

PINE CONE



The Newsletter of The Friends of St Mary's Church, Wreay
Issue No25 November 2022



*The Last Stand of the 44th Regiment at
Gundamuck, 1842 by William Barns Wollen*

Shap Writers' Workshop
Thirty Years a Soldier - Major William Thain

DEAR FRIENDS,



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"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow." Albert Einstein
At a time of so much uncertainty I thought that this quote seemed appropriate.

Looking back, it was unfortunate that we had to cancel the Friends Open Day in September as it was not going to be viable with so few tickets sold. But we have learnt that perhaps circumstances have changed and, as we look forward, we need to rethink the nature of society activities.

So, on a positive note, the committee is planning a major event in 2023 which will take the best parts of our Open Days but be more unstructured and appeal to a wider audience we hope - await further news!

Indeed all is not lost and I am delighted that Stuart Eastwood has contributed a resumé of his talk to this edition. It turns out that Stuart has a very personal interest in the 1st Afghan War and Major William Thain....read on. We also hope that he will be able to deliver his talk as a stand alone event next year.

When we refurbished the Chapel of Rest, now the Sarah Losh Heritage Centre, we hoped that it would become a valuable resource for visiting groups who wanted to study and be inspired by Sarah's legacy. So I was delighted when Susan Allen of Wordsworth Grasmere held a day of writing and drawing for the Shap Writers group and I am pleased to be able to share their work with you. This was followed by a group from Allhallows and I do hope that we will see similar events in the coming years. As Susan says 'We would encourage others to spend time in this very special place.' So do spread the word.

In uncertain times we can all 'learn from yesterday, live for today (and) hope for tomorrow'.

Raymond Whittaker

SHAP WRITERS at WREAY by Susan Allen

Members of Shap Writers' group shared a fascinating day at Wreay this summer. Some, not all, of the group already knew the church but the Heritage Centre proved a revelation for all of us and was the perfect base for a day of reflection, good company, conversation, writing and drawing.



One of the highlights of my outreach work with Wordsworth Grasmere is our regular writing workshop at the Old Courthouse in Shap and over the past few years we have, when possible, made trips around Cumbria to explore and respond to the people, landscapes, buildings and art which makes the county so intriguing. Jenny Uglow's wonderful study of Sarah Losh's life, family connections with the Wordsworths (amongst others) and her innovative approach to design sparked an interest in making this trip together.

At Wreay we were delighted to be joined by artist Alison Critchlow for one of our collaborative series of Poetry & Paint sessions, encouraging people who perhaps don't draw to try and giving everyone a relaxing but inspirational environment in which to combine words and images. Sarah Losh and the Heritage Centre certainly provided this. The information in the Centre, so beautifully curated, along with insights from Raymond Whittaker & Mike Jones (Friends of St. Mary's Church, Wreay), together with access to the Mausoleum, all contributed to a remarkable day. As one of the writers said, she appreciated being guided to a place she might otherwise not have known at all. We would all encourage others to spend time in this very special place and respond to what it has to offer us all today.

Members of the group on the day: Alison Critchlow (artist), Henry Elphinstone, Janet Wood, Lania Knight, Peter Dicken, Rosemary Campbell, Sue Millard, Susan Allen (Wordsworth Grasmere) and Victoria Stevenson.

I wanted to show you the church I built in the village

Each arched window and door carve
a silhouette. The latch, the knob,
a lotus. Hinges, your fletched arrows.

I painted each globe an hour
of sunset. I cut the alabaster
windows to watch the alley

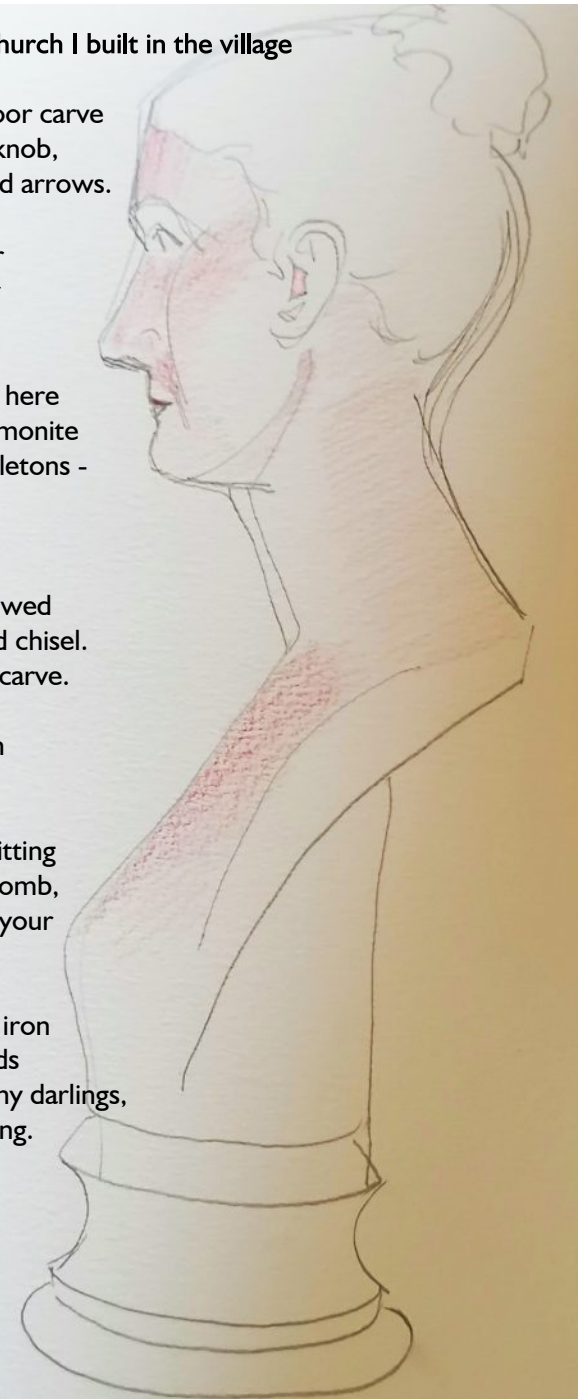
of yew, a solitary walk from here
to somewhere beyond. Ammonite
and branching coral, exoskeletons -
they are ancient seas.

When there was no one left
who knew our stories, I showed
the villagers how to chip and chisel.
I taught the farmer's son to carve.
I taught his father to quarry
and the woodsmen to notch
and set the beams aloft.

There you are - Katherine sitting
by the sea, reading in your tomb,
William, an arrow buried in your
shoulder, by the old well.

They say stone and copper, iron
and alabaster hold the sounds
we no longer hear. Listen, my darlings,
the wind in the yews is sighing.

Lania Knight





On visiting Wreay one June

From Afghanistan to Woodside
the gift of a pinecone
plants a seed
Arrows rail around the dry well
iron palings
where a small lion lives
thirsting for light and water
and the company of other lions
We are only here - they say -
because of a few inches of top soil
and the accident of rain
More arrows dart across the door
narrow shutters let in air
and show another side to the argument
Are we in or out?

Susan Allen

Haiku 75 - 83 Wreay

A lost pencil,
That's all to take away from
A painted village?

Howling through foliage
Challenged by roaring traffic
Breath of sunlit life.

Chapel of ease of
Rest, stillness and quietness
Calm the living flesh.

Disturbing not the
Unbeating hearts of those
Beyond mortal toil.

A sacred site deep,
Beyond human cognisance
Forgiving loam love.

Braced against a trunk
High in a swirling leafed ash
Buoyant, brave boyhood.

And there they are, two
Podded peas, unlike any others
With secret smiles, nods

Of recognition
Out in the world, separate
From their vines

But nurtured in the
Same soil, rooted in lineage
Nurtured to independence.

Peter Dicken

A Church rebuilt by Sarah Losh in 1840-42

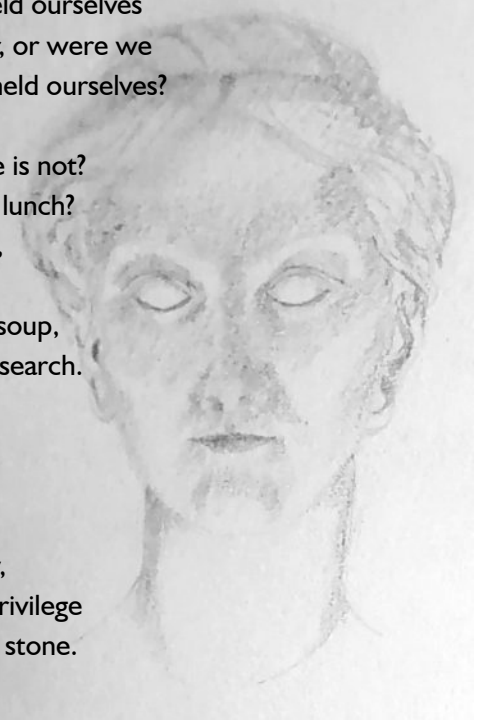
Outside, a Jubilee flag snaps at the wind
and the church rides it, like a stolid Ark.

I'm spinning words here in a writers' workshop
and groping for some truth. I am not looking
at the church, but at the people next to me –
what our posture takes in, what it gives back,
each subtly changed by what's been given.
I should make art here: I should sing a protest,
or paint a passport for my friend's best girl
whose house is dust on yon side of Odessa.

Who else here feels that they're pretending?
Which of us dredged up words to praise the Queen?
And did we change, then, how we held ourselves
when we were singing God Save Her, or were we
changing what it meant, by how we held ourselves?

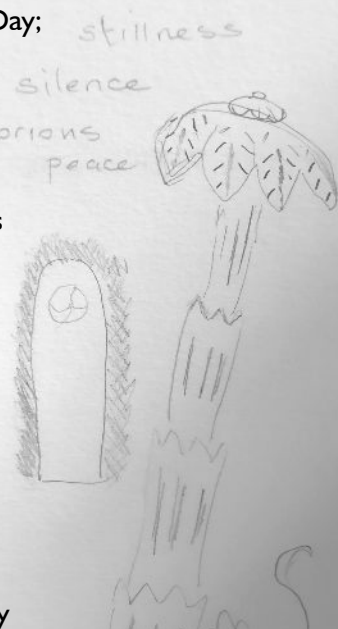
Can you define a woman by what she is not?
Can we make art before it's time for lunch?
I have brought cheese as salt as tears,
olives with pimienta red as blood.
I do not eat them. We share creamy soup,
chat about folksong, and resume the search.

I am not looking now at any others
but at myself, pencilling in this faint
graphite-grey. Sarah's memorial eyes
are a Victorian blank – lit from below,
no longer from within – but what a privilege
to have that vision build clean lines in stone.



She made no Christ in agony, no Judgement Day;
the deadly heads of arrows are concealed;
no image here of grieving Mother, Mary.
Disciples and the Creed surround the apse
in round-head arches like a country dance.
Her windows glow re-formed in ancient glass
and female angels fly above the nave,
their gaze fixed outward. Lectern and altar
float among birds and flowers, fossil ferns,
and Fibonacci's pine-cone spiral. Life.
It riots everywhere, like art reborn.

Sue Millard



A Visit to Wreay - Impressions

Balmy, blustery, translucent sunshine – Wreay
Bathed in a watercolour wash.

Rounded windows, arrows, pine cones,
Sarah's mark, in wood and stone.

Ancient and modern, glass fragments form
Kaleidoscope of refracted light.

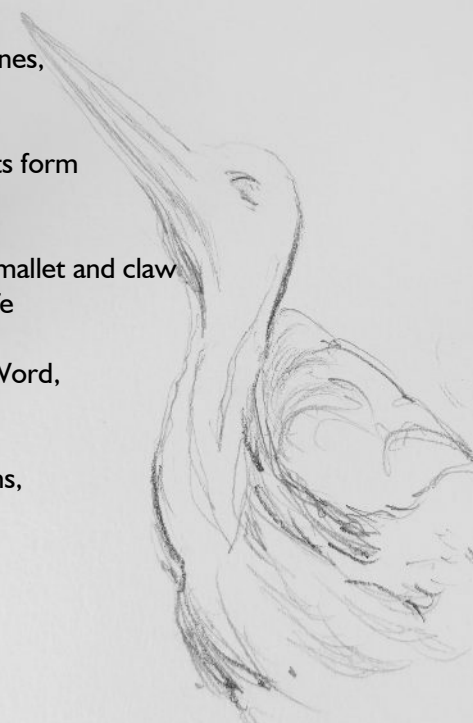
Alabaster font, fashioned by chisel, mallet and claw
Embellished with symbols of new life

Sturdy dark bog oak, delivers The Word,
Testaments of time

Stencil-like filigree of fossils and ferns,
Illuminated by natural light

Wonders of creation extolled
In geometric beauty of nature.

Janet Wood



THIRTY YEARS A SOLDIER - MAJOR WILLIAM THAIN by Stuart Eastwood

I was approached early this year by Raymond Whittaker and Richard Dixon to give a talk to the Friends of St. Mary's Church in September about the 1st Afghan War (1839-42). This related to the memorial in the Churchyard erected by Sarah Losh to Major William Thain 33rd Regiment of Foot, who was killed in January 1842.

Although the talk had to be cancelled, I began to do more detailed research on William Thain and his military service, firstly because of his connection with Cumbria and secondly due to a family connection with the 33rd (or 1st Yorkshire West Riding) Regiment of Foot, later to become The Duke of Wellington's Regiment. Two of my ancestors, Samuel Coggill (great-grandfather x 6) and his son John, both served as Sergeants in the 33rd between 1772 and 1817.

William's connection with Wreay and the Losh family and his military career have been well documented in Jenny Uglow's book *The Pinecone* and article by Peter Pickles in the Friends Newsletter of May 2014. Service in the military probably came from William's father James, who worked for the Losh family as a supervisor of their alkali works at Walker-on-Tyne. James had served in the Americas with the British Army, as a mercenary officer in the Swedish Army and in 1793 joined the Northumberland Militia as a volunteer, being commissioned as a Captain in 1807. Following in his father's footsteps, William age 15 received a commission as a Lieutenant in the Northumberland Militia dated 29th November 1811, beginning a military career which lasted 30 years.

Throughout Great Britain & Ireland the County Militia Regiments, as well as locally raised volunteer units, provided home defence against the threat



A Recruiting Sergeant of the 33rd Regiment of Foot, 1814

of invasion during the Napoleonic Wars and were a major source of reinforcements for a greatly expanded Army. In May 1813, William was commissioned from the Militia as an Ensign in the 33rd Foot '*without purchase*'. It was common practice for many officers to buy their commissions and thereby advance their careers above others who were older and more experienced. However, William's promotions throughout his career were all due both to merit and ability, as well as filling posts of those who left the Regiment as casualties (dead men's shoes), or by transfer and retirement.

On 24th June 1813 William joined the 33rd at Windsor and embarked in July 1813 for Europe, serving first in North Germany and then in the Netherlands. The next two years would be the most active and, perhaps most formative, of his career. He kept a detailed diary during his military service and extracts covering his service in the Netherlands Campaign of 1813-14 form a chapter in Ian Bamford's excellent book *Triumph & Disasters – Eyewitness Accounts of the Netherlands Campaign 1813-14*. He was present at the siege of Antwerp in early 1814 and on 8th March at the unsuccessful night assault on the city of Bergen-op-Zoom, during which the 33rd suffered 29 officers and men killed, 69 wounded and 58 taken prisoner. On a local (Cumbrian) note, the 55th (Westmoreland) Regiment, later the 2nd Battalion Border Regiment, fought in the same action.

In April 1814, following Napoleon's abdication and cessation of hostilities, the 33rd remained in the Netherlands with the Army of Occupation. William Thain saw duty both as the Regiment's Adjutant and then as Town Adjutant in Antwerp, which became the main depot for British forces remaining in Europe. In May 1815, he was appointed as Adjutant of the 33rd Foot and rejoined his Regiment; this appointment and promotion to Lieutenant was formally confirmed in August 1815.

Following Napoleon's return from exile, the 33rd fought under Wellington in the Waterloo campaign and were first engaged against Napoleon's Army at the village of Quatre Bras in Belgium on 16th June 1815. Having marched 20 miles, the 33rd arrived at 4pm to support the defence of this vital cross-roads and engaged French infantry. William wrote: '*....We gave them a most beautiful volley and charged, but they ran faster than our troops (already fatigued) could do, and we consequently did not touch them with the bayonet....*' This was followed by a stubborn defence in the open against determined attacks by French cavalry. The 33rd fell back to the cover of the trees in the nearby Bois de Bossu, reformed, but remained in reserve until the fighting ceased at nightfall, having suffered losses of 16 killed, 71 wounded and 9 missing out of a strength of 561.

The Regiment made their way to Waterloo where Wellington established a position blocking the road to Brussels on the Mont St, Jean ridge near the village. Soaked and exhausted the 33rd were in position by 9am on 18th June in the right centre of the battlefield. Subjected to intense artillery fire, they fought on in square against four French cavalry charges in the afternoon and by early evening reduced by casualties formed a single battalion with soldiers of the 69th. As the assault of Napoleon's Imperial Guard was beaten back the 33rd and 69th took part in the general advance and with the arrival of the Prussians, victory was assured.

William wrote to his father from Brussels where he was recovering in hospital: '*It was about that hour that the squares were ordered to advance against the enemy's artillery, the 33rd forming half of the front and the whole of the left face (of the square), that I received a musket ball through the left arm a little below the shoulder, but as the bone is not fractured I hope to be soon well again..*' The 33rd had suffered heavily at Waterloo with 36 Killed, 100 wounded and 48 missing. The Regiment remained in camp near Paris, where presumably William joined them after recovering. On 23rd December 1815 they sailed from Calais to England and marched to join the Regimental Depot at Hull.

The 33rd were awarded the Battle Honour '*Waterloo*', and all ranks who took part in the campaign were awarded the Waterloo Medal, the first campaign medal to be so awarded to the British Army. All ranks received an amount of prize money, on a scale according to rank, all soldiers had two years added to their service in reckoning of any pay or pension and junior officers two years' additional service towards reckoning for the additional shilling a day granted to lieutenants of seven years standing. William received his medal and prize money of £34-14s-0d.

From 1816 the 33rd were based in various locations in Great Britain and Ireland, leaving Dublin in 1822 for Jamaica in the West Indies. During the ten years there, 11 officers and 560 NCOs and soldiers from the Regiment died from disease and sickness, especially yellow fever and malaria. William received his promotion to Captain without purchase in January 1826, developed a keen interest in natural history and survived the tour, returning home with the 33rd to Portsmouth in March 1832. He served with them at Weedon in Northamptonshire, Cork and from 1836 at Gibraltar, where he was promoted Major in July 1838.

In the following year, William's made a major career change. According to Bamford, he had maintained his connection with his former commanding officer of the 33rd Foot, a certain William George Keith Elphinstone. Formerly of the

15th Light Dragoons, Lieutenant-Colonel Elphinstone commanded the 33rd from September 1813 to May 1821, being wounded at Bergen-op-Zoom. He led his Regiment at Quatre Bras and Waterloo and was made CB (Companion of the Order of The Bath) for his service. He went on to command the 16th Light Dragoons, was promoted to Colonel in 1825 and appointed an ADC to King George IV. Placed on half pay he was recalled to the active list in 1837, promoted Major-General and given command of the Benares Division of the Bengal Army in India. William was appointed an Aide-de-Camp to Elphinstone in 1839, presumably due to a request by him, or from his old CO. Following the appointment William wrote to the Military Secretary in July 1839 to request a transfer to a Regiment stationed in Bengal. The transfer was approved and Brevet Major William Thain transferred from the 33rd to the 21st Foot

In April 1841 Lord Auckland the Governor General of India appointed Major-General Elphinstone Commander-in-Chief of British and Indian forces occupying Afghanistan. Elphinstone was wholly unsuited to the post in terms of age and particularly his health, suffering severely from gout. He tried to refuse command in view of his health, but to no avail and the appointment would contribute to the tragic events that were to unfold. As a member of his staff, William Thain went with him.

Afghanistan had been invaded and occupied by the British in 1839, who feared Russian designs on the country. Its leader Dost Muhammad Khan was replaced by a previous Amir Shah Suja and Dost Muhammad sent into exile in India in 1840. Initially, relations between occupiers and the Afghans were relatively calm, but the new ruler was not popular and during 1841 Afghan opposition to the occupation grew. Armed resistance broke out from October, with attacks on the British residency and cantonments in Kabul, during which William was slightly wounded. Shah Suja was essentially side-lined and the arrival in November of Akbar Khan, one of Dost Muhammad's sons, provided the leadership of and galvanised resistance against the British. The situation in Kabul quickly worsened, culminating in the murder of the British envoy Sir William Macnaghten and other officers on 23rd December 1841. Negotiations were held with the Afghans for safe passage to Jalalabad of some 4,500 British and Indian troops and up to 12,000 civilians. The Retreat from Kabul began on 6th January 1842 at the worst possible time of year with the winter weather being as great an enemy as the Afghans. The route from Kabul that the column had to take via the Khoord Kabul, Tugheeh Tugarekhee and Jugdulluk passes, Sourkab, Gandamak and Fattahabad to Jalalabad was nearly 85 miles long, at least 10 miles longer than the shortest and less arduous route.

Despite the negotiations and promises, the column was attacked continuously as it trekked slowly east. The casualties quickly mounted both from attacks by the enemy and the appalling wintry weather and hostages were taken, including Elphinstone. On 12th January 1842 in the Jugdulluk Pass, the remaining troops and followers made their final stand and all but a few were killed including Major William Thain. Jenny Uglow wrote: *'On the first day of their flight William Thain's horse was shot from under him and he received a deep flesh wound in the shoulder, but he went on, leading repeated charges, until he was killed in the final pass. The news did not reach England until late spring, when work on the chapel at Wreay was reaching its last stages. This was the reason, the villagers said, that Miss Losh put the arrows there, with their message of violent death.'*

On 13th January most of the survivors of the previous day were killed. Captain Souter, Sergeant Fair and several privates of the 44th Foot, Major Griffiths 37th Native Infantry and a civilian Mr. Blewitt were spared and taken prisoner. The only survivor to bring news of the appalling disaster was Surgeon Dr. William Brydon, who made it to the fort at Jalalabad later that day. Several Indian Sepoys made it back in the days that followed and another source cites a Lance-Sergeant Philip Edwards of the 44th Foot who arrived at a camp in Gujerat in 1843 having survived the last stand at Gandamak.

William Thain's former CO, General Elphinstone, remained a captive hostage with others in Kabul, where he died of dysentery on 23rd April 1842. Akbar Khan the Afghan leader arranged for Elphinstone's body to be sent to Jalalabad with a small guard of Afghan soldiers and the General's batman Moore. In spite of being attacked en route, the party made it and the former CO of the 33rd Foot at Waterloo was buried outside the city wall.

Elsewhere the Afghans captured Ghazni, but the British garrisons at Kandahar and Jalalabad held out until relieved in the spring of 1842. Akbar Khan was defeated near Jalalabad and in August a two-pronged advance by British forces captured Ghazni, cleared the Khyber Pass and inflicted a further defeat on Akbar Khan. Kabul was taken in September and, having released the hostages, the British withdrew through the Khyber Pass in October. Dost Muhammad was released and ruled Afghanistan until his death in 1863 in fairly peaceful co-existence with neighbouring British India.

Major William Thain has no known grave, but has his memorials in the pinecones at St. Mary's, representing the one he sent back from Afghanistan, and memorial in the churchyard that once stood by a Khelat pine tree, which is a worthy tribute to a great and loyal soldier who lies in a foreign field – *'This Khelat pine is planted in memory of Wm Thain, Major of the 33rd, and was raised from seed transmitted by him to England. He perished in the fatal pass of Coord Kabul, esteemed and lamented by all who knew him'*.