

The Norman Nicholson Society
Minutes of the Annual General Meeting
Online Zoom 25th March 2023

Attendees: Charlie Lambert, Janice Brockbank, Sue Dawson, Jack Hartley, Laura Day, Antoinette Fawcett, Glenn Lang, Brian Whalley, Brian Charnley, Jonathan Powell, Brian & Sheila Lead, Norma Hughes, Mary Robinson, Phil & Chris Houghton, Alexandra Bridget Sinclair, Malcolm Morrison, Ann Thomson, David Boyd, Anne Clarke, Oliver Comins, Kathleen Jones, Sue Wilkinson

1. **Chair's Welcome:** Charlie Lambert. See below.
2. **Apologies** received from Clive Shaw, Kerry Darbishire, Joanne Weeks, Miggy Scott, Jean Liney, Janet Allan, Martyn Halsall, Carole Thirlaway, Liz North, Jan Bridget, Rob & Sue Keeble, Dorothy Lambert, Susan Talbot, Lorraine Douglas.
3. **AGM Minutes from April 2022:** The Minutes were unanimously approved as an accurate record. No objection or abstention.
4. **Matters Arising:** No matters arising.
5. **Election of Committee:** No members due for re-election.
Nominations for NNS Secretary: CL reminded members that JB was standing down as the Society's secretary and invited nominations to succeed her. No nominations were made. CL then asked members to contact him after the meeting if, on consideration, they would be prepared to take on this important role. He thanked JB for her very valuable work over the last three and a half years.
6. **Secretary's Report:** Janice Brockbank. See below.
7. **Treasurer's Report:** Brian Charnley. See below. The 2023 financial statement was accepted unanimously.
8. **Membership Secretary's Report:** Brian Whalley. See below.
There was discussion about the problems that some people have reported in getting their bank to recognise the NN Society account as a genuine account when they try to pay membership fees. This seems to be connected to the fact that our account is with a Building Society. Glenn said that if people go ahead and make their payment it does go through. Kathleen Jones - said that using the IBAN number resolved the problem. Jack Hartley suggested adding the IBAN number to the information about membership on the website. Charlie Lambert said he would do that.
9. **Comet & Outreach Report:** Antoinette Fawcett. See below
Kathleen Jones suggested inviting Karen Lloyd, editor of the 'North Country' anthology, to give a talk to the Society. Charlie Lambert said that Karen will be the main speaker at our festival this summer.
10. **Schools and Community Officer's Report:** Sue Dawson. See below.
11. **University Liaison Report:** Jack Hartley. See below
12. **NNH CIC update:** Charlie Lambert. See below.
13. **Any Other Business:** No other business raised.
Charlie thanked all officers for their reports and contributions to the Society during the last twelve months and extended his thanks and appreciation to the all-important membership.

The AGM closed at 12.03 p.m.

(Further information: following the AGM our member Marie Hodgson kindly offered to serve as secretary and has since been co-opted to the committee in that role.)

CHAIR'S WELCOME 2023

Good morning; thank you for joining us, and welcome to the AGM of the NN Society, 2023. And thank goodness I can open an AGM in the knowledge that there has been a series of events involving real togetherness over the year that we'll be reflecting on. Covid may not be completely behind us, but it receded enough in the year 2022/23 to allow us to go ahead with in-person events and as you'll be reminded in the upcoming reports, we did just that with a wonderful variety of goings-on.

Mind you, not every moment was quite so wonderful. Thinking back over the months, my mind just can't help going back to a Friday afternoon and evening in September when we were getting ready for our one-day Heritage Open Day at No 14. We'd bought some tall glass display cabinets to put our exhibits in. These were the kind you have to put together yourself, relying on less than precise assembly instructions, and yes you guessed it, they were from Ikea. Antoinette, Glenn, Sue and myself were working on the preparations for the following day and it fell to me and Glenn to put these cabinets together. After over three hours, we were still struggling to assemble the first of them. As the afternoon descended into dusk our efforts were descending into farce. The strong plastic strip that was supposed to hold two sides of the cabinet together just would not do what it was meant to do. I was getting seriously worried that we'd run out of time and we wouldn't have much worth showing the public next day. Glenn had had enough of following the instructions and decided simply to give the outside of this plastic strip a mighty whack with the side of his hand. The noise was unearthly. It sounded like a massive ice floe splitting in two. I was horrified and hardly dared look at the damage. But when I did, I saw that, miraculously, nothing was broken, and the plastic strip had slipped right into place. The sides of the cabinet were secure and steady. Glenn had saved the day and I'm sure he intended this to happen all along! Well after that we resorted to brute force much earlier in the construction process and got the other two cabinets put together relatively quickly.

After that, the Open Day itself was a breeze! It was lovely to see so many coming into the house, including a good few who'd travelled some distance, not to mention Simone Faulkner in her role as deputy mayor of Millom – and to know, despite the scars that Glenn and I carry to this day, that the NN Society had once again triumphed in the face of adversity. You can interpret that whichever way you want, whether it's taming the beast of Ikea or surviving as a flourishing literary society despite the ravages of Covid, or maybe being taken on board as part of Millom's application to the Government for millions of pounds in Levelling Up money, or raising an unbelievable £40,000 for the House project through our crowdfunder and the matching deal we secured from the Architectural Heritage Fund. There have been some quite startling success stories over this past year, and not least among them has been our keeping the focus on the essence of our mission, to study, celebrate and publicise the writing of Norman Nicholson which has continued all year, notably with our ongoing discussion of A Local Habitation.

None of this would have been possible without the terrific support of two important groups. One, you, our members, who have kept us going with your support, your interest, and your passion. Thank you so much for that. And Two, your committee, who believe me have put in the hours and the commitment to see us through Covid and on into a slightly different, more Zoomy, landscape with so many good things happening. My special thanks to Janice who is stepping down as secretary after 3 and a half years, Janice has done a great job and I'm delighted that she will be continuing on the committee as well as being a director of the Nicholson House CIC.

This being our AGM, I would like to pay tribute to members who have passed away over the last 12 months – David Scott, Maurice Payn, Keith Walmsley, and our wonderful friend Dorothy Richardson. We miss them all, especially today.

So here's to another great year coming up, a year which will include our third two-day – in fact it's becoming more of a three-day – NN Festival on the first weekend of July.

On behalf of Glenn and myself, flat packs from Ikea will not be involved.
Charlie Lambert 25/3/23

NNS Secretary's Annual Report, 2022-23

A summary of the Society's key events are listed below not otherwise covered in other committee Officers' reports. It's safe to say that The Norman Nicholson Society has offered a fantastic range of varied events maintaining a local and online presence for members during the previous year.

Spring Event - GeoWeek Cumbria 2022, May 14th

As part of Cumbria GeoWeek, '**Saturday Morning Geology**' was a walk and talk led by Brian Whalley of the University of Sheffield and the Norman Nicholson Society. It included a walk around central Millom to look at the geology in and around the town.

In the afternoon Antoinette Fawcett, Glenn Lang and Brian Whalley led a talk and discussion about 'A Local Habitation' which has been a focus throughout most of the year., Nicholson's 1972 volume that includes poems linking geology and Millom (Great Day, The Borehole, Bee Orchid at Hodbarrow, Scree, Hodbarrow Flooded, On the Closing of Millom Ironworks etc). Thanks to Brian the event was reported in the national GeoWeek Journal promoting The Norman Nicholson Society to a wider audience.

Online Event - An Evening with Ruth Sutton, July 27th 2022

The Norman Nicholson Society organised 'An Evening with Ruth Sutton', held online via Zoom. Ruth Sutton is one of Cumbria's most successful contemporary novelists, She has now turned her talents to drama in commissioned by Copeland's Deep Time project.

Her debut play, 'The Day the Ironworks Closed', set at the time Millom ironworks closed in 1968 with such devastating consequences for the town, was premiered successfully at the Beggar's Theatre on November 4th and 5th 2022. Ruth joined us on Zoom to talk about the play and how it reflects the legacy of Norman Nicholson, and also to answer a range of questions about her novels and her writing career in general.

Pop-Up Exhibition: A Face, A Place, A Root. Sept 17th 2022, No. 14 St George's Terrace, Millom

A one-off exhibition was organised in Norman Nicholson's old home to coincide with National Heritage Week and mark the 50th anniversary of his collection 'A Local Habitation'. This gave visitors the chance to see many of Nicholson's possessions which are not generally on view to the public, as well as setting foot inside his lifelong home and hearing audio recordings of Norman reading his own poems in the place where he wrote them. Thanks to Sue Dawson for accommodating the society's plans once again.

Celebrating A Local Habitation, November 26th 2022, Online, using Zoom

An afternoon of readings and discussion to continue the society's events to mark the 50th anniversary of Nicholson's 1972 collection, introduced by Antoinette Fawcett and led by our committee members Jack Threlfall Hartley and Laura Day. We were delighted to welcome attendees from across the UK and beyond.

Commemorative Event marking Norman's 109th Birthday: January 8th 2023 at No. 14 St George's Terrace and St George's Church, Millom. 'Speaking to Our Times'

We gathered in Norman's lifetime home and enjoyed a series of readings of Nicholson's poems, chosen to celebrate Norman's poetry that engaged with and spoke to his own times and which continues to speak powerfully to us today, whether on the subject of war in Europe, climate change, or living with difficult circumstances. After the first few readings - which included an audio recording of Nicholson himself reading *The Whisperer* - we made our way to St George's Church where the rest of the event took place, followed by refreshments, a birthday cake, and a special song in honour of Norman composed and sung by Antoinette Fawcett. Our thanks to Rev Carl Carter for permission to meet at St George's.

The Society was pleased to offer a 'hybrid' option for this event and were delighted to welcome attendees from around the UK and beyond. Thanks must go to every committee member who played their part in organising and supporting each event.

Janice Brockbank March 2023
Secretary: The Norman Nicholson Society

Treasurer's Report 2022- 2023

Norman Nicholson Society - Income & Expenditure Account

25 March 2022 to 03 March 2023

● **Active Account:**

| Income: | | Expenditure: | |
|----------------------|------------------|---------------------------|------------------|
| Subscriptions | 1206.00 | Printing / Postage | 822.99 |
| Donations | 543.95 | Weebly/Zoom | 552.54 |
| Transfer/House | 139.94 | N.N. House CIC | 500.00 |
| Transfer/Glenn | 47.00 | Laura (Research) | 100.00 |
| | | Unity Insurance | 90.37 |
| | | Lit. Houses | 82.00 |
| | | Music Festival | 50.00 |
| Total Income: | 1936.89 ✓ | Total Expenditure: | 2197.90 ✓ |

Actual Excess of Income over Expenditure: -261.01

TOTAL Excess of Income over Expenditure: -261.01

BALANCE SHEET AS AT 03 MARCH 2023

CURRENT ASSETS:

| | |
|-----------------------|----------------|
| Debtors | - |
| Bank Account - Active | 7163.58 |
| Total: | 7163.58 |

CURRENT LIABILITIES:

| | |
|----------------------|----------------|
| Creditors | - |
| TOTAL ASSETS: | 7163.58 |

CAPITAL ACCOUNT:

| | |
|--------------------------------|-------------|
| Balance brought forward + | 7163.58 |
| Excess income over Expenditure | + (-261.01) |

TOTAL RESERVES:

6902.57 ✓

To the best of my knowledge and in accordance with the information and explanations given to me, these financial statements have been properly prepared from the accounting records of the Association and are in agreement with them.

R. Woods FMAAT

DATED: 10/3/2023

Norman Nicholson Society – Membership Report 2022-23

I thank Glenn Lang for dealing with *The Cumberland* (formerly Cumberland Building Society) and lodging cheques and checking membership payments.

The current membership (10 March 2023) is:

- 146 of which 7 are Honorary Life Members and President, and 4 are Youth members (< 25 years of age). There are 20 joint memberships. We had 4 new members over the last year and 5 resignations and deaths reported over the last year.
- This is a reduced membership number from that reported last year (159). Aside from the deaths and resignations, this is due to regularizing the membership list according to failures to re-new membership.
- Although we have a 'stable' core of members any annual addition appears to have slowed.
- We should try to increase the membership as Nicholson's poetry gains in popularity. Some publicity is gained from presentations made by members regarding Norman Nicholson and his poetry and the occasional reading of a poem on BBC radio. However, such events do not appear to increase membership enquires and some attendees to online talks have not joined despite expectations. The support for the Norman Nicholson House Project shows that there is an interest in Nicholson and the Society needs to capitalize on this.
- I propose that your committee looks again at the *Society's Membership Review and Action Plan* (which mentions some of the difficulties of increasing the membership) with a view to generating more income from membership numbers. Increases of postage costs for mailing 'Comet' need to be covered. We would also welcome ideas from the membership about increasing the 'visibility' of the Society and its work and to increase membership accordingly.

Brian Whalley
Membership Secretary
10th March, 2023

COMET, COMET ONLINE AND E-BULLETIN REPORT 2022-23

Members received two issues of *Comet* last year, in June and in November, and both were bumper **32-page issues** containing a great deal of interesting and original material, as well as news and updates on the activities of the Society. I expect the next issues to appear at similar points this year.

The **2022 late spring/early summer issue of *Comet*** demonstrated the broad range and scope of Nicholson's oeuvre and also looked at lesser known aspects of his life. As I said in my editorial "there are so many different ways of relating to Nicholson's life and work". Some of the key articles focused on song and singing, but there were also "mysteries to explore, memories to enjoy, some geology to understand, and plenty of social and personal history to help us place Nicholson and his work in a wider context." What I felt that this issue showed was that it was important to remember **the aesthetic and emotional impact of Nicholson's work and its historical and social breadth**. I was very pleased to welcome several writers new to the Society in this issue, including **Jean Crosbie**, who shared her memories of Nicholson's poetry readings at Wordsworth House in Cockermouth with us, and **Professor John T. Andrews**, a distinguished geologist, who wrote about his memories of Millom as it was when he was still a child and young man.

The **Autumn/Winter 2022 issue of *Comet*** is perhaps the one I am proudest of since starting to edit the magazine in 2006. It was themed around Nicholson's 1972 collection *A Local Habitation*, whose 50th anniversary we were celebrating last year. All the articles in this issue complemented each other and added a great deal to our knowledge both of Nicholson's life and his themes. I'd particularly like to thank **Ann Thomson** for sharing some of the insights of her valuable MA work on Nicholson with us; **Charlie Lambert** for his original research in the John Rylands Archive, exploring the relationship between Nicholson and various Liverpudlians; and the distinguished poet and critic **Roger Garfitt** for his poem in memory of Norman Nicholson and his lovely, humorous recollection of the warm friendship he had with Norman as a young man. I am, of course, grateful to all our writers, whether I have mentioned them by name or not. It is fantastic that so many of you continue to write for *Comet* on a regular basis. Without your hard work, there really would be no NN Society magazine.

As mentioned in last year's report, **Comet Online** continues to be a useful resource for both students and the wider public. It is still the intention to add further issues of

Comet to the website, hosted by Lancaster University, when time allows. Each issue has to be carefully prepared and redacted, and each article within each issue has to be put, by hand, into a format which makes it searchable. Individual articles are downloadable from the website, as well as complete, redacted issues. So, it is not just a question of uploading an issue as a simple PDF, hence the backlog in terms of updating the website. However, new issues of *Comet* still appear on the Members' Area of our website as PDFs and in exactly the same format in which they were published. If you prefer to read online, rather than in paper format, this is a resource which is exclusive to our membership.

Nine **e-bulletins** have been sent to members since last March, two of them in the new online format that I have tested over the past couple of months. The e-bulletin is intended to be a swift way of communicating with our members and contains news about our events and other activities, as well as updates on the Norman Nicholson House Project and Appeal. I am also happy to publish relevant **Member News** here. Please send such news in good time, especially if you wish to advertise an event in which you are involved.

I make the e-bulletin available to people who are not members of the Society as well as to members. It is a way for them to keep in touch with what is going on, even if they don't want to commit to membership.

I hope that our members are enjoying **the new online version of the bulletin**, which is accessed by clicking on the visual link in the emails I send you. I can still send you a plain PDF of the same content in the older format that I used, if you would prefer. Just contact me by email to request that.

Last year I mentioned a few **outreach and networking activities** that the Society has been involved in, which were outwith the remit of the other reports. In case the following are not mentioned elsewhere, I'd like to take the opportunity of reminding members about **Laura Day's** online lecture on Millom and the Ironworks in Nicholson's 1954 collection, *The Pot Geranium*, in May last year, in collaboration with the University of Cumbria as part of their Cultural Landscapes series. Laura also gave a talk on Nicholson's representations of Cumbrian Space in November at St. Michael's Church in Workington, as well as attending and presenting her work on Nicholson at a number of academic conferences. I can't stress sufficiently how important it is that her voice has been heard speaking about Nicholson's work in so

many different arenas. We are very proud of her fire, energy and wisdom, and wish her well in whatever area of work or research she will focus on after her doctorate.

Other activities not mentioned in other reports include the representation of the Norman Nicholson Society at the **LitHouses conference weekend in Halifax** in October and at the **Cumbria Archive Service 60th Anniversary History Fair** in Carlisle in October, as well as our attendance at the **South Cumbria Musical Festival** to watch children performing their recitations of Nicholson's poem 'In a Word'. Glenn Lang and I were your representatives at all these events.

Between *Comet*, **Comet Online**, the **e-bulletin**, and our **wide range of outreach and networking activities**, we really are doing our utmost to keep Nicholson's work in the public eye and make it clear to potential new readers that he continues to have great and perhaps even increasing relevance for our current era.

Antoinette Fawcett 22nd March 2023

Norman Nicholson Society Schools and Community Liaison Officer Annual Report 2023

This year has brought a welcome return to a number of activities which were restricted during the pandemic especially the return of the Christmas Tree Festival at St George's Church, Millom. This is a popular community event that the society has been involved with since it was first established over 10 years ago. Unfortunately we were not able to enjoy the participation of Dot Richardson this time who sadly passed away in September. This was one of Dot's favourite NNS events of the year and her enthusiasm and inspiration were missed. However the creative interpretation of our Poet Tree - which was a tree made entirely out of books which NN had written - was very well received and gained many positive comments.

I have been involved in creating an addition to the current NN Walking Trail App which will include a circular walk around Haverigg. This is still a work in progress but the content has been aided by help from the local community and NNS committee members and it will also include a section which involves children from Haverigg Primary School. The trail will hopefully be completed within the next few months.

At the end of March we will be welcoming to Millom the MA students from the University of Cumbria who are studying Romanticism and the English Lake District. The aim of this visit is to provide the students with the 'lived experience' that NN would have had during his lifetime in the town. We try to provide this through visits to locations where members of the NN committee read the appropriate poems linked to the places which inspired NN's writing. We also spend time in number 14 St George's Terrace where the students can experience NN reading his own poetry in the place where it was actually written.

I have helped the Duddon Valley Local History Society with providing suitable quotations and readings from NN's writing when they recently organised a walk around Seathwaite. The Newfield Inn at Seathwaite was one of NN's favourite place to go for a meal so it seemed appropriate that others should enjoy his work while being in the Duddon Valley.

During the year I have supported the Heritage Open Day event in September when number 14 was open to the public, the birthday event in January, and I am currently in discussions with the County Library staff in order to organise an official unveiling of NN's sculpture by Joan Palmer which has been found a new home because Millom Public Library has relocated to a new site at the Hub in Millom School.

Sue Dawson

Schools & Community Liaison Officer NNS

University Liaison Report 2022-2023 - Jack Hartley (Minutes from verbal report)

A Nicholson study day is being organised at the University of Cumbria September 30th 2023.

Jack is working with Dr Penny Bradshaw, University of Cumbria, and Antoinette Fawcett Norman Nicholson Society. Plans are in the early stages of discussion so the event will be publicised once details are finalised.

Jack Hartley

Project 14 - report on 2022/23 by Charlie Lambert, Chair, Norman Nicholson House Community Interest Company & Chair, Norman Nicholson Society

This time last year I seem to remember saying that the upcoming 12 months would be decisive in respect of Project 14. OK, I hold up my hand. They weren't. Not quite. But they did turn out to be hugely important. They did give us solid grounds for optimism. And they end now with Project 14 in a much stronger place.

Thank you, thank you to everyone who contributed to our crowdfunder which raised £20,000 itself and thus earned a further £20,000 from our terrific supporters at the Architectural Heritage Fund. I know that a lot of our friends have donated more than once, some have donated in memory of special people, some have put in four-figure sums, some have put in five pounds – whatever the amount, the support has been quite breathtaking and I and the Nicholson House directors as well as the committee of the Society are very grateful.

This last year has turned out to be, if not decisive, at least pretty good. That crowdfunder initiative has turned out to be worth £40,000 to us. And also last year, in July, we were included in the Millom Stronger Towns bid for £20 million of Government money under the Levelling Up scheme. We were told that we are a 'priority project' but exactly what that means in terms of financial support we don't yet know. We've been told to await a further announcement from the Town Deal board, so, we wait. We certainly hope to receive a significant sum, but we know we will have to justify that, and it won't come anywhere near meeting the entire cost of the project. I hope that it will be enough to prompt other funding organisations to commit, to show them that this is a viable project.

You'll have noticed that in the last 12 months everything has been costing more. That includes all the costs associated with Project 14. We have had to review our financial projections, both for the construction and renovation phase and for the first few years of operations once the house is open for business. We've also been through some detailed work to satisfy Building Control's requirements over fire regulations. I would like to pay tribute to Copeland Community Fund for providing funding to pay for the work of our cost consultants Fairfield Cost Consultants of Kendal and for updates to the drawings by our architects. The total cost now exceeds £700,000. I know, I had a sharp intake of breath as well. But we've already raised or secured over £150,000, and the true value of that impressive figure is not just the pounds-sterling, it's the unequivocal message of support that it sends out to anyone who's listening. And talking of support, I'd also like to thank Jeff Cowton of Wordsworth Grasmere who continues to be a wonderful source of advice and encouragement; to say thank-you to the Heritage Trust Network which makes a huge amount of information and expertise available to us; and also to thank the committee of the Society for their enthusiastic support.

As you'll hear elsewhere in our officers' reports, No 14 has hosted various events and visits over the last year.

One final word from me concerns a change to the board of directors of the Nicholson House company. In May Nick Lancaster stepped down having made a terrific contribution since the company was first set up in 2020, giving us the benefit of his experience in the hospitality and tourism sector from his years as MD of Langdale Leisure. Last month I was delighted to welcome to the board John Baker, CEO of Whitehaven Harbour Commissioners, who will bring similar expertise to our endeavours, a very valuable addition to the team.

As the Society's President, Melvyn Bragg, says in an endorsement of our business plan, 'There is something about the houses of artists which never fails to illuminate their work and to enliven and excite the interest of visitors, particularly the young. It would be a real triumph for Millom to have Norman's house become such a centre'.

The year 2022-23 has seen some very substantial steps taken in that direction.

Charlie Lambert 25/3/23