

Teesdale u3a

Andy Beck needed no introduction to the audience at the April u3a meeting. After leaving the RAF, he became a full time professional artist and ran The Teesdale Gallery on the corner of The Bank and Newgate, together with his wife and (then) two dogs. Being an outdoor enthusiast he knew the work of Alfred Wainwright who produced those seven detailed walking guides, titled 'A Pictorial Guide to the Lakeland Fells'. Many in the audience were familiar with the guides and several, including the writer of this article, still have the seven copies. The guides describe in detail the routes to the top of 214 lakeland fells, with lovely and very accurate hand sketched images with fascinating descriptions. Wainwright took his photographs with a very simple camera and wrote up the descriptions when he got home using a dip pen and ink.

Andy speculated whether he could paint the exact views that Wainwright had photographed and wondered if the paintings would sell. It would be a serious challenge to do them all. He checked the copyright issues and met members of the current Wainwright family. Wainwright's two stepdaughters thought it was a great idea. So, Andy gave up the Gallery and began what was to be a 10 year project, without any sponsorship.

He then spent several years walking the fells and identifying as far as possible the exact spot that Wainwright had used, from which to take his photographs. In all Andy took 1508 pictures. He had to contend with a variety of predictable difficulties eg the changing weather conditions, a change in the landscape over the years, the fact that Wainwright was about 6 inches taller than Andy, and there were several instances of Wainwright using artistic license. Andy's most dangerous climb was at Hopegill Head when he was looking for the plant, *Viscaria Alpina*, but the project had become an obsession.

All of Andy's 1500 watercolour sketches are included in his pictorial book, 'The Wainwrights in Colour'. His work has been well publicised and he has received numerous awards. The BBC produced the film 'Halin Fell' near Lake Ullswater, highlighting Andy's work. This was a mammoth project which took determination and self belief but which allowed Andy to pursue his interests both in the outdoors and in his painting. Andy gave a wonderful talk, delivered to a knowledgeable audience with enthusiasm and humour. The next meeting is on Thursday, 23rd May, when Jean Harrod will be speaking on her life as a diplomat.

Ian Reid

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