

## REPORT ON TEN YEARS OF 'COMET'

For the **Norman Nicholson Society AGM**, April 16<sup>th</sup> 2016

Because the Norman Nicholson Society is celebrating 10 years of its existence this year, I thought I would present a brief report on some of the interesting facts which have emerged about the newsletter *Comet* as I have gone through the records of all our issues.

*Comet* originally appeared as a four-page newsheet, published in time for the inaugural meeting of the Society on 31<sup>st</sup> March 2006. Little did I think that ten years later I would have edited 24 issues of the journal (yes, that humble little newsheet probably does now deserve the hybrid title of newsletter-journal) and that I would have edited more than 74 individual authors, as well as a large number of children's and teenagers' works. If these are also included, then the total number of writers is more than 100, whilst the articles and other items published are around 250.

The range of people writing for *Comet* has been impressive. Remember that each writer has contributed their thoughts, opinions, memories, poems, research, stories and essays from the goodness of their hearts, and from an enthusiasm and passion for the work of Norman Nicholson, or for the written word itself.

*Comet* has, thanks to Neil Curry's help in approaching eminent writers in the early days, attracted some surprisingly 'big' names: the first issue alone contained words of support from Melvyn Bragg and Andrew Motion, as well as a personal response to a Nicholson poem by the well-loved poet U. A. Fanthorpe, now sadly no longer with us. Other fine creative writers and poets who have contributed to *Comet* include, of course, Neil Curry himself, Chris Pilling, Mary Robinson, Philip Houghton, Martyn Halsall, Andrew Forster, Kathleen Jones, David Scott, Matt Simpson, Hugh Thomson – and many a young person whose innate talent for words may first have been spotted and encouraged by competitions organized by the Society. But there is much more to *Comet* than this – over the years the newsletter-journal has attracted articles by academics, independent researchers and enthusiasts who have shown us new ways of looking at Nicholson's writings: think of David Cooper's pioneering work, for example; or of Alan Beattie's articles with their emphasis on Nicholson's response to time, to the environment, and to questions of love, sexuality and gender; or of Martyn Halsall's theologically nuanced exploration of Nicholson's response to

war; or of David Boyd's faithful and intensive study of Nicholson's literary, social and religious networks.

But there is a great deal more than this too. I have also very much enjoyed editing people's personal memories of Nicholson, some of which have truly deepened our knowledge of the man. I'm thinking of articles submitted by Peggy Troll, Susan Troll, Robin Gray, Keith Jackson, Janice Savage, Angela Petersen, and many others. One of my personal favourites amongst this type of article has to be one gleaned from my correspondence with the Swedish teacher and literary-theological researcher, Göran Strandell, in which he told me how hospitable Nicholson had been when Strandell travelled to England to meet him, and how they had memorably shared a tot of whisky together. That seemed so authentic, given what we know of Nicholson's (moderate) fondness for the liquor. The work I did then, in exploring Nicholson's links with Scandinavia, is coming to fruition now in my current research into his reception in non-Anglophone cultures. I also remember Rosemary Joyce's article on her sister Yvonne, precious memories which she managed to share with us before it was too late to do so.

Each issue – and I am quoting the opinions of others – seems to top the last in terms of its range and interest, but the fact is that this really *is* only 'seeming'. Each issue still presents us with a treasure-house of useful and fascinating ways of understanding both the life and the work of our poet. There are loyal and long-standing writers for *Comet* whose own work has clearly grown in depth of perception as the years have passed – but there are also brilliant one-offs whose articles reveal something about Nicholson that we haven't seen before.

If this were a prize-giving ceremony, I would be hard-pressed to select the best writers, or the most prolific, or the wittiest, or the most unusual – all of the writers who have permitted me to edit and publish their work have trusted me to present it in the best possible way, and have, I will emphasize again, given freely of their time, their intellect, and their passion. I feel that it has been a real privilege to edit such work – even though, on occasion, I have found it difficult to make time for the tasks involved in bringing you – the members and friends of the Society – this first thrice-yearly, now six-monthly, newsletter-journal that has grown and grown in size, until in recent times it has regularly clocked in at 28 or 32 densely packed pages.

If you get a chance to look at the first edition of *Comet*, for which I had to buy and get used to a specialized desktop publishing programme, you'll see that I was definitely still learning how to lay out and present the text. Even now, undoubtedly, I will make little mistakes and slips of judgement, but I think that the more recent editions of *Comet* look and feel like quite a professional production, thanks too to our printer, George Coulter of Milner's in Barrow-in-Furness.

Please do keep on submitting work to me. Take the time to think about your memories of Norman, if you were one of the people lucky enough to have known him, however fleetingly, and write these down. Or feel free to write me a letter, by mail or e-mail, to give your reactions to events, to articles published in *Comet*, or to suggest ways in which we can further promote Nicholson's work. There are still many poems to explore – and I haven't received a reading of a favourite poem for quite some time now. I would encourage you to do so, in whatever style or at whatever length (within reason) you wish. I'd like to publish more Member Profiles (don't be shy to suggest yourself, or to suggest someone you'd like to see featured). I'd also like to see more variety in the reports – quite a few end up being written by the editor, in fact, and I'm sure that readers would enjoy hearing other voices. I also welcome creative writing inspired by Nicholson's themes and, of course, the kind of thematic article on aspects of his work which *Comet* has been so rich in.

I am in the course of finalizing a list of all the writers and articles which have appeared in *Comet* over the past ten years, alphabetically, by author, and a second one by year, so that those of you who have a full set of back copies, but can't remember where to find a particular piece of work, will be able to locate these more efficiently. I hope these two lists can be published on our website, and I will also send them out to members who have e-mail addresses.

I welcome, as always, any suggestions for specific articles, themes, or general improvements to *Comet*. Here's to the next ten years...

Antoinette Fawcett

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