

Lockdown brings unexpected lettering discovery...

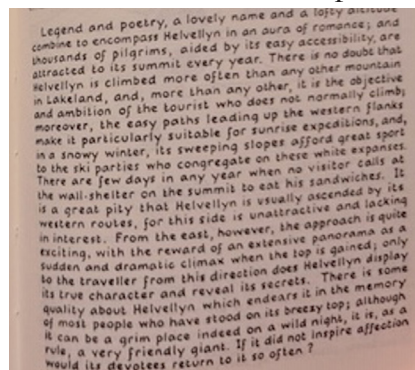
Text by Ellie Bloxham; photos by Ellie Bloxham and Chris Butterfield

In October 2020, knowing that the COVID pandemic was likely to keep on affecting our lives well into 2021, I decided to take the plunge and purchase a treadmill with the iFit capability to help me stay fit in my own home. This capability has allowed me to walk/hike virtually around the world. However, when I made this purchase, I had no idea of the unexpected connections to lettering that I would find on these travels ...

As part of the UK Lake District walking series the iFit trainer Alex Gregory talks about some of the wonderful artists, writers and poets that have scoured the beautiful fells (local name for hill/mountain) of the Lake District National Park, located in the north-western part of England. One such writer was Alfred Wainwright.

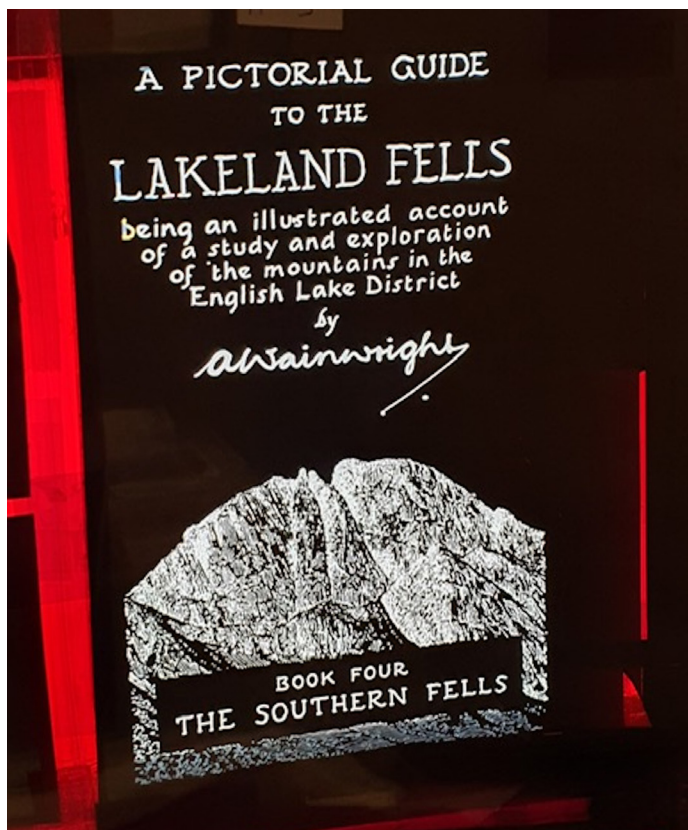
Growing up in the UK I had heard of Alfred Wainwright's books documenting the various hikes in the Lake District and had viewed some of the books in the used bookstores over the years. What I didn't know is the amazing story behind the books.

Wainwright hand wrote seven books as part of his pictorial guide to the Lake District. He began writing book one, the Eastern Fells, in 1952. After six months of writing Wainwright scrapped 100 pages as he disliked the way the pages were justified down the left-hand side only. So, he started writing these pages again and justified the lines down both sides of the page, spacing the words or letters out just enough to ensure that he didn't have any split words and to "land perfectly on the right-hand side. He did this line after line". He was a perfectionist.



Excerpt of Wainwright's handwriting from his Eastern Fells Pictorial Guide.

Wainwright took this manuscript to Andrew Nichol, a book publishing manager in the Lake District area who was convinced he was looking at a new typeface. On learning that the entire manuscript

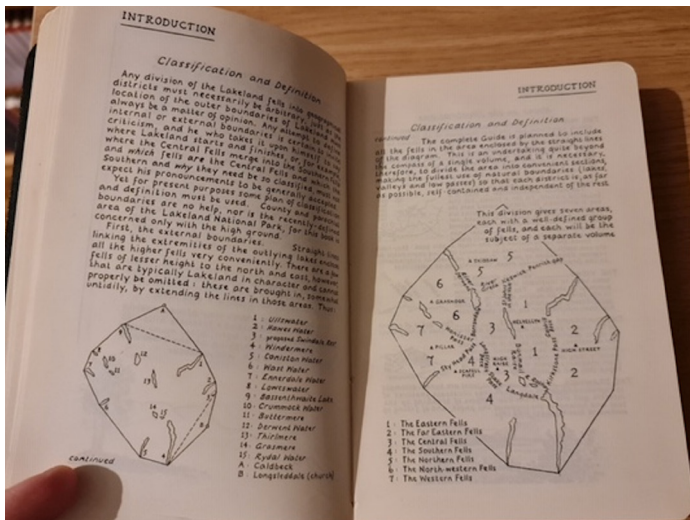


had been written by hand, Nichol couldn't believe it - even now at the age of 88 this fact still amazes him.

Fascinated with this story, I wanted to find out more and came across a website honouring Wainwright and his incredible feat (<https://www.alfredwainwright.co.uk/the-eastern-fells/>). The website has been put together by Chris Butterfield, Wainwright aficionado and archivist. Chris kindly provided some pictures of the lettering (seen here in this article) and he also provided some more insight into Wainwright's amazing lettering capability.

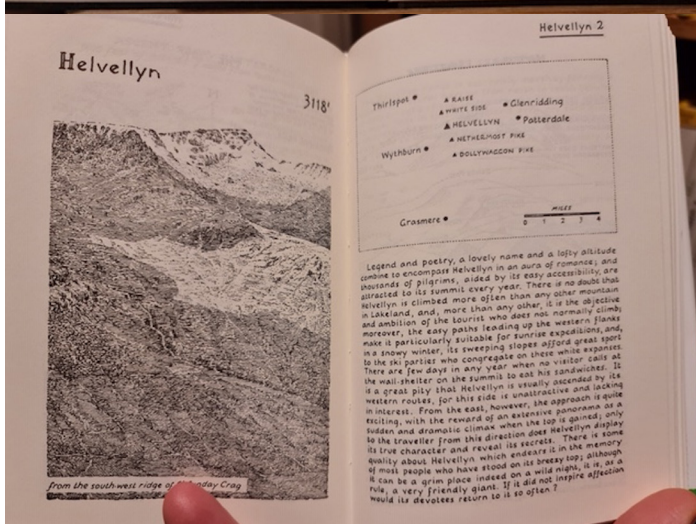
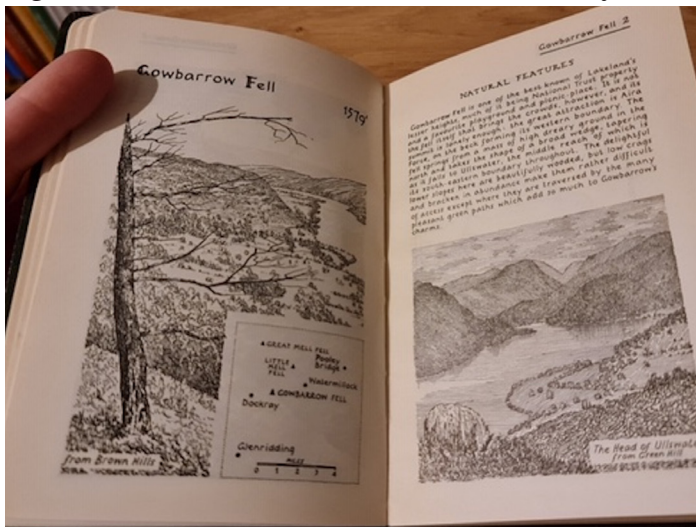
Chris indicated that each book includes introduction pages related to classification and definition of the specified area, details of the specific Fells to be traversed and a conclusion in which Wainwright indicated how he felt about a particular area - good or bad.

An example of a 'Classification and Definition' section has been provided here. Note the drawings and lists, both perfectly positioned as shown and all in Wainwright's own hand!



Example of a handwritten 'Classification and Definition' section of one of Wainwright's Pictorial Guides.

Each fell description includes hand drawn maps showing the individual ascents to get to the summit and hand drawn pictures of the landscape or interesting elements that should be admired on the way.

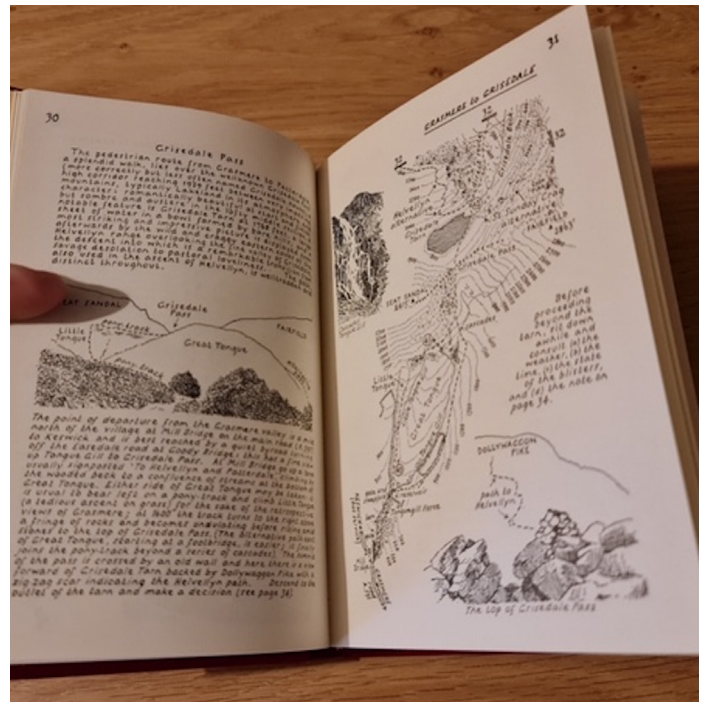


Examples of the hand drawn Fells, location with respect to other Fells or towns and their individual descriptions.

• CAPITAL LETTERS •

It boggles the mind how much of a perfectionist Wainwright must have been to produce such a professional manuscript and how talented to have only written it out once or twice.

Wainwright went on to write other pictorial guides including the Coast to Coast walk shown here. Note the hand-drawn diagrams showing the contours for Grisedale Pass.



These hand-written versions were printed using the Letterpress process (initially). This process photographs the original pages and uses the negatives to produce the plates for printing. As Chris rightly indicated to me, the fact that no one has produced a guidebook quite like this since is a testament to how good he was. Apparently when Wainwright "was asked about it, he was so casual with his response, as though it was nothing and everyone could do it." Oh, to be that good!



Alfred Wainwright memorial unveiled at Blackburn, Lancashire, UK. Photo by Davis Dixon, Creative Commons license.