

Jack Woods

Wainwright Society member Jack Woods lives near Preston. He met AW on a number of occasions as well as exchanging correspondence with him:

The dark and stormy night of 6 December 1979 found me driving the thirty miles from Kendal to Dalton-in-Furness. I was going to see an exhibition of sketches from *A Second Furness Sketchbook*, by Mr A Wainwright, who was to be present. I'd already had a lovely letter from him in 1971 and I was very keen to meet him. I arrived early and there was hardly anyone in the hall, which wasn't surprising as the weather was appalling. I had already bought the sketch I wanted: Wetherlam, my favourite mountain at the time. There it was on the wall with some others.



I looked round for the artist. That big man in the sports jacket by the table must be him, I thought. There were still only about half a dozen people about, and he didn't seem to be busy with anyone, so I approached him and tentatively held out my hand. I said something like, 'You must be Mr Wainwright; I'm so glad to meet you', and of course he said 'Yes' and we shook hands. I said I had bought one or two of his sketches and also one on the wall and he asked which one. I pointed it out. I asked if he would possibly allow me to take a photo before the place became crowded, and to my surprise he agreed. I suggested he stand looking at the sketch I'd bought and he did so. I remember

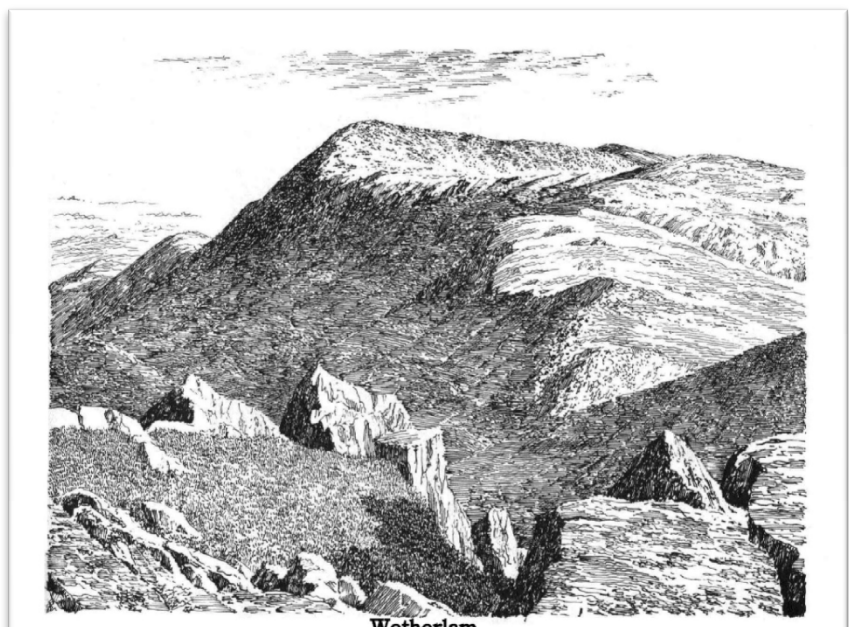


asking him to put his pipe in his mouth adding that it was a pity he couldn't have a curl of smoke issuing from it!

In January I sent him a 5 x 7 enlargement. He kindly wrote to thank me, saying it was 'quite the best flash photo I have ever seen ... really excellent'. Many years later this photograph was to figure in a mystery. Leafing through Hunter Davies' biography of AW that I had just bought, I was surprised to see my photograph of AW – but in black and white! It was wrongly captioned as taken in Ulverston, and attributed to a Barrow newspaper photographer. I wrote to Jenny Dereham at Michael Joseph to set matters right. It seems that Mr Wainwright had so liked my photo that he'd had several copies made in monochrome size 8 x 10 but hadn't told me about it. Both corrections appeared in the paperback edition – but the caption reverted to Ulverston in the next reprint by Frances Lincoln. Ah well!

Later I wrote to AW with a query about something in his *North Western Fells* guide. After expressing my admiration of the guides, I'd had the temerity to suggest he might have made a mistake about the view from Grisedale Pike! The reply I received was not from the curmudgeonly, arrogant man some people have suggested he was: 'I think you may be wrong, but if I can drag my weary old limbs up there this summer (hard work nowadays) I will confirm or confess.' I immediately wrote back and asked him not to even think of it, and I would have another look. Of course, he was right.

A few years later a neighbour mentioned that he had taken some of Wainwright's books to his home to be signed. I rang up and asked if he would kindly sign my set of Pictorial Guides as he had done for my friend. AW never used to answer the phone, always leaving it to Mrs Wainwright and she said yes it was alright. Although he must have been working on some future book when I visited, AW came down and sat with



me for a good twenty minutes, signed my books and chatted, pipe in mouth and cat on knees. It has been said that he was a difficult man to have a conversation with; but I found him quite easy, both of us contributing bits and pieces about the fells, my job at Westminster Abbey, how long he took to draw one of his wonderful sketches, and so on. There were no awkward moments, no intimation that I was taking up his time. When I apologised for the condition of one of the books, which had suffered when my tent had blown down in a gale during a night camp near Angle Tarn, he just said it proved it was being used and that was what it was for.

I was lucky enough to be welcomed a few more times later and he readily signed two of his large colour books for me. He was unable to see me on only one occasion, because he was going to be out filming with the BBC.

While I was still living in Mealbank, Kendal, Mrs Wainwright brought AW by car to deliver one of the books my neighbour Colin Wild had left at his house for signing. What followed has since become rather an embarrassment for me. I had bought his sketch of the *Scafell range from Crinkle Crag*s, but when I was developing some photo prints I spilled some fixer. Later I was mortified to find that the sketch of the Scafells had a small yellowish stain right in the centre. When I saw that AW was outside I took the sketch to him and (how did I have the cheek?) asked if he could possibly cover up the stain somehow. He looked carefully at it, and said, 'I think I can do something. Leave it with me.' When I got it back from him all trace of the stain had gone, a new piece of rock in its place! So I have not only an original Wainwright, but a 'double original'. But how I cringe now when thinking about it! What other artist would have made an alteration to one of his originals?

In 1981 I wrote to him about the suggestion by some authorities that there had been a Roman road passing over Whinfell linking Low Borrow Bridge fort with Watercock and that I thought I'd found evidence of it along the route. He answered with a long typed letter, saying he'd submitted my idea to two experts, one of whom agreed with me and the other giving four sound reasons why he didn't. I was busy changing jobs and home to one in London at the time so was unable to continue the study and the issue is still unresolved. AW wrote: 'I can

understand your reluctance to leave your cottage in Mealbank but the fells will always be here to welcome you back whenever you can come.'

Earlier I had investigated the old road from Kendal to Shap and while in London wrote and self-printed a booklet about it. In 1984 I sent a copy to him for his comments. He not only read it, he asked the CWAAS (Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society) if they would be interested in publishing it in the annual transactions, and he also approached the *Westmorland Gazette*. The former thought it too long; the latter that it would not be commercially viable. However, he set up a meeting for me with Bill Mitchell, at *Cumbria Magazine*. He, too, thought it too long for an article, and too short for a booklet. I was much impressed by AW's thoughtful efforts on my behalf. He suggested a 'simple map...would be a useful help as a frontispiece'. I cannot draw anything – even a map – but later with the help of a computer I was able to self-publish the booklet with a few maps under the title *The North Road*. The then owner of Kirkland Books agreed to take batches of 20 at a time and all of them sold out quite quickly. I gave copies to Carlisle and Kendal libraries.

In 1985 I discovered a new booklet by AW: *Old Roads of Eastern Lakeland*. In it was a description of the very road I had written about! I sent a copy to him asking him to please sign it. In reply he said 'you are in a way responsible for this being published. Most of the chapters I did about four years ago but then abandoned it ... until you appeared with your manuscript ... So I dug it out of its dust ... and sent it to the Gazette'. I have to admit I was a little surprised he hadn't mentioned it to me beforehand!

That was, in fact, the last letter I had from AW. After he had returned home from his first stay in hospital in 1990 I wrote to him describing one of my days on the fells. Betty replied on his behalf saying he'd enjoyed hearing the letter, which she had read to him.

Of course, everyone forms his own impressions of a person: mine of AW are of a warm and generous man from whom I had the privilege of receiving kind words and help. Small wonder that my memories of him

are treasured. I only wish I had the same skills and devotion that he showed in his writing and drawing.