

John Brown's *Description of the Lake at Keswick*:

A Manuscript and a Few More Clues

by

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In a previous issue of *The Library* (20.4), I drew attention to a handful of hitherto undocumented printings of John Brown's *Description of the Lake at Keswick*.¹ Brown's *Description*, as I explained, is an early, influential account of Derwent Water in the English Lake District. The *Description* is an epistolary prose sketch. Its date of composition is not known, but evidence suggests that it may have been written in either 1751 or 1753. Copies of the *Description* appeared in various periodicals during the 1760s, and a chapbook edition of the text was printed in Newcastle-upon-Tyne in 1767. Subsequent chapbook editions were printed in Kendal (1770 and 1771), Whitehaven (1772) and London (1772).² These printings helped to increase awareness of Brown's *Description*, which was widely quoted and reprinted thereafter. Prior to publication, the *Description* circulated privately in both manuscript and print. Until recently, however, none of these private copies were known to exist. This has been an impediment to further research, and it is therefore of interest to note that a manuscript copy of the *Description* (Figure 1) has come to light.

[Perhaps insert figure here?]

Figure 1. Manuscript of Brown's *Description*

Courtesy of the Wordsworth Trust, Grasmere, acc. no. 2021.2

The article in issue 20.4 noted the possible existence of this manuscript, which was auctioned at Anderson House, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, on 18 June 2013. Until recently, however, it was not possible to verify that the item in question was indeed a manuscript of Brown's *Description*. Thanks to Ryan O'Horne Books in Humshaugh, Northumberland, I have been able to view the item and to verify its authenticity. Consequently, I can now confirm several particulars.

The manuscript is a small, thread-bound pamphlet. It measures 11.5 cm by 18.5 cm and comprises a single, thread-bound gathering of four sheets of laid post paper. The paper bears a crowned post-horn-shield watermark with the initials L.V.G. pendant. The design is comparable

¹ Christopher Donaldson, 'John Brown's *Description of The Lake at Keswick*: New Clues and Clarifications', *The Library*, ser. 7, 20.4 (2019), 462–74.

² See Donald D. Eddy, 'John Brown: The Columbus of Keswick', *Modern Philology*, 73, pt. 2: A Supplement to Honor Arthur Friedman (1976), S74–S84, and Peter Bicknell, *The Picturesque Scenery of the Lake District, 1752–1855: A Bibliography* (Winchester: St Paul's Bibliographies, 1990), pp. 23–24.

to the one used by James Whatman, father (1702–1759) and son (1741–1798), during the mid-eighteenth century. The first nine folios contain a fair copy of Brown's *Description*. The remaining folios are blank. The script is neatly written in an ornamental running hand. Words italicised in most printed editions of the *Description* appear in roundhand in the manuscript, which generally corresponds to the presentation and layout of the chapbook printed in Newcastle in 1767. Like that chapbook and all other contemporary printings of the *Description*, the manuscript does not include the lyrical effusion, 'Now sunk the Sun', which, according to Richard Cumberland (1732–1811), originally formed the conclusion of Brown's text.

The provenance of the manuscript is not fully documented. There is reason to suppose that it may be connected in some way to the collection of George Norman Paul Crombie (1910–1987), the first Honorary Secretary of the York Georgian Society. The other item in the lot in which the manuscript was sold is a copy of a work that was once in Crombie's library.³ The manuscript, in any case, does not appear to be in Brown's handwriting. A careful comparison of the manuscript and a selection of Brown's holographs reveals several inconsistencies.⁴ Given both this and the manuscript's similarity to the Newcastle chapbook, it is possible to conjecture that the manuscript may have been the fair copy on which that chapbook was based. Alternatively, the manuscript may have been copied from that edition or from one of the later chapbook editions.

Internal evidence from the manuscript provides further support for these speculations. There are several minor differences of spelling, capitalisation and punctuation between the manuscript and the chapbook editions of the *Description*, as well as four other variations. The first three of these are variant spellings. Whereas the Newcastle chapbook and other known printed versions of the text read 'exceeds them more in grandeur than I can give you', the manuscript reads

³ The manuscript of Brown's *Description* was sold alongside a nineteenth-century manuscript copy of John Hawkins's *The Life and Death of our Late Most Incomparable and Heroique Prince, Henry Prince of Wales* (1613; pub. 1641). The copy is inscribed 'J. Watson scripsit' and appears to be based on the original manuscript, which Crombie once owned. Both the copy and the original manuscript conclude with a monogram composed of Hawkins's initials. The original manuscript is now in the collection of the Folger Shakespeare Library (acc. no. MS Add 894), whose catalogue lists Crombie as a former owner. The Folger, however, mistakenly attributes the work to Charles Cornwallis. On the authorship of Hawkins's *Life*, see Michael Ulliyot, 'The Life Abridged: Exemplarity, Biography, and the Problem of Metonymy', *Journal of the Northern Renaissance*, 3 (2011), 47 paras <<https://www.northernrenaissance.org/the-life-abridged-exemplarity-biography-and-the-problem-of-metonymy/>> [accessed 4 August 2021].

⁴ I have compared the manuscript of the *Description* with the following, all of which contain samples of Brown's handwriting: Library Register, Carlisle Cathedral, 14 June 1744, Carlisle Archive Centre, DCHA/5/6/1/15; An Essay on Satire: Occasioned by the Death of Mr Pope, 1745, British Library, Egerton MS 3275; Articles of Agreement with Thomas Thomson of Morland, 29 February 1747, Carlisle Library, C9 MOR 9; Letter from John Brown to Charles Yorke, 25 September 1753, British Library, Add MS 35633, fol. 264; Address to Empress Catherine II, 1766, St John's College, Cambridge, MS O.88. I am grateful to the following people for support with accessing copies of these items: Zoe Stansell and Nicola Beech of the British Library; Michael Stephens of Carlisle Archive Centre; Caroline Lunny of Carlisle Library; and Dr Adam Crothers of St John's College, Cambridge. I would also like to thank Lisa Tallis and Alison Harvey (Cardiff University), Elaine Archbold and Michael Sharpe (Newcastle University), Timothy Sykes, William Roberts and Dr Helen Williams (Northumbria University) for providing access to other items and information.

‘exceeds them more in grandeur *then* I can give you’.⁵ Similarly, whereas the Newcastle chapbook and most known printed versions of the text read ‘to give you a complete idea of these three perfections’, the manuscript reads ‘to give you a *compleat* idea of these three perfections’.⁶ Finally, whereas the Newcastle chapbook and other known printed versions of the text read ‘the natural variety of colouring which the several objects produce’, the manuscript reads ‘the *naturel* variety of colouring which the several objects produce’.⁷

These three variants are superficial, but the fourth is potentially more significant. As Donald Eddy has noted, the Newcastle chapbook introduced a misprint that did not appear in previously published versions of the *Description*.⁸ Like the manuscript, those earlier printings included the clause ‘for here the more distant hills appear beyond those you had already seen’ in the final paragraph of the text.⁹ Instead of ‘appear before’, the text in the Newcastle chapbook reads ‘appear beyond’.¹⁰ That mistake was replicated in the chapbooks printed in Kendal and Whitehaven.¹¹ The correct wording does appear in the London chapbook, and that gives some scope for supposing that the manuscript may have been copied from that edition.¹² It is, however, also possible that the manuscript may be the fair copy on which the original Newcastle chapbook was based, and that an error was made when the compositor set the type.

The evidence for this latter hypothesis is mostly conjectural. But there is reason to think that the manuscript may be related to the version of the *Description* published in the *Newcastle Chronicle* in May 1765.¹³ This possible relationship is noteworthy, because the *Newcastle Chronicle* printing can be linked with the Newcastle chapbook.

The version of the *Description* printed in the *Newcastle Chronicle* does not include the three variant spellings that appear in the manuscript. The printing is, however, currently the first datable instance in which Brown’s prose sketch appeared under the title ‘Description of the Lake at Keswick’. All prior printings of which I am aware refer to the text simply as a ‘Letter’ or as an

⁵ John Brown, *A Description of the Lake at Keswick (And the adjacent Country) in Cumberland. Communicated in a Letter to a Friend. By a Popular Writer* (Newcastle, 1767), p. 3. Italics added.

⁶ Brown, *Description of the Lake at Keswick*, p. 5. Italics added. The printing in the *London Chronicle* includes the variant spelling ‘compleat’. It is the only known printed version of the *Description* that does so.

⁷ Brown, *Description of the Lake at Keswick*, p. 7. Italics added.

⁸ Eddy, ‘Columbus of Keswick’, p. S81, n. 24.

⁹ See, indicatively, ‘Extract of a Letter to ***’, *London Register; or, Notes of the Present Times* (April 1762), 308–9.

¹⁰ Brown, *Description of the Lake at Keswick*, p. 8.

¹¹ John Brown, *A Description of the Lake at Keswick (And the adjacent Country) in Cumberland. Communicated in a Letter to a Friend. By a Late Popular Writer* (Kendal: J. Ashburner, 1770), p. 8; John Brown, *A Description of the Lake at Keswick (And the adjacent Country) in Cumberland. Communicated in a Letter to a Friend. By a Late Popular Writer* (Kendal: W. Pennington, 1771), p. 8; and John Brown, *A Description of the Lake at Keswick (And the adjacent Country) in Cumberland. Communicated in a Letter to a Friend. By a Popular Writer* (Kendal: John Dunn, 1772), p. 8.

¹² John Brown, *A Description of the Lake at Keswick (And the adjacent Country) in Cumberland. In a Letter to a Friend*. (London: T. Sherlock, 1772), p. 10.

¹³ ‘Description of the Lake at Keswick, in Cumberland, by a popular Writer; communicated in a Letter to a Friend’, *Newcastle Chronicle*, 25 May 1765, 4.

‘Elegant Description’.¹⁴ This fact affords grounds for speculating that the manuscript may be connected in some way with the *Newcastle Chronicle*. If that were the case, it might help to account for the manuscript’s appearance at auction in Newcastle in 2013.

The nature of this possible link between the manuscript and the version of the *Description* published in the *Newcastle Chronicle* is uncertain. The manuscript may have been the source on which the text printed in the newspaper was based. But given the noted similarity between the manuscript and the Newcastle chapbook, it is also possible to surmise that the manuscript was an intermediary between the *Newcastle Chronicle* printing and the chapbook’s creation. At that time, the newspaper was run by its founders, Thomas Slack (1723–1784) and Ann Slack (née Fisher, 1719–1778), and there is evidence to suggest that the Slacks printed the Newcastle chapbook as well. No printer is named in the chapbook. But the chapbook’s title-page resembles the title-pages of other works the Slacks printed, and it includes a printer’s ornament that they are known to have used.¹⁵ Given this information, it would seem more likely that the chapbook was prepared by the Slacks than by the other Newcastle-based printers who produced copies of Brown’s works.¹⁶

These hypotheses are compelling, but whether or not the manuscript is connected with the Newcastle printings of the *Description* remains a subject for further research. Such research will hopefully bring additional evidence to light. In the meantime, the manuscript has been donated to the Wordsworth Trust, in Grasmere, where it can be consulted alongside the Trust’s extensive collection of Lake District publications.

Lancaster

¹⁴ See Donaldson, ‘John Brown’, p. 469.

¹⁵ See, for example, *Several Select Portions of the Psalms, from Tate and Brady’s Version* (Newcastle: T. Slack, 1763), and *The Pleasing Instructor, or Entertaining Moralist, Consisting of Select Essays, Relations, Visions, and Allegories* (London: Robertson & Roberts; Newcastle: T. Slack, 1770), p. xii.

¹⁶ Brown was installed as Vicar of St Nicholas’s Church, Newcastle, in 1761, and editions of his sermons and essays were printed in Newcastle thereafter. Those editions were printed by Isaac Thompson & Co. and by John White and Thomas Saint. See Donald Eddy, *A Bibliography of John Brown* (New York, NY: Bibliographical Society of America, 1971), p. 92.