pot Geranium*).

But this is merely the stage: the plants and ferns, which occupy this space, are the active ingredients.

Throughout Nicholson's prose we discover references to this very yard, an enclosure as worthy of his comment as any portion of fell surrounded by walls that walk ("Wall", *Sea to the West*). In the closing pages of Chapter One, *Wednesday Early Closing*, Nicholson's simple description of the yard at St George's Terrace evokes an almost pioneering image of settlement and the claiming of ground. We read how his father created a simple garden in miniature, collecting and carrying soil from his walks and placing it in retained beds, covering the bedrock of slate slabs at the margin of the yard. There is something glacier-like about this gathering up of the soil and spreading it to cultivate the yard, the very essence of the Cumbrian dale, where the flattened bottoms of deep valleys are cultivated to pasture ("Valleys", *Cumberland & Westmorland*, page 43).

The *Wednesday Early Closing* passage continues with a description the yard's planting. The Virginia creeper is given Nicholson's attention and we read of his continued amazement at the prolific nature of its growth from such a small volume of earth at its feet, noting that it is in its seventieth year when he is writing – a family tree-like link, back to those first cuttings his father had put down to root in this backyard.

Ferns are the main colonisers of this walled-in crevice of Millom, wild ferns gathered by his father and added to by Nicholson, their seasonal greenery noted as "fixed hoses spraying the yard with green".

Throughout the description there is a focus on small patches of earth, minimal growing media expressed in terms of the capacity of beer barrels, and yet significant growth.

In *Provincial Pleasures* ("July"), we encounter a similar yard, that of Mrs Grice of Marsh Edge Street. Here, and this time not in Nicholson's own backyard, we discover that self-same border of tiles, the emphasis on small quantities of soil, cubic-footage of earth and growth, and the *against-all-odds* acreage of Virginia creeper that it sustains. In this yard, Nicholson's theoretical barrels of earth from *Wednesday Early Closing* have become actual barrels, joined by chimney-pots in the horticultural colonisation of Mrs Grice's yard. The echoes continue, with ferns, again prolific and gathered in the wild – from "among the mines", just as Nicholson had done along the hedges at Hodbarrow. Where Nicholson's ferns are "fixed hoses", Mrs Grice's ferns are "great oil-gushes" and later, together with other plants, the "frondage of fern . . . spurts in a luminous spray."

Nicholson's description of his own yard resists the temptation of showing us his wider botanical flair, confining himself to naming but a couple of types of fern. In *Provincial Pleasures*, the ferns are introduced in almost the same way and with the same species, but we see Nicholson's wider interest as he goes further – interestingly the expanded list of

by Philip Houghton

plants are all natural colonisers, beyond the control of the collector's hand.

The collecting of ferns is described by Nicholson, in *Cumberland and Westmorland*, Chapter Four, where we see an extensive listing of ferns, with the Royal Fern noted as being a specimen commonly transported to backyards.

The poem "A Garden Enclosed" (*The Pot Geranium*) draws together Nicholson's descriptions of his own yard, and the recognisable landscape of up-ended tiles, mossy walls, the creeper and ferns, steps from the page. Somewhat more covert is the Royal Fern which, in the first stanza, is now found hiding in the shadows under its botanical name, as *osmunda regalis*.

As in the previous poem, birds are never far away from Nicholson's writing, flitting through his observations in prose and verse, and the backyard is no exception – his own sustains a blackbird and Mrs Grice's a wren in the creeper, a bird, which we read in July, *Provincial Pleasures*, whose appearance was to Mrs Grice "as if the phoenix of childhood had been re-fledged again" and which had "the power . . . to pick her up and tuck her into a child's bed of feathers . . ."

The links here with the poem "The Cock's Nest" are immediate and the features of the creeper and the pipe frame both the prose and poetry, like the wren's nest itself. We find the creeper's "trellis of transparent hands", "caged in a wickerwork of creeper". There are the flitting journeys of the wren from wall to nest, and the gathering of moss. The poem shifts the focus from Nicholson's father's death in its introduction to the description of the wren and its activity, with the final disappointment of the empty *cock's nest* thrusting us back into the cold realisation of Nicholson's loss. Mrs Grice's wren transports her to happier times, despite the lack of a laying hen bird. There is a real intimacy and insight into the lives of Nicholson and Mrs Grice, expressed through the importance of their backyards as windows on their respective worlds, accepting that the root of both draws up from Nicholson himself.

The Nicholson backyard, with its Virginia creeper and ferns, has woven a thread throughout his writing and there are apparent parallels to his own life – contained in a small patch of earth, enclosed by the wall of the yard, and yet yielding substantial growth in the prolific writings of his prose and poetry. There are similar parallels to the yard in the poem "The Pot Geranium", where Nicholson's father's tile-edged border and imported soil of the yard, are reflected in the "crock of soil / six inch deep by four across", echoing Wordsworth's beautiful place of death in *The Thorn* ("'Tis three feet long, and two feet wide"). Yards, however - enclosed, private spaces - are larger pots, which can open up the imagination and lives of their inhabitants to the world and its opportunities, where each "Contains the pattern, the prod and pulse of life" (*The Pot Geranium*).

Phil Houghton – Cumbria, 27th September 2008

ERRATA IN COMET JULY 2008

In the report on the AGM in previous issue of "Comet" (July 2008), Mandy Penellum was erroneously described as a member of the Norman Nicholson Society Committee. Mandy Penellum is not a member of the committee but attends occasional meetings as an observer in her role as Tourism Development Officer for Millom.

In the report on the Summer Event at Isel Church no mention was made of the involvement of The Wordsworth Trust with the event. Deepest apologies to Andrew Forster and to Adam O' Riordan, and many thanks for their involvement, for Andrew's excellent talk and for Adam's wonderful reading. The Society hopes to develop further links with The Wordsworth Trust and is extremely grateful for their interest in and encouragement of our still fledgling society. An article by Andrew Forster will appear in the next issue of "Comet".

AF

THE NORMAN NICHOLSON SCHOOLS' WRITING COMPETITION

Black Combe and Coniston Old Man

Black Combe and Coniston Old Man,
 Brothers, siblings,
 Always looking out for each other,
 Best friends.
 Side by side, Old Man protecting
 Coniston town.
 Side by side, Black Combe protecting
 Millom town.

Robbie Evans
 Joint 1st Prize St. James' School

My Happy Memory

I can remember walking up the pebbly path holding tightly onto my Dad, rushing and diving into the marshmallow-like snow, slipping and crashing down onto my bottom as the prickly grass tickles me. Oh how I loved the view of Coniston O' Man, the wiggly path leading to the highest point, sheep way up, up and into the clouds. Reaching the top is MY favourite part, eating the warm crumbly pie as we settle into the shelter. This is my first mountain.

Evie Burn
 1st Prize Black Combe School

The Dog

I suddenly drift away...

The sun shines on its jet black coat
 While the emerald green washing line hangs over.
 The honey coloured moss lies across the slanted roof.
 The fluffy tail never stops wagging as it strolls along the roof.
 The claws click like Spanish dancers using castanets on a sunny evening.
 It jumps from roof to roof as the day goes by.

... my mind jumps back to class.

I'll have to ask what to do now.

Ellis Marr
 2nd Prize Haverigg School



By Ellis Marr

NOTE

We think that "Comet" readers will agree that there are some excellent young writers and artists in the Millom and District area.

Unfortunately, due to constraints on layout, we have been unable to include all the prize-winning and commended stories or poems in this issue of "Comet". If there is space in the March issue, the remaining winning and commended entries will be published then.

Please remember that adults are also encouraged to send in examples of their writing, especially if there is a clear relationship to NN's themes. AF



By Norman Nicholson

My Memory

One day I remember going up Black Combe hill,
 Ahead I saw Gray Rocky Mountains.
 I saw a steam train letting its smell spread
 And ducks and swans swimming across the lake
slowly.
 I see the breeze blowing the trees from side to side.
 The smell of bacon and burgers cooking on a
barbeque.
 The sun shines on car tops as they drive down the
road, leaving smoke behind.
 Birds fly over the house tops.

Aiden Woodburn
 Highly Commended Black Combe School

Skull Iron

Gigantic, ancient,
 Iron black as charcoal.
 Too big
 To move,
 Too heavy to lift.
 Surrounded by
 Grass, as green as emeralds;
 Shuffling in the wind.

Robert Tyson 3rd Prize St. James' School

PRIZEWINNING WRITING

The Dog

An old building with slippery slimy slates
and an unlocked window.
Out pops the head of a dog,
fur as dark as the midnight sky.
The dog glances around... he spots a gap,
then he starts to sniff around cautiously looking for danger that he might fall into.
As his pads grip the slate he walks to the gap,
like a skater he glides across.

Then he looks around and sees a cat with golden green eyes staring at him every second,
he snarls at the cat and barks as he tries to protect himself,
the cat scatters off with fright.

The dog trots to a different part of the roof,
His claws going tip tap tip tap,
like solid steel raindrops dropping from the grey dull sky.
He hears the wind whipping the trees as if they are slaves,
then he sees a window, and lots of children
staring like owls, when they are supposed to be listening to the teacher
standing at the front of the class.

Then a curtain goes over the window, and he hears the teacher saying, "It's just a dog!"
He notices the sun shining down on the roof,
so he goes and sits in the shade happily dreaming of chasing rabbits,
then a nightmare takes over his dream, he wakes up with a tear in his eye.
The children have gone quiet whilst working their hardest,
he scampers back across the roofs and in the house back to his bed, and waits for the rain to stop.

When the rain stops the sun is smiling down on the rooftops
and the dog comes back out.
He spots the children playing happily,
then sun goes in and the children go in,
so does the dog.

Maddy Roskell
1st Prize Haverigg School

SCHOOLS WRITING COMPETITION 2008

Once I remember being asked why I liked Dickens. "Because he's so real", I said.
(Norman Nicholson, WEC, Chapter 7).

As a writer and poet, helping to judge this year's Schools Writing Competition, I offer the same reason for why we enjoyed this role so much - because the writing was so *real*.

The work of the pupils, and the teachers' encouragement, illuminated the Black Combe-like mound of entries we encountered on Peggy's dining room table, one Saturday morning in early September (in fairness, they were more orderly stacked, like *Kirkby round heads* - waiting for the winning slates to be split from the block).

Celebrating Nicholson's *Wednesday Early Closing*, "Memories" was the Society's competition theme and the imagery of Millom life; its industrial history, day-to-day characters and mountainous margins were all represented in the submitted entries. The study of a dog, compiled from the permitted window-gazing of pupils, created some notable poetry.

We deliberated over memories of hill walks, pies enjoyed at altitude on Black Combe, "skull iron" starkly punctuating Millom's past, of broken limbs, cracked heads, birthdays and new born siblings, there were seascapes, landscapes, and the brotherhood of Combe and Old Man - a *Cherry Blossom Boat*, bobbing, red in the estuary swell, will be my lasting memory of the competition.

It was difficult to single out winners, but that was the task in hand - there are life writers, observers and poets in Millom's schools and encouragers in the teaching staff, the standard was very high and the winners and runners-up, very deserving of praise. Keep writing!

Phil Houghton

MORE PRIZEWINNERS

Roof dog

As the infants skip happily to their classroom
at the start of a new school day
a dog,
as black as an old cellar waits endlessly
for the crystal white door to be opened.

Finally
the man, releases the door to a bright sunlit world
and the dog stretches out its shiny, silky body
like a tiger about to pounce out at his prey.

The dog balances along the slanted slates,
with honey yellow moss,
like an acrobat,
to glance randomly
from here to there
down to Main Street,
leaving the emerald green washing line behind.

As he leaps from roof to roof,
like Spiderman in a rescue mission,
he approaches the end of the terrace.

The school day begins to end
as the infants skip happily past the
classroom window.

At the end of a great school day
the dog begins to pad
back through the crystal white door again.

Clare Steele

3rd Prize Haverigg School

Little Red Boat

Gazing to the estuary
We spotted it.
Cherry red,
Bobbing up and down.
Red,
Black,
White.

Sat there on the estuary,
Surrounded by water,
Bobbing up and down.

Mary Hughes

Highly Commended St. James' School

Skull Iron

Black as midnight air,
Skull iron lay there,
All empty and alone
As miners deserted it
Ages ago.

Black as coal, iron
Lay there
Doing nothing,
Laying there, too heavy to lift
From the old furnace buildings.

Jessica Bradley

Highly Commended St. James' School

Memories: My Auntie's Wedding

One chilly September morning in 2005, in Blair Atholl, Scotland, my Auntie Cait was getting married to her fiancé, Andy.

At 1.00 p.m. we all set off to the church, with me in my kilt, to see the wedding ceremony. We were there for a few hours, then afterwards we went to Fishers Hotel in Pitlochry. You could smell the icing from the cake and the tomato soup when you entered.

The bride and groom came through the door and walked down the red carpet and then cut the cake.

Afterwards me, my mum and my sister all sat down in the hall, with the rest of the guests for the five course meal. It smelled and tasted fabulous.

After everyone had finished their meal, the groom (Andy), the bride (Cait) and myself all made a speech. My speech was a surprise. No one knew except me, my mum and Andy.

Shortly after we all went to the party room. There was a band, and some karaoke.

I still remember the song I sung with my cousin, "Is this the way to Amarillo". It was so much fun!

All the bridesmaids etc. got a present for helping with the wedding. I got a £10.00 W.H. Smith voucher.

The night drew to a close about 1.00 a.m.. My sister was already asleep on the chair in the party room. How she could sleep through that racket I don't know (I can't really speak because I fell asleep in an Elton John concert, but that's a different story!). We all went to our hotel room and I was asleep as soon as my head hit the pillow. I slept like a log all night!

And to top it all off, in the morning I found out my auntie was pregnant!

Daniel Meyer Highly Commended Black Combe School

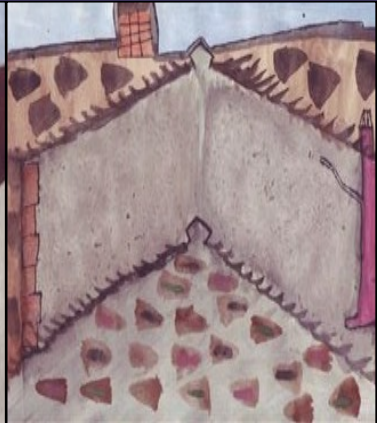
WATERCOLOURS BY CHILDREN FROM HAVERIGG SCHOOL



Haverigg School by Joshua Rae



By Martha Armstrong



By Emily Coulson



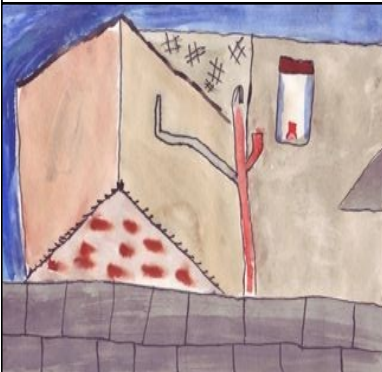
By Brandon Hennelly



By Sophy Leece



By Samuel Thompson



By Maddy Roskell



By Kathleen Rigg



By Rachel McCartney



By Lewis Bawdon



By Clare Steele



By Lewis Dixon

MORE PRIZE-WINNING PIECES

My Memory

When I was three I went to playgroup in Millom. I used to walk there with my mum. It was a wonderful school and I never wanted to leave but when it was time to leave the school and go on to the next one, it was knocked down, about a week after I left, and it broke my heart to know that I would never see that school again. I even had a nickname for it. It was painted red, so I called it The Red School.

Thomas Pattinson

Highly Commended Black Combe School

Baby No. 5

On the 9th July in the year 2006 a special event took place. It happened in the busy town of Burnley, in a house. The house had three bedrooms. A large one for my parents. A middle-sized one for my brothers, and a small one for me and my sister Naomi. The house started on the ground floor and finished on the first floor. The two smallest bedrooms belonging to us kids were next to each other. The larger room was down the corridor. What happened started at 7.00 a.m. and it began like this...

I had woken up early in the morning. Naomi then woke up shortly after me. We had then crept up to my Mum's room and had peeped round the door. We saw Mum and Dad sleeping on the bed with the lamp lights on. Me and Naomi had then returned to our little room.

After we had been playing games such as Bratz and Gameboys for an hour or so, we had seen our bedroom door opening! When the door had opened we had realized that it was only Dominic. He is my little brother and was five at the time. He is skinny and brown-haired. He is lovable and cute. He had asked, "Have you seen the baby yet?"

At that I had questioned, "What baby?" Dominic had then replied, "Go and look in Mummy's room!"

So Naomi and I went in to check. This time we went right up to the bed. It turned out that Mum had been cuddling a little, adorable, few hours old baby. We just stared, taking in his features, his tiny little hands and his cute face. We loved him. Looking at him made my insides warm and full up with love.

Mum had by now woken up, so she asked, "Do you like your new little brother? His name is Reuben."

Me and Naomi replied, "We sure do, Mum!"

Antonia Raven

2nd Prize Black Combe School

Swaying...

Swaying
In the gentle breeze,
Spiky
Leaves like needles.
Surges.
Ripples through
The golden sand.
Green,
Spiky grass,
Chunks of
Marram grow in the sand.
Walking
Along the estuary,
Swaying
To and fro
In the strong breeze,
Making the soft sand
Blow far away,
But the marram
A hero to the sand dunes
Protects the sand
From harm.

Carla Teeley

Highly Commended St. James' School

Views

Strong currents
Thrusting to fill the dangerous estuary.
A mint green and white boat,
Tilting,
The rust as sharp as a crisp
In the flowing azure tide.
Rotting jetty stumps protruding out
Of the sand.
Marram, kneedling
Stinging any animal in its path.
Salt marshes plunge into the ground
Like they have been stencilled in
A migration of shingle,
On the edge of the tide.

Dominic O'Brien

Joint First Prize St. James' School

THE NORMAN NICHOLSON FESTIVAL DAY by Angela Petersen

THE NN Autumn Festival in October must surely have been the best ever, not least because of the decision to hold the event at Millom Network Centre. The modern venue, with its conference facilities and work rooms, provided the society with comfortable, pleasant surroundings, and space to spread out! Tea and coffee facilities were available throughout the day and the lunch was truly scrumptious. The Centre made sure the 50 or so people who braved heavy rain to be there, were instantly welcomed. Visitors from all over the UK joined residents to celebrate the life of poet Norman Nicholson through talks, writing workshops and prize-giving.

Taking the theme from NN's celebrated autobiography *Wednesday Early Closing*, the Day opened with an enlightening talk from society chairman, Dr David Cooper of Lancaster University. He began by defining the word autobiography; the various ways of writing an autobiography; the reasons for, and the motivations behind the genre, why people feel the need to put their life stories in print, and the vagaries of memory. He noted how NN wrote little of himself in his early works, yet indicated how often the poet used the first person in his later prose and poetry, culminating in his autobiography, which followed a chronological order but finished abruptly on his return to Millom after his time in a south coast sanatorium. Whether NN would have written another autobiography of his later life had to be left to speculation.

Popular Millom author and historian Bill Myers then took visitors on a fascinating journey through Nicholson's Millom. He began the journey in the mid 1800s, and took the audience through the First World War, the devastating 'Spanish 'flu', through the depression, and boom and bust of the town's major industry, the ironworks. He used a slide show to great effect, illustrating how the town grew and changed during Nicholson's lifetime.

After the lunch-break, when much of the conversation was enthusiastic about what the audience had heard, some participants went off to visit Millom Folk Museum while others joined Antoinette Fawcett for an inspiring insight into life-writing. This session was oversubscribed, possibly because the visitors were energised by Dr Cooper's earlier talk. Her simple 'exercises' for the visitors were amazing in their achievements and everyone went away a little wiser than before, but a little saddened that the time was up so quickly!

During the meeting it was also announced that the inner courtyard of Millom Network Centre was to be refurbished to provide an outside arena for the arts, drama, or just to sit and enjoy a coffee. It was to be called the Nicholson Courtyard, as users of the Centre felt it was fitting to acknowledge Millom's heritage as well as to create something the community could enjoy in the future.

The day was an unbridled success and we look forward to an even better 2009 event – the benchmark has been set!

The Society is most grateful to all those who took part, to the members of the committee, especially Secretary, Margaret Forsman, Treasurer, Wendy Bracegirdle and Paul Stewart and helpers at the Network Centre

The day finished with the presentation of prizes to the winners of 'Memories', the society-sponsored schools' writing competition, for Millom Federation of Schools, judged by founding chairman Peggy Troll, consultant Julia Dixon and poet Phil Houghton.

Children from three of the town's junior schools were congratulated for the quality of their entries in a prose and poetry writing competition which ensured one of the aims of the Norman Nicholson Society - to get children to write creatively - was achieved.

Winners from St James RC School, Haverigg School and Black Combe Junior School, were 1. Evie Burns, Maddy Roskell, Robbie Evans, Dominic O'Brien. 2. Ellis Marr and Antonia Raven. 3. Melissa Bell, Joe Jordan, Clare Steele and Robert Tyson. All were awarded cash prizes and certificates. Highly commended were Martha Armstrong, Thomas Pattinson, Nathan Woodward, Jessica Bradley, Jade Rudy, Aiden Woodburn, Mary Hughes, Carla Teeley, Daniel Meyer and Lauren Tyson. They were awarded Certificates of Merit.

Each school received a copy of the new paperback edition of *Wednesday Early Closing*.

Angela Petersen

The Demise of the Favourite Nicholson Poem?

Since the first issue of "Comet" appeared in March 2006, coinciding with the inaugural meeting of the Norman Nicholson Society, there has been a regular "Favourite Nicholson Poem" column, in which someone, often a poet who has been influenced in some way by Nicholson's work, discusses an aspect of an NN poem which has strong meaning for them. In fact, all submissions to this column would be welcome, and by no means is it expected that the response should come from a practising poet.

For several of the past issues it has been the case that no one has submitted their thoughts and feelings about a specific Nicholson poem, and whilst the editor has from time to time filled that gap with her own thoughts, it is now felt that perhaps the way forward would be to invite discussion on a specific Nicholson poem.

As the next issue will be focussed on Nicholson and the Visual Arts, the poem set for discussion is "Cockley Moor, Dockwray, Penrith", Nicholson's tribute to Helen Sutherland and her work as patron of the arts.

The poem is printed below:

Cockley Moor, Dockwray, Penrith

Outside, the cubist fells are drawn again
Beneath the light that speaks extempore;

[...]

Inside, like tiles the poet's pleasures lie,
Square laid on circle, circle laid on square,
And pencilled angles of eternity
Are calculated on the doubled stair.

Collected Poems (p. 27)

The text of this poem has been redacted for copyright reasons.

Cockley Moor was the home of Helen Sutherland (1881-1965). She moved to Cockley Moor in 1939 and hosted many artists and writers there, including Norman Nicholson. Other important visitors were Ben and Winifred Nicholson (no relation to Norman), the poet and artist David Jones, and Kathleen Raine, who was friendly with Norman during the 2nd World War.

Helen was also known for her patronage of the Pitmen Painters, about whom the dramatist Lee Hall wrote a very successful and popular play (2007).

Note added November 2018 as part of redaction process.

It would be interesting to set a variety of responses to this poem side by side, or in the form of a collage, rather than having a single response to a favourite piece, as has been the case till now.

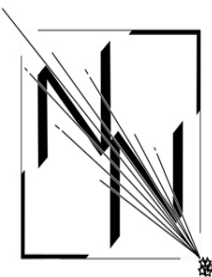
What is it, if anything, that is distinctive about Nicholson's style and approach to his theme in this work? How does this poem link to the themes which captured his interest throughout his life? Can links be found to the work of other writers and artists?

I look forward to receiving any kinds of comment at all on this poem—not necessarily in the form of a fully worked-out critical piece: sentences, or paragraphs, or even creative responses, would be just as interesting for the purpose of collaging together a multi-authored article.

I still hope that the "Favourite Nicholson Poem" column has not completely died away, and that members of the society will continue to send in their responses in this format too.

As usual, all articles will be received with interest.

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Grateful thanks to all contributors. Next issue March 2009: theme — NN and the Visual Arts. Please send contributions on this theme, or on any other topic, by post or e-mail to the editor. Contributions are particularly encouraged for the Favourite Poem and Memories of Nicholson columns.