



**PENRITH**  
The Heart of Cumbria

## WORDSWORTH WALKS



the journey begins here...

## WORDSWORTH

William Wordsworth, the renowned poet, spent the early years of his life in Penrith, his father being agent for the Lowther family business. The late Victorian Wordsworth Street celebrates his fame, after a long life as a literary artist. Our Wordsworth walk tells the story and links the poet to several well-known places in the town.

- 1 **Arnison's** Today's shop is on the site of Penrith's Old Moot Hall. Although 'old' in 1572 this was not demolished until the 1830s. Late in the 18th century the Hall was owned by William Cookson, grandfather of William Wordsworth.



The Wordsworth family then lived in Cockermouth, William's father being the agent for Lowther's extensive business interests in West Cumberland. Returning from a visit to a friend in London, Wordsworth's mother became ill and was forced to break her journey home at Penrith, where she was confined to bed for about two months. She died on 8 March 1778 in her parents house from what appears to have been pneumonia - the family believed she had a cold from sleeping in a damp bed. She was buried in St Andrews Churchyard, but there is no sign of her grave today. She was only thirty years old, and William was eight.

William's last sight of his mother was when passing the door of her room as she lay on her death-bed. Her death robbed him of 'the props of his affections': he was now alone, to be sustained only by his own spirit. Five young children felt destitute, left to 'troop together'.

The Cookson grandparents had looked after their daughter's children for months on end, but did not welcome having more to do with William. There were constant clashes, and between William and Christopher Crackenthorpe, his Uncle Kit.

William appears to have been proud of his defiance and rebelliousness, unabashed by punishment. On one occasion, however, he retired to an attic room and contemplated suicide, taking hold of a foil as if to end all.

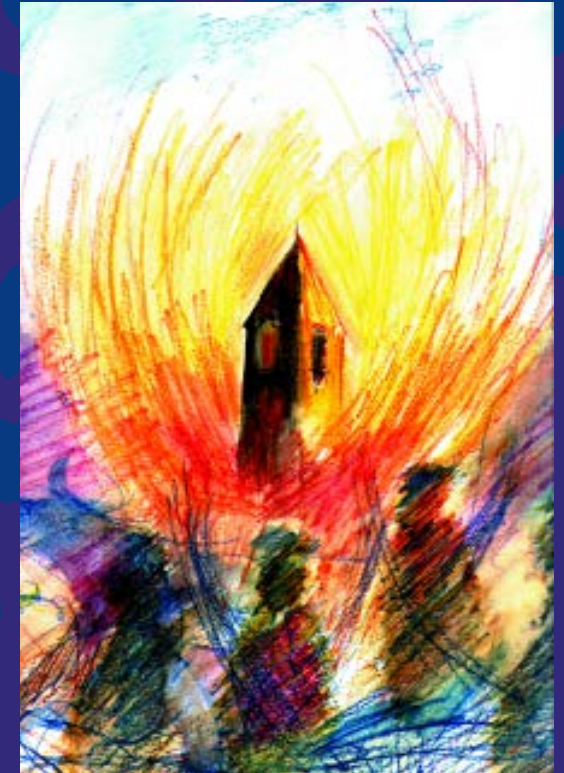
Another time William and his elder brother Richard were 'whipping togs' in the large drawing room, where the carpet was laid down only for occasions. Looking at the family pictures around the room, William said "Dare you strike your whip through that lady's petticoat?" Richard replied, "No I won't". William then struck through her hooped petticoat, and no doubt was properly punished.

Wordsworth later glorified his childhood. But at the time he could not grasp why his grandparents disliked him so much. His beloved sister, Dorothy, was always upset by William being picked upon. In June 1778 Dorothy was sent to relations in Halifax, Yorkshire, and did not see William for nine years. William did not

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## Millennium Trail



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easily troop together with his brothers, although they all spent Christmas with their father in Cocker mouth. Dorothy was the only one completely in tune with William's moods and personality.

In 1779, at nine years old, William was sent away to a school on the other side of the Lake District at Hawkshead.

Dorothy returned to Penrith in 1787-8 and was teated as a poor relation, complaining of the 'cold insensibility' of her grandparents and consoling herself with the friendship of Mary and Peggy Hutchinson who lived nearby.

"They used to steal to each other's houses, and when we had had our talk over the kitchen fire, to delay the moment of parting, paced up one street and down another by moon or starlight."

William's father died on 30 December 1783. He had been about Lowther business in the Millom area, where he was coroner. Riding home in bad weather from Broughton-in-Furness he lost his way and spent the night without shelter on Cold Fell. He suffered a severe chill from which he never recovered. William said later 'he had never kept his usual cheerfulness of mind since the death of his wife'. The Cocker mouth register has the entry "1784 Buried Mr John Wordsworth, Attorney at Law, aged 42. January 2nd. Dropsy."

John Wordsworth's children William, John, Christopher and Dorothy were ill provided for, the Earl of Lonsdale having acquired £5000 savings as a loan and refusing to repay. The two uncles, Richard Wordsworth of Whitehaven and Christopher Crackenthorpe of Newbiggin, gave the children a liberal education. The Earl of Lonsdale's successor restored the money with interest - £8500 total.

2 **Robert Bartram's House, St Andrews Churchyard** Opposite the south-west corner of St Andrews Church the 'Tudor' house is a legacy of the earliest domestic architecture in Penrith. The projecting porch-like gable bears an inscription below the uppermost window 'RB 1563' recalling its owner Roger Bertram. In later times this was a school run by Dame Ann Birkett.



William Wordsworth claimed he first attended this dame school when he was three, playing with the Hutchinson girls, but it is more likely that he and Dorothy first went in 1776. William even boasted in later years that it taught the 'upper classes' of the town.

The Hutchinson's had originally come from County Durham, where Mary's father had lived all his life. As a tobacconist in the town, they were shopkeeper stock as was William's mother's family. There were eight children, all orphaned when Mary's mother died in 1783 and her father two years later. Dorothy was a dear and beloved friend of Mary's, and it was she more than William who kept letter-writing over the years.

3 **Town Hall** The Town Hall was formerly two ornate sandstone houses designed in 1792 by Robert Adam. The poet's first cousins John and Richard acquired the left-hand, now marked by a plaque, in 1805. John, Captain of the East India Company's 'Earl of Abergavenny', lived there. William's brother, also John Wordsworth, later



captained the same ship.

A letter by Dorothy Wordsworth dated 23 December 1815 suggests she was a guest here for three nights, the last of which saw William other family arrive for dinner. The following morning he walked with Dorothy to Lowther and then to Sockbridge.

Conversion of these houses to become the Town Hall in 1905-6 added a porch which makes it almost impossible to imagine the original pair.



4 **Robin Hood Inn and Raisley Calvert** Raisley Calvert had ambitions to be a sculptor and was interested in artistic matters. He saw genius in William Wordsworth, promising to share his own income from property and leave a legacy.

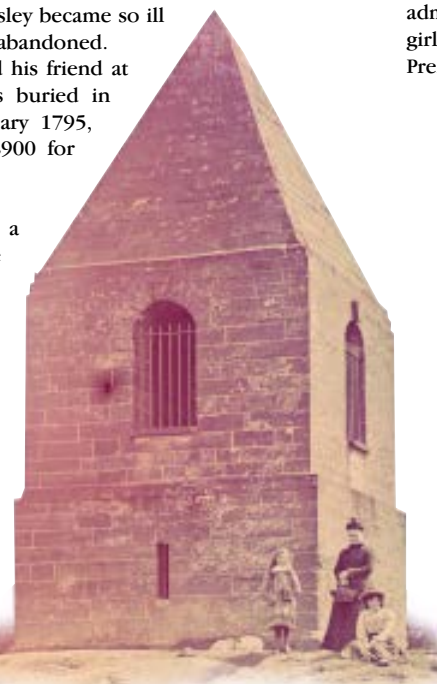


Raisley had tuberculosis and was in poor health. He and William were going to Lisbon in Portugal for a holiday to aid recovery. They set off in October 1794 on foot from the Calvert house at Windy Brow near Keswick, getting as far as Penrith before Raisley became so ill that the holiday was abandoned.

William nursed his friend at the Robin Hood Inn, but he was buried in Greystoke Churchyard on 12 January 1795, aged 21. In his will there was £900 for Wordsworth.

5 **The Beacon** The Beacon Pike is a gentle climb of a mile or so above the centre of the town. The well-known and symbolic Beacon tower, built in 1719, is the site of earlier signal fires warning of attack from Scotland. A signal fire was last lit during the Napoleonic invasion scare.

On the east shoulder of the Beacon, an area known as Red Hill, William Wordsworth experienced what he described as a 'spot of time'. With enclosure and tree-planting this area is no longer accessible from the Pike summit.



The five year old Wordsworth went riding on the hill with an old family servant called James. They became separated and William found himself on the spot where, cut in the turf, were the initials TPM - Thomas Parker Murdered. He was murdered in 1766, for which Thomas Nicholson was executed and hung in chains near the same place on 31 August 1767.

Thomas Parker was a butcher from Langwathby. He called at the Cross Keys Inn at Carleton going home from Penrith market on Tuesday 18 November 1766. The landlord saw he had drunk too much, and urged him to stay. He would not and was found murdered the same night, battered to death. Thomas Nicholson, who was asking for Parker at the Inn, was arrested on suspicion. Tried at Carlisle Assizes, he was convicted and sentenced to be executed and hung in chains.

*" . . . . and, through fear  
Dismounting, down the rough and stony moor  
I led my horse, and stumbling on, at length  
Came to a bottom, where in former times  
A murderer had been hung in iron chains.  
The gibbet-mast had mouldered down, the bones  
And iron case were gone; but on the turf,  
Hard by, soon after that fell deed was wrought,  
Some unknown hand has carved the murderer's name."*

In terror William ran off in a panic, and came across a mysterious young girl, battling up the hill with a pitcher on her head. He admitted as an adult that it was 'an ordinary sight' to see such a girl carrying water, and recalled the incident in Book XII of the Prelude, one of the few instances that Penrith is mentioned.

*"Faltering and faint, and ignorant of the road;  
Then, reascending the bare common, saw  
A naked pool that lay beneath the hills,  
The beacon on the summit, and, more near,  
A girl, who bore a pitcher on her head,  
And seemed with difficult steps to force her way  
Against the blowing wind. It was, in truth,  
An ordinary sight; but I should need  
Colours and words that are unknown to man,  
To paint the visionary dreariness  
Which, while I looked all round for my lost guide,  
Invested moorland waste and naked pool,  
The beacon crowning the lone eminence,  
The female and her garments vexed and tossed  
By the strong wind."*





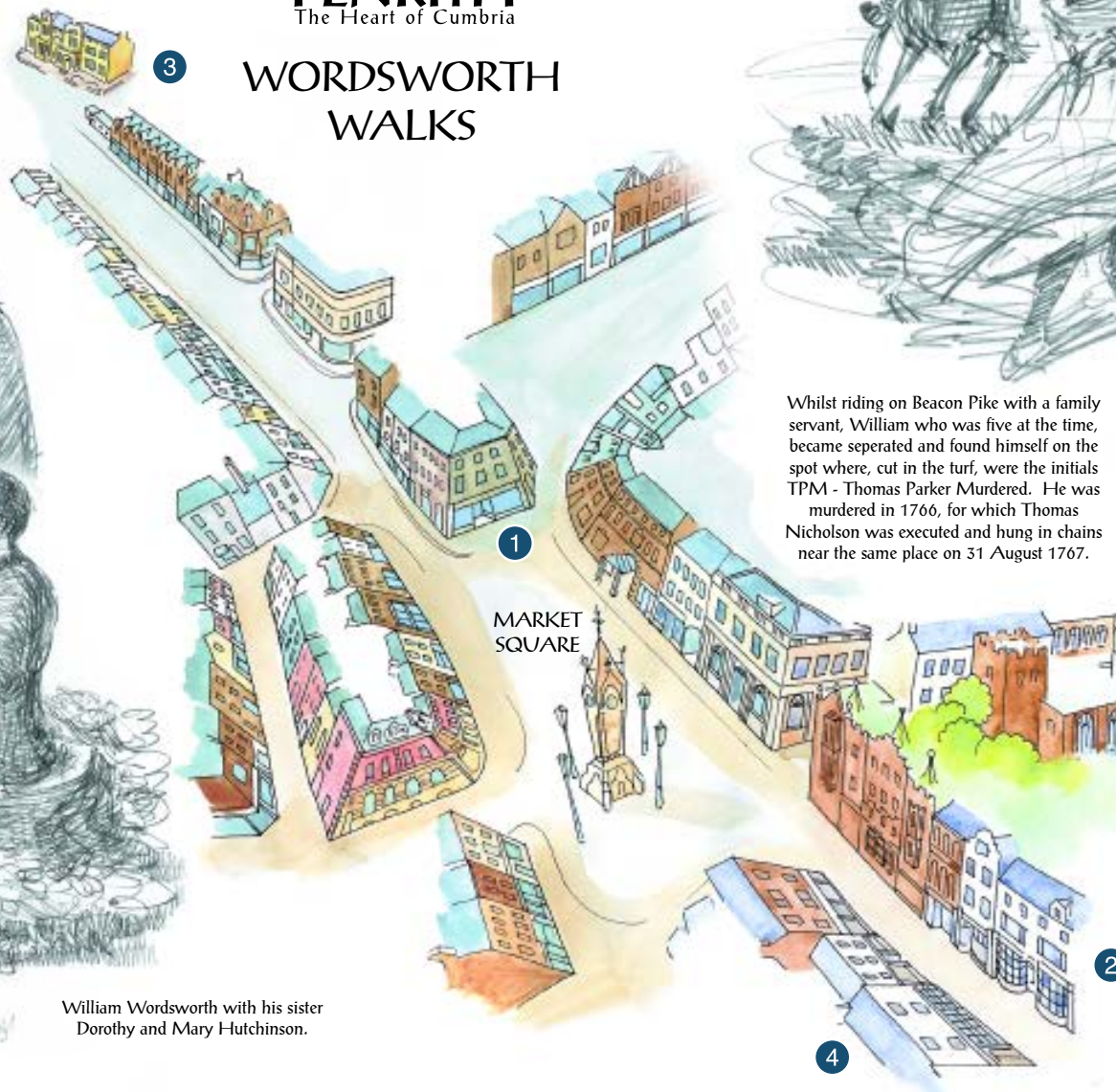
William Wordsworth with his sister Dorothy and Mary Hutchinson.



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Whilst riding on Beacon Pike with a family servant, William who was five at the time, became seperated and found himself on the spot where, cut in the turf, were the initials TPM - Thomas Parker Murdered. He was murdered in 1766, for which Thomas Nicholson was executed and hung in chains near the same place on 31 August 1767.



The young William and Dorothy Wordsworth attending school at the 'Tudor' in 1776.