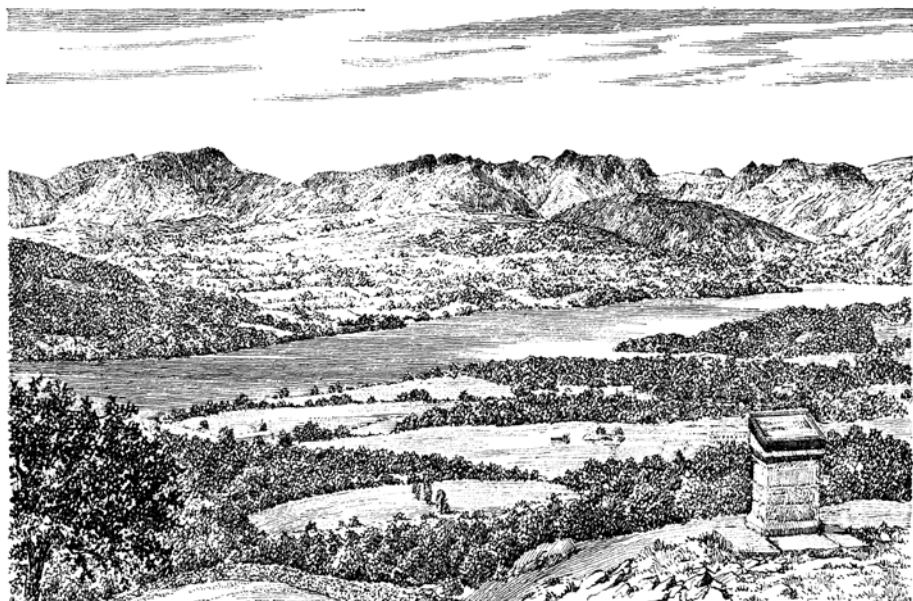


## Wainwright's masterpiece

Chris Butterfield charts the story of Alfred Wainwright's 1975 book *Westmorland Heritage*, which captured a county about to change forever



“When are you going to decide who gets number one? I can’t even go to the loo without locking the door.” Andrew Nichol’s frustrations were obvious to *Westmorland Gazette* general manager Harry Firth. No decision had been made as to who would receive the very first of the 1,000 freshly bound copies of Alfred Wainwright’s new book, *Westmorland Heritage*.

The publisher had no lockup in which to safeguard the books. The only solution was to stack them on the floor of works manager Andrew Nichol’s office. There was a supporting wall below, above which the books would have to be

strategically stacked to support the sheer weight. Andrew was constantly warning everyone who entered his office not to accidentally kick the books; something had to be done.

Storage wasn’t the only problem. Signing and numbering the books was proving to be a challenge. Wainwright had never set foot in the *Westmorland Gazette* premises and was unlikely to ever do so. Taking them to Wainwright wasn’t an option either – carting 1,000 books

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*Above: The view from Orrest Head, an illustration from Westmorland Heritage*

to his home in Kendal Green and back was impractical. After some thought, a workaround was found. The individual folded sixteen-page sheets – all 1,000 of them – were taken to Wainwright, who signed and numbered them, after which they were returned to the *Westmorland Gazette*, to be bound.

A day or two later, much to Andrew's relief, it was decided by Wainwright that Paul Wilson should receive copy number one. Paul Wilson, Lord Lieutenant of Westmorland from 1965 to 1974, and of Cumbria from 1974 to 1980, was

influential in Wainwright compiling the *Westmorland Heritage* book. It was also his idea for Wainwright to create the magnificent Westmorland Map in 1974: he wanted the county of Westmorland to be recorded before it was changed forever by local government reorganisation.

The book, one of Wainwright's masterpieces, is a celebration of the old Westmorland county, featuring nearly 2,000-line drawings of buildings, landmarks and scenery. Every parish in the county is meticulously recorded in great detail. Shortly after *Westmorland*



The popular edition of Westmorland Heritage, together with the original order form and the printer's negatives, now held by Chris Butterfield

### Cumbria's original review of *Westmorland Heritage*, from December 1975

One of the most remarkable books ever published on the Lakeland scene has just appeared from a now familiar pen, that of A. Wainwright, already known for his Lakeland walking guides and sketchbooks. Its title is *Westmorland Heritage*, and like all this author's previous books there is not a single letter of type in it. It is all printed from plates taken direct from the author's own drawings and lettering.

It is a book of almost 500 large

pages of drawings with concise notes on each, and goes steadily through the county in alphabetical order, from Ambleside to Yanwath, covering views, buildings, historical remains, village oddities and everything else except people.

Not only is this a book that will provide continuing pleasure for all who know Lakeland, but it has an historical importance as Westmorland no longer exists as a separate county since its incorporation into Cumbria.

*Right: author Alfred Wainwright and (far right) Westmorland Gazette works manager Andrew Nichol, who oversaw production of both the original and the popular editions of Westmorland Heritage*



*Heritage's* publication in 1975, Wainwright wrote to Paul thanking him for his generous review of the book and for the initial idea.

The remaining books were issued strictly in the order in which they were sold. The books retailed at £11 and proved so popular that nearly 400 copies were

sold before they had even been produced; the remaining books were all sold within two weeks of its publication. To this day Andrew believes they should have been sold for no less than £25.

Twelve years after its publication, many people were still trying, unsuccessfully, to obtain a copy.

In the author's own words, it is a "dated book" – and that gives it added importance. Yet it will be as a book of 500 beautiful drawings, each accompanied by a touch of nostalgia for those who know their Lakeland, which will make this a treasure to be enjoyed over and over again and



probably to be handed down to future generations. It was published for the author by the Westmorland Gazette, Kendal

(limited edition, fully subscribed).

**H. J. S. (Harry Scott, then-managing director)**

Wainwright had been wrong to doubt its potential for success. That demand led Andrew to telephone the head office of the Publishers Association, to seek advice on reprinting the book. Specifically, he wanted to know whether republication would be in bad faith to those who had bought the original limited-edition book. He need not have worried. The Publishers Association said publishing the book again would affect nothing. Its rule was that if ten years or more had passed since the original publication, and all the books had sold, then everything

“ That hand-numbered, first copy was something of a holy grail for Wainwright fans ”

was okay. Wainwright also had to give permission to reprint the book. Even though the *Westmorland Gazette* held the copyright to his other titles books, *Westmorland Heritage*, as a limited edition, wasn't listed in the original copyright agreement. They had long since sold out when Wainwright signed the copyright over to the *Gazette* in 1983.

In 1988, 3,000 copies of *Westmorland Heritage* – popular edition – were printed. It sold well, despite it being neither a limited nor leather-bound edition. Andrew's good judgement had paid off. It would be another sixteen years until we would see the book in print again. In 2004, Frances Lincoln published a third

edition but it has been out of print ever since.

In 1990, Andrew gathered together all the original *Westmorland Heritage* printing plates and had them framed. They proved very popular and, even today, those featuring Lake District scenes attract high prices.

Thanks to David Rigg, the owner of Kendal printer Titus Wilson, I recently became custodian of all existing Wainwright book printing material, including the original gold blocking for *Westmorland Heritage's* Limited and Popular editions. These fabulous one-of-a-kind blocks are now archived.

Finding the different editions of Wainwright's masterpiece in mint unread condition, proved quite a challenge. It took me several years to acquire all three. Although satisfied with my finds, more detective work remained if the story was to be completed: that hand-numbered first copy of *Westmorland Heritage* was something of a holy grail for Wainwright fans and collectors, and I needed to track down. I found it by sheer luck and expect to take custody of it soon.

Its original owner, Paul Wilson, had died in 1980. During his lifetime, Paul had had a great passion for windmills and watermills. His close friend, architect John Kenneth Major, was an expert on such buildings. John was born in Reading but for some years lived in Kendal, where he had worked closely with Paul.

After Paul's death, the book remained with his wife. She eventually gave it to John who kept it for many years. Before his own death in 2009, he sold it to Selby bookseller Anthony Vickers, which is where I came across it. Book one also



came with Wainwright's original 1975 letter to Paul. Together, they are an important piece of Wainwright's book publishing history.

Anthony has specialised in Wainwright's publications for the last twenty-five years and was mentioned in Hunter

Davies's Wainwright biography. He has since become a good friend and a great Wainwright related contact.

My Facebook group, Alfred Wainwright Books & Memorabilia, is well into its second year. During that time I have been surprised by how many members have asked me if I have spare copies of *Westmorland Heritage*, as they have been unable to find one. That suggests to me that the book deserves a fourth publication, to enable a new generation to appreciate the genius of Alfred Wainwright. ■

● *Tony Greenbank chats with Chris Butterfield about his Wainwright obsession in the August edition of Cumbria, on sale July 25.*



"I'd like to see the manager but I've lost my glasses, so I can't"