

**REPORT ON *COMET* and COMET ONLINE 2019-20 / 20-21**  
Norman Nicholson Society AGM  
**Online Zoom Saturday, April 24<sup>th</sup> 2021 – 11.00 a.m.**

This report covers the years 2019-20 and 2020-21 as the onslaught of the Covid-19 pandemic in March 2020 meant that the AGM scheduled for that year was cancelled.

**Comet Online:** <http://wp.lancs.ac.uk/nns/>

In the report for the Norman Nicholson Society AGM April 13<sup>th</sup> 2019 I included a paragraph on the Comet Online Project. This is a brief update on that project and its usefulness.

At the 2018 AGM the Society mandated the committee, and specifically the editor of *Comet*, to look for ways in which the *Comet* archive could be put online and made available in a fully searchable format to the wider community. Dr. Christopher Donaldson, our Universities Liaison Officer, suggested that this would be a good project to work on in conjunction with the School of Computing and Communications at the University of Lancaster.

Our work with Lancaster University, specifically Dr Christopher Donaldson (Cultural History), Dr Paul Rayson (Computing and Communications) and Bartek Barański (Computer Sciences student), was carried out over the course of about six months, from October 2018 through to April 2019. In that period a large number of previous *Comets* were put online, both as full issues and as individual articles. The website is hosted by Lancaster University and is now maintained by Dr. Christopher Donaldson. There is an Article Index and an Author Index, which can be consulted to make searching easier. Past issues, which have been redacted where necessary, can be downloaded, as can individual articles. Copyright of the articles remains with the individual authors. The site also contains information about the Norman Nicholson Society and includes a link to our own website on the Home Page and a page dedicated to information about *Comet* and the NN Society. There is also a very useful page about Norman Nicholson himself and a page that describes the Archival Materials that relate to Nicholson.

The relatively short period of time in which the materials were prepared and redacted and the website was put together meant that not all our past issues have yet been put online. The intention was always to leave a gap of at least three years between an issue of *Comet* being made available to our members and its being placed online on the Lancaster University website. More recent issues of *Comet* can be downloaded in their original form from the Member Section of our own website.

If you make a Google Search for Comet Online, remember to include the words 'Norman Nicholson', otherwise you will be directed to Comet Electrical or to a Stevenage local online newspaper. I suggest the search term: 'Comet Online Norman Nicholson'.

The Covid-19 pandemic, and my own long-lasting Covid experience, meant that my plans to update the website with further past copies and articles were not carried out in 2019-20, but I hope that I will be able to continue redacting and preparing the materials later this year. Dr. Chris Donaldson will also continue to support this project.

We are extremely grateful to the University of Lancaster for hosting the website and to Dr. Donaldson, Mr Barański and Dr. Rayson for their collaboration on this project.

## **Comet 2019-20 and 2020-21**

In the Norman Nicholson Society year 2019-20 two issues of *Comet* were published (Vol. 14.1; Vol. 14.2).

**Vol. 14.1** included interesting memories relating to Norman by Merryn Williams, Roger Bush and Geraldine Green; an article by Mary Robinson on the translation of *The Old Man of the Mountains* into Welsh; poems by several members and NN Festival participants; an account of the process of creating 'An Image for Norman', by the artist and graphic designer Alan Roper and myself; a report on the Alliance of Literary Societies AGM Weekend at Nuneaton, in celebration of the bicentenary of George Eliot's birth; reports on the Norman Nicholson Festival 2019 and on the exhibition in Kansas City of a new artwork by Andy Goldsworthy, inspired by Nicholson's poem 'Wall'; and the third part of Professor Brian Whalley's response to Nicholson's Geology and Geomorphology. This series of articles will form a major resource for a proper appreciation of Nicholson's scientific knowledge and the way in which he used this in his work. The series is still ongoing. Finally, I had the sad duty of writing an obituary for one of our founding members, the poet Chris Pilling, who knew Nicholson personally and was an excellent writer in his own right.

**Vol.14.2** should have appeared in the spring of 2020. Unfortunately, I caught (suspected) Covid-19 myself in March that year and have been dealing with Long Covid symptoms ever since. This issue was therefore postponed until September 2020, although it reports on all the events the Society held or attended between September 2019 and January 2020.

The editorial dealt with some of the events that had to be put on hold, particularly the celebrations planned by the Wordsworth Trust to mark the 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Wordsworth's birth and the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the publication of his Duddon Sonnets. The Norman Nicholson Society had been invited to contribute to the exhibition on the Duddon Sonnets which would be the first exhibition to take place in the new Wordsworth Grasmere museum. In September 2020 both the opening of the museum and the exhibition had been postponed and it wasn't yet clear when – or even if – the exhibition would take place. I am pleased to say that the situation has now changed for the better, and the 'Endless Waters' exhibition is expected to open in May 2021, with community involvement from various groups, and a showcase dedicated to the impact of Wordsworth and the Duddon on Norman Nicholson. I expect to report on this exciting development in the *Comets* of 2021.

Vol 14.2 strongly featured the work of the stained glass artist Christine Boyce, who created the beautiful Norman Nicholson Memorial Window, placed in St. George's Church, Millom in 2000. The Society was extremely shocked to receive the news of Christine's sudden death in November 2019, only a month after the brilliant study day we had spent with her in Carlisle in October 2019. Again, it was a sad duty for me to write a tribute to her, but also a great joy to be able to present her wonderful life and work to members and friends of the Society.

Other important pieces included Charlie Lambert's essay on the relationship between the poet Matt Simpson and Norman Nicholson; the first part of an engaging article by Leo Finighan on Wordsworth, Nicholson and the Duddon; a continuation of Brian Whalley's 'Rocks and Landscape' series; reviews of a new book by Society Vice-President Neil Curry and a poetry collection by Mary Robinson; and several reports on events, including the LitHouses Conference, held in Brantwood in October 2019, the

Christmas Tree Festival 2019, and the Norman Nicholson Birthday Party 2020, our last live Society event before the lockdown.

**Vol 15.1** came out just before Christmas 2020. It was a bonus issue, intended to compensate members for the fact that the usual spring issue had been postponed. For the first time since I started editing *Comet*, there were no Society events to report on, again as a result of the pandemic. Nevertheless, this did not mean that our actual activity came to a standstill. The Society News column reported on the Lockdown Poetry Competition, the formation of the Norman Nicholson House Community Interest Company and a Walking Trails App, expected to be produced in the spring of 2021.

This issue also contained two important and interesting pieces by our doctoral student members, Laura Day (University of Durham) and Jack Threlfall Hartley (University of Oxford). Both of them are also brilliant photographers and their responses to landscape, here in Cumbria and also in Iceland, formed an important theme in this issue, complementing Brian Whalley's ongoing series on Nicholson and geomorphology. Laura even discovered a degree of freedom in the pandemic which enabled her to roam through Cumbria in a way that might have been impossible if she had been tied to her desk in Durham.

Charlie Lambert gave us another, very touching, piece on Nicholson's correspondence with Matt Simpson, and I was able to use some of my lockdown time to investigate the life of Nicholson's teacher, Miss Hobson, after receiving a tribute to her from Donald Benson, another of her former students. The article I wrote will be continued in a later issue of *Comet*, supplemented by further articles about Nicholson's schooling and his teachers. I had also been able to discover a 'lost' Nicholson poem – 'Christmas Carol for the First Man on the Moon' – with the help of Katy Conover, Archivist for Hearst Magazines UK, re-published for the first time in this issue, by kind permission of David Higham Associates Limited on behalf of the Estate of Norman Nicholson. Other pieces included a report on a Nicholson-inspired land art project by Irene Rogan and a discussion piece on Nicholson's poem 'The Blackberry' by Chris Donaldson.

As in previous issues, it was both a sad duty and a privilege for me to create tributes to the lives of some of our members who had passed away in the previous months: Tom Troll; Peter Houghton; and Valerie Rickerby.

### **Concluding remarks**

Because of the difficulties created by the pandemic, in 2020-21 *Comet* has appeared primarily in digital format. Rather than sending our members a printed copy, they were encouraged to download the digital version from the Members Section of the Norman Nicholson Society website. Full instructions on how to do this were sent out several times in our e-bulletins. Some members, who do not have access to the internet, were sent Vol. 14.2 by post. The Christmas issue (Vol. 15.1) was only available online, but the intention is to print and distribute a small number of copies of this issue as soon as it seems possible and safe to do so.

*Comet* has now been published for a full fifteen years. It has grown during that time into an important resource for members and non-members. It is a magazine I am proud to edit, but without the many writers who have contributed to it over the years, it would simply not exist. My grateful thanks to all of you, past and present.

**Antoinette Fawcett 16<sup>th</sup> April 2021**