The Cornell Wordsworth: A History

The Cornell Wordsworth was completed in 2007. Cornell University Press in Ithaca, New York, published this twenty-one-volume series of editions of the poems of William Wordsworth over a span of thirty-two years. A supplementary volume, published the next year by Humanities EBooks of Penrith in Britain, provided additional information, indexes to the series, and a guide to the manuscripts. The story of this groundbreaking project has been told well by others at several junctures along the way, both in professional meetings and in print. What follows draws from their accounts, from the archive of correspondence deposited by Stephen Parrish, the General Editor of the series, and by other series editors in the Cornell University Library, and from correspondence in private hands.

In 1997, James A. Butler explained the origins of the project in this way:

Stephen Maxfield Parrish arrived at Cornell University in 1954 with a new Ph.D. and an unusual resume, having practiced textual criticism both at Harvard (working with Hyder Rollins on Keats and the Bostonians) and for the U.S. Government . . . as a code breaker . . . To protect the Wordsworth manuscripts in the Dove Cottage Trustees' possession, in those Cold War days, heavy with the threat of nuclear apocalypse, Helen Darbishire had them microfilmed . . . George Healey of Cornell somehow convinced Helen Darbishire to deposit a . . . set of microfilms at his library. There those microfilms joined the world's best collection of printed Wordsworth materials, a catalogue of which Healey published in 1957 as The Cornell Wordsworth Collection. Thus Parrish, the microfilms, and the books were now all in the same place, leading to the creation . . . of The Cornell Wordsworth Series.1

John Alban Finch enrolled in the graduate program in English at Cornell in 1960. Having taught English literature at Howe Military Academy in Indiana after emigrating from England in 1958, he won a Woodrow Wilson Fellowship to Cornell. Though trained as a teacher of British diplomatic history, he now devoted his considerable energy and talents to the study of literature, ultimately focusing on the 19th-century English romantic period, and chose for his dissertation topic Wordsworth’s poem, The Recluse. Working under M. H. Abrams and Stephen Parrish, John delved into the films of Dove Cottage manuscripts in his effort to reconstruct the chronology and shape of The Recluse, the long poem that Wordsworth never completed but intended to encompass virtually all of his blank verse poems. Growing out of these studies was a larger project, an index and full bibliographical description of Wordsworth’s manuscripts and letters. Hired as an instructor at Cornell in September 1963, he completed his degree in the following spring. He then concentrated on his massive project of describing all Wordsworth manuscripts he could find. He defined it as “a descriptive catalog of all known MSS of W.W.’s poetry, describing location, physical features, and contents fully.”2 By 1966 he had amassed sixty-plus notebooks filled with leaf-by-leaf analysis of each document, convinced that dated documents like letters, if one knew their physical characteristics, could aid in dating verse documents with the same physical features but without any evidence of date.3
Parrish has said that the “arrival of . . . films [of the Dove Cottage manuscripts] at Cornell brought to us a clear realization that the then standard edition of Wordsworth, published by the Clarendon Press, Oxford, in six volumes (five for the Poetical Works, one for the Prelude), edited by Ernest de Selincourt and Miss Darbishire, was lamentably defective.” Citing Jonathan Wordsworth’s remark that “most great poets are known by the best versions of their works; Wordsworth is almost exclusively known by his worst,” Parrish had reached the conclusion that the long tradition in English studies that honored the final lifetime version of literary works and the inevitable omissions and errors of transcription of manuscripts by editors combined to bring about this state in modern editions of Wordsworth’s texts. By June 1963 Parrish’s own close work with the microfilms as well as that of John Finch and other graduate students working under Parrish, led him to propose a new edition of Wordsworth’s poetry that would feature “some of the early notebooks as notebooks” that included “long early poems that have not anywhere appeared in the first published form.” John Finch, at first skeptical of the plan, began working with Parrish to work out “some sort of scheme” to edit early texts. In December 1966 he formally proposed a series devoted solely to the early long poems buried among the manuscripts he had begun to index and describe. Both proposals featured a clean reading text based on the earliest finished holograph version. Unique to Finch’s proposal was his insistence on the principle of presenting transcriptions “unencumbered by a detailed apparatus criticus.” Such a presentation, he argued, “would mark a new departure in Wordsworthian scholarship and create for the Cornell series an interest and importance beyond that of any earlier edition.” Together they refined their proposals into a united plan and began to promote it with colleagues in the Cornell English department, key Wordsworthian scholars elsewhere, and Cornell University Press.

Looking back several years later, Parrish described the plans for the edition that were made between them and in consultation with others in the mid 1960s: the aim was “to publish a series of volumes, each to be devoted to a long poem by Wordsworth.” Each volume, then, would contain: (1) “reading texts of the poem as it stood upon its completion, with all later revisions stripped away; (2) transcriptions of the most important underlying manuscripts, with facing photographs of the most complex and interesting of these; and (3) a full record of all other manuscript readings and all printed variants up through the final lifetime edition.” Those at Cornell who shaped these plans were Parrish, who subsequently took the role of General Editor, John Finch, who became Associate Editor, George Healey, and M. H. Abrams. After John Finch’s sudden death in the spring of 1967, Mark L. Reed was invited to take his place as Associate Editor. Advisory editors for the series included M. H. Abrams, Geoffrey Hartman, and Jonathan Wordsworth. James A. Butler and Jared Curtis were later added to the board as, respectively, a second Associate Editor and a Coordinating Editor. Parrish held meetings with the director, the editor, and the graphic designer at Cornell University Press, who were enthusiastic about the project, if wary of the typographical complexity of transcriptions, but they were quite willing to print as many photographs as were needed.

Initially, following Finch’s contribution to the scheme, the work went forward with long poems that were firmly established in the canon in finally authorized texts, within the original manuscripts for which one found the marks of earlier “finished” but never published versions. Finch was to have edited “Home at Grasmere,” clearly intended as the inaugural volume for the series, and was well along in its preparation at the time of
his death. Jonathan Wordsworth, an active figure in the early years of development, was to edit “The Ruined Cottage”; Stephen Gill had completed a press-ready copy of “The Salisbury Plain Poems” in 1970; and Parrish was at work on the 1798–1799 two-part Prelude. Finch’s death in 1967 slowed the project by the loss of his leadership, his wide command of the physical properties and dating of manuscripts, his imaginative solutions to technical problems of presentation, and his passionate advocacy of the importance of the enterprise for Wordsworth scholarship. But it did not languish, by any means. The first volume to appear, The Salisbury Plain Poems, edited by Stephen Gill, was published by Cornell University Press in 1975, and was followed by Parrish’s Prelude and Beth Darlington’s Home at Grasmere in 1977. In the intervening year, Parrish characterized the need for such editions by summarizing the wayward journey of “The Female Vagrant,” a poem written in the poet’s twenties. He pointed out that, after publishing it in the editions of Lyrical Ballads in 1798, 1800, and 1802, Wordsworth “retouched the poem for every printing in the ensuing forty years.” At that point, in 1842, he published a much-revised version of a longer poem, now called “Guilt and Sorrow,” in which he had restored the story of “The Female Vagrant” to its original place in the longer narrative. But this published record reveals only a small part of the permutations of the text found in manuscript drafts and obsessively corrected fair copies of both the long poem and its excerpt. [Links to images: DCMS_10_00002; DCMS_16_00029; DCMS_151_Folder 1_00006]

It was clear from the start that every major poem and nearly all of the shorter lyric and narrative poems of lesser length underwent a similarly transformative journey in the poet’s hands. The trove of manuscripts at Dove Cottage, preserved there in the keeping of the Wordsworth Trust and echoed in the films at Cornell, became the working ground for scholar-archaeologists, as Parrish was wont to describe them, “to rescue these lost poems”—to uncover the early versions of both long familiar and largely unknown poems and to trace and record the changes through the poet’s lifetime in drafts, letters, journals, proofs, and print to the final lifetime edition of 1850. In this way, Parrish believed, there was promise of making “it possible at last to know the best of Wordsworth, to follow the maturation of his poetic genius, and to honor his lifelong concern about his poems by bringing equivalent care to the reading and study of them.”

Once the initial list of long poems for the Cornell Wordsworth was decided upon, the volumes were assigned to editors and the project was set in motion. But very soon, in view of the competing projects and the long-range shape of the series, the challenge for the editorial board was to decide on the content and inclusiveness of the volumes to follow. Parrish soon set aside his idea of editing “notebooks” and focused instead, as Finch had urged, on long poems. All the long poems listed in the early plans eventually appeared as separate editions, with the exception of “Michael” and “The Brothers.” What would have been a relatively brief volume edited by Karen Green was ultimately combined with an intended volume of “shorter” poems written from 1797–1800 to make a single edition of Lyrical Ballads and related poems and fragments through 1800, an edition proposed and undertaken by Green and James A. Butler.

Shifting from an edition of “Michael” and its pastoral companion “The Brothers” to one of a collection of poems made it clear that the inclusiveness of the Cornell Wordsworth was at issue. Parrish approached Bernie Kendler, the editor at Cornell University Press in
charge of the series, in early 1974, with the “possibility of extending the series in two
two steps (the first of which could be taken without the second): (1) adding WW’s two
collections – 1807 and [Lyrical Ballads] (2) adding poems collected in 1815 & later.” In
addition, he wrote, there would “for a complete Wordsworth have to be a third step,”
Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches. In his account of the series written for the
trustees of Dove Cottage in December 1976, Parrish put it in these terms:

A change of design was introduced in 1974 when a collection was given a place in the
series: Poems, in Two Volumes of 1807, intended for publication by the Clarendon
Press but not accepted there. Its inclusion raised problems about defining the
series. . . . Was it to be described as a series devoted to Wordsworth’s long poems,
with one odd volume, or a series with two branches, one devoted to the long poems,
one to collections? Was it to remain open-ended, or was a closure to be foreseen?

Explaining that at the outset it was projected that “the series will begin with long poems
written between 1793 and 1808,” Parrish now reported that “it has seemed reasonable to
keep options open, and to include one or two other collections, like Wordsworth’s own
first collection [Lyrical Ballads],” and a volume devoted to the several sonnet sequences
and itinerary poems, “but at the same time to make sure, by fixing spans of dates, that
there was no overlap or duplication between volumes.”

Each of the long poems that Finch and Parrish had added to their list—several lists, in
fact, over a relatively short period—was to appear in a dedicated volume. The most
advanced of these lists included the two-part “Prelude,” “Home at Grasmere,” the closely
connected “The Ruined Cottage” and “The Pedlar,” “The Borderers,” “The Waggoner,”
“Peter Bell,” a thirteen-book “Prelude,” “Michael” and “The Brothers” (both
emerging at the same time were plans for several competing projects that involved a fresh
editing of Wordsworth’s poetry, each of a different design and aim, but treating the same
literary manuscripts housed at Dove Cottage. Jonathan Wordsworth was at work on a two
volume edition of Wordsworth’s poems arranged chronologically by date of composition,
1787–1807, to be published by Longmans. The aim was not to show development but, as
Finch described it in the 1967 proposal, to “supply an easily accessible reading text with
only selective annotations, not the full editions with complete scholarly apparatus Cornell
can plan.” The greatest challenge to the Cornell project was the proposed multivolume
edition of “The Notebooks” to be edited by Robert Woof and published by Clarendon
Press. Though it never saw fruition, or even a clear definition, this series was to have
contained at least a dozen or so of the early bound notebooks in which the poet both
drafted and fair-copied his verses, beginning in his Hawkshead school days and carrying
through to the early years of the nineteenth-century. Woof’s claim, at different times, to
some or all of these “notebooks” (which included most of Wordsworth’s poetry right
down to the final version of The Prelude), stood in the way of the Cornell team’s
intention to present the chronological development of “poems” rather than “notebooks,”
since most poems appeared in one or more of the notebooks.

Not one to turn down a challenge, Parrish negotiated his way through these straits with
dexterity and grace, pressing on all who would listen both the soundness of the methods
and scope of the Cornell project and the value of its resulting editions to readers and to
the Wordsworth Trust, the steward of the original documents. An immediate crisis arose
The poetry that Wordsworth composed at school and during his Cambridge years. At the urging of Jonathan Wordsworth, Parrish and Robert Woof met in Newcastle in early January 1974 to discuss a possible agreement between them over their competing interests in notebooks. A month earlier Parrish had offered “The Vale of Esthwaite,” Evening Walk, and Descriptive Sketches to Woof to edit within the series, but in their January meeting Woof upheld his claim to the first forty-five verse notebooks, along with other materials like the Fenwick notes, and no agreement was reached—nor did Woof commit to editing the early poems for the Cornell series. Matters stood until it became clear to Parrish in late 1976 that Clarendon Press was no longer interested in the notebook project that Woof had proposed. Shortly after, Woof, who in 1974 had become Honorary Keeper of collections of books, manuscripts, and paintings at Dove Cottage, formally withdrew from any role in the Cornell Wordsworth. Parrish then invited Carol Landon, who had been assisting Woof with the earliest unpublished material, to edit “The Vale of Esthwaite” and the early notebook writings, and assigned the two published poems, Evening Walk and Descriptive Sketches, to James Averill and Paul Zall, respectively.

But the claim on the “notebooks” still stood in the way of a complete Wordsworth. A way through the impasse appeared in July of 1977, when a Cornell University donor purchased at a Sotheby auction a cache of manuscripts consisting of the private papers of Mary Wordsworth and her son. Housed for over a century in a law firm’s vault in Carlisle, the cache contained many letters, including thirty-one “love letters” between William and Mary Wordsworth written in middle age, as well as holograph verse manuscripts—most remarkably containing two poems by Samuel Taylor Coleridge. Intended by the purchaser as a significant addition to the Wordsworth collection at Cornell University, the papers were held in Britain pending approval to export them. However, at the urging of William Wordsworth, the head of the Wordsworth family, and a representative of the British Museum, the Board of Trade denied an export license for the papers. Cornell determined to retain ownership of the papers and keep them at the London office of the University Press. When efforts by the Dove Cottage Trust to raise funds to purchase the papers were successful, an agreement was worked out among representatives of Cornell University, the editors of the Cornell Wordsworth, and Jonathan Wordsworth, now chairman of the Dove Cottage Trust, to resell them to the Trust. This agreement for sale, and a companion agreement between the general editor of the Cornell Wordsworth and the Trustees of Dove Cottage, left a “clear track,” Parrish wrote, “to develop our definitive new edition of Wordsworth.”

By the late seventies the editorial board had established a design that included all of the poet’s verse in its earliest complete form. The three collections mentioned by Parrish in 1967 were included, plus five others: early poems and fragments, shorter poems composed between 1807 and 1820, late poems related to The Recluse, translations from Chaucer and Virgil, and poems composed between 1820 and 1850. Generous grants from the National Endowment for the Humanities, beginning in 1977, made it possible for editors to travel to Grasmere between terms or on sabbaticals to conduct their research for the remaining volumes in the series, which now included these “two branches,” listed below [or in a sidebar] by their published titles, with links to facsimiles of some of the manuscript pages.
Editions of long poems:

*Evening Walk*, ed. James Averill  [DCMS_10_00003: opening lines of *An Evening Walk*]

*Descriptive Sketches*, ed. Eric Birdsall

*The Salisbury Plain Poems*, ed. Stephen Gill  [DCMS_10_00002; DCMS_16_00029; DCMS_151_Folder 1_00006: opening passages of three stages of the poem]


*The Ruined Cottage* and *The Pedlar*, ed. James A. Butler  [DCMS_13–00009; DCMS_15_00004; DCMS_17_00022; DCMS_16_00046: sequence of pages from four MSS of *The Ruined Cottage*]

*Peter Bell*, ed. John Jordan


*Home at Grasmere*, ed. Beth Darlington  [DCMS_58_00001; DCMS_45_00001; DCMS_59_00007: sequence of pages from three MSS of *Home at Grasmere*]

*The Thirteen-Book Prelude*, ed. Mark L. Reed  [DCMS_52_00016: stolen boat episode]

*Benjamin the Waggoner*, ed. Paul F. Betz


*The Excursion*, ed. Sally Bushell, James A. Butler, and Michael C. Jaye


Editions of collections:

*Early Poems and Fragments*, 1785–1797, ed. Carol Landon and Jared Curtis  [DCMS_3_00008: opening passage of *The Vale of Esthwaite*]


*The Tuft of Primroses*, with Other Late Poems for *The Recluse*, ed. Joseph Kishel  [DCMS_18_00016: opening lines of *The Tuft of Primroses*]


Translations of Chaucer and Virgil, ed. Bruce E. Graver  [DCMS_13_00011: Chaucer’s *The Manciple’s Tale*; DCMS_101_00133: end of Book I of Virgil’s *Aeneid*]

Sonnet Series and Itinerary Poems, 1820–1845, ed. Geoffrey Jackson

Last Poems, 1821–1850, ed. Jared Curtis, with assistance from Apryl Lea Denny-Ferris and Jillian Heydt-Stevenson  [DCMS_151_Folder 1_00175: draft of “The most alluring clouds that mount the sky”]

The editors of the first three volumes to appear set a high standard for those who followed. Paramount to the project’s uniqueness and its success were the meticulous transcriptions from what were often extremely messy holograph manuscripts, many of
which were presented in photographs opposite their respective transcriptions. From the outset, the editors devised artful solutions to difficult problems of representation raised by Wordsworth’s extensive and repeated revision of page after page of text [link to DCMS_22_00003]. There are countless over-writings of a letter, several letters, or an entire word; elaborate arrows drawn to indicate transposition up and down the page; more than one layer of deletion marks revealing several stages of change within a line or passage; erasures inked over with new writing; and what Parrish has described as “bits of blank paper . . . gummed onto the old sheets with sealing wax to receive fresh revision, and occasionally a third or fourth layer . . . patched on.”22 Translating scholars’ wishes into practical guidelines for submissions that Cornell University Press could actually design and typeset was a challenge. A careful scheme devised by John Finch and worked over by the editorial board and by individual editors was further modified by the graphic designers at the press. All agreed, finally, on the basic design of facing photograph and transcription, two sizes of type to distinguish original entry from added text, italics to signal a second hand, bold face type for printed text (in annotated proofs, for example), curly brackets to show overwriting, and so on. (For example, Parrish’s request for two-color printing to distinguish handwriting by others from Wordsworth’s hand was ruled out immediately by the press; and on looking at sample copy the typesetters protested that it was too difficult for them to read text that the editor had crossed out to show a deletion in the manuscript, and a code for marking these features in colored pencil, and, later, at the insistence of the Press, a fine-tip "Pilot" orange pen, to aid them.

Another challenge was the physical condition of the Dove Cottage manuscripts themselves, long preserved in less than ideal circumstances for paper documents. Restoration work often proceeded simultaneously with editorial work, the former brilliantly carried out by Sidney Cockerell at his bindery at Grantchester, near Cambridge, at the request of the Wordsworth Trust in a fashion that permitted readers to see what could only be guessed at before. Wordsworth and his amanuenses were “hoarders,” savers of paper generally, of notebooks, both commercial and handmade, and of loose manuscripts of the poet’s writings, and were reluctant to let it escape from their hands even after a work they contained had been published. To this material Wordsworth returned again and again as he revised his poems tirelessly, whether or not they had reached print. He often annotated the pages of his published works as well, noting changes intended for the subsequent edition, leaving behind this lengthy record of progress through several publications of the same work. The greater portion of his manuscripts is in the care of the Wordsworth Trust in Grasmere. But other pieces of it are scattered near and far: London, Oxford, Cambridge, Windsor Castle, Bristol, Manchester, Carlisle, Keswick, and Edinburgh have important collections, and other manuscripts are housed in libraries in Australia, Canada, Ireland, New Zealand, and the United States.23

The series has deep Cornell roots. As Butler points out, editors “of twelve of the twenty-one volumes graduated from or taught at Cornell.” Moreover, all the Cornell editors had “Grasmere in common; they frequently stayed there in groups.”24 Supervisory editors worked alongside volume editors, proofreading each set of transcriptions against original manuscripts. Editors labored at first under crowded conditions in the two-roomed building (a converted smithy) that is now the Trust bookshop, and then, under the modernizing efforts of Director Robert Woof, in the larger quarters of the converted stone barn across the road that had been the Wordsworth Museum, left vacant when the new
museum (a converted coach house) was opened in 1981. The new library quarters offered more room for storage, a librarian’s desk, and many more tables for scholars, more shelves for the display of Wordsworth editions and related printed works. The collaborative spirit that developed out of this experience extended to a series of unfailingly helpful caretakers of the Library and its manuscripts, principally, in the early years, Grasmere resident Nesta Clutterbuck, who was also a Dove Cottage trustee. For several years, when Miss Clutterbuck fell ill, experienced readers Stephen Gill, Beth Darlington, and Steve Parrish, who could arrange longer summer stays in Grasmere, filled the role of librarian. At first the Library was open only in summer, resulting in a large contingent of editors appearing all at once to share a single large table in a very small space. When the library was relocated, year-round service became possible, and professional librarians joined the scene. Pete Laver, the first, was a widely knowledgeable scholar and poet whose ability to locate just the right materials became legendary among Cornell editors, and Jeffrey Cowton, a scholar-librarian with a great command of the collections as a whole, grew to be essential to the ongoing efforts to complete the Cornell Wordsworth project.25

All did not go smoothly, of course. Robert Osborn’s manuscript of “The Borderers” was stolen in a truck hi-jack. On the advice of the police, the Press offered a small reward—no questions asked—for return of the typescript, and notices were posted about New York City, where the theft occurred. To everyone’s amazement the hijacked Borderers typescript did come back, dropped off anonymously and without any claim on the reward. The manuscript of “Poems, in Two Volumes, and Other Poems,” was less fortunate. Carefully and elaborately marked-up by the legendary Barbara Salazar of Cornell University Press, it was on its way from Ithaca to its editor Jared Curtis in Vancouver, Canada, when the carton containing it was dropped on the tarmac at the Toronto airport and promptly flattened by a passing vehicle, scattering an untold number of pages to the winds (and probably into Lake Ontario) before the remaining sheets were rescued. Curtis then prepared fresh originals that were returned to the Press for remarking. And particularly frustrating was the hunt for manuscripts known to have existed but long been missing. Promising trails through the notes and letters of nineteenth-century writers and antiquarian dealers who were acquainted with Wordsworth’s manuscripts and had often had them in their hands led discouragingly to a dead end.

Cornell editors, singly, in pairs, even in teams of three or four, spent many hours in the Wordsworth Library poring over manuscripts and books, taking full advantage of this unique collection of materials. Their stays were characterized by hard work and intense consultation over this or that crux, but also by convivial times, shared lodging and meals, excursions to near and more distant Lake District sights, mostly on foot to nearby peaks and lakes, but occasionally by bus or car—to Hawkshead and Esthwaite Lake, to Morecombe Bay to gather cockles, or to the fells surrounding Keswick and the town of Whitehaven by the sea. Bridge Cottage, on the edge of the River Rothay in the center of Grasmere, has a Guest Book littered with the names of Cornell editors, who on many occasions shared the cottage in groups of four or five and hosted festive dinners for many more. North American editors took advantage of the two-to-three-week break between terms in January to spend time in Grasmere, and it was not uncommon for the several occupants of the cottage to huddle round its sole coal fire in the tiny kitchen. Steve Parrish, “our fearless leader” to the editors under him, liked to “talk to the sheep and
could produce admirable and extended baas for them on walks in the long June evenings,” comments Beth Darlington. For several years Darlington “took care of the library from some time in May until July, when Stephen [Gill] could come from Oxford,” and remembers George Kirby, chief Dove Cottage guide, lighting the fires daily in the old library building. She “wore wool socks, wool skirts, and wool sweaters, but still needed the warmth of those fires to keep [her] fingers from going numb.” As Stephen Gill recalls, “the Dove Cottage library in the early days had only two Angle-Poise lamps, one of which tended not to work, until a furiously impatient Michael Jaye bought some more.” In winter, Gill remembers, when “the library was open by appointment, there was a coal fire which the solitary reader was encouraged to keep well alight, and coffee in the morning provided by Miss Clutterbuck.”

This new publication of full-colour digital facsimiles of the manuscripts at Dove Cottage opens up exciting new possibilities for romantic scholars. Those interested in textual scholarship can look at the manuscripts in detail, in conjunction with the Cornell Wordsworth. The availability of the wider range of letters and papers from the Dove Cottage collection, as well as extensive holdings of the manuscripts of Coleridge, De Quincey, Southey, and many others, also offers new fields to explore.

JARED CURTIS

SEATTLE, WASHINGTON

1 James A. Butler, “The Cornell Wordsworth Series,” *The Wordsworth Circle* 28, no. 2 (1997): 96, 96–100. The Dove Cottage Trust was established in 1890 and purchased Dove Cottage in that year, opening the building to the public in 1891. In 1984 the trust became formally known as the Wordsworth Trust, though the old name has continued in use.

2 John A. Finch to Mark L. Reed, April 26, 1965; Stephen Parrish Papers, 1980–2004. Collection Number: 14-12-3591, uncatalogued; Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library (hereafter, Parish Papers).


6 John A. Finch to Mark L. Reed, December 6, 1965; Parrish Papers, uncatalogued.

7 Quoted in Stephen M. Parrish to Mark L. Reed, December 5, 1967; in Parrish Papers, box 6.

10 Ibid., p. 91.
11 Parrish to Reed, January 7, 1975; Parrish Papers, uncatalogued.
13 “Proposal for a Cornell Wordsworth Series,” unsigned, but sent by Finch to Reed on October 22, 1967, as a joint proposal from Finch and Parrish; Parrish Papers, uncatalogued.
14 Jonathan Wordsworth to Parrish, January 6, 1974, and Parrish to Reed, January 24, 1974; Parrish Papers, uncatalogued.
15 Parrish to Robert Woof, December 10, 1973; Parrish Papers, Box 6. Robert Woof and Carol Landon are given as the editors of “The Vale of Esthwaite” and “An Evening Walk” in a list of twenty proposed volumes that Parrish sent to Mark L. Reed in January 1976; Parrish Papers, uncatalogued.
16 Parrish to Reed, January 24, 1974; Parrish Papers, uncatalogued.
17 Parrish to Jonathan Wordsworth, June 7, 1977; Parrish Papers, Box 6. Woof became Director of the Wordsworth Trust and the Museum in 1984, holding that post until his death in 2005. Under his leadership the Trust raised funds for improvements to the Wordsworth Museum and for a new library, The Jerwood Centre, which was completed and opened in 2004.
18 Pursuit of the rightful owner of the papers was an issue for a few years after the sale. In 1979 Hunter Davies wrote of tracking down twenty-seven-year-old Steve Murray of Carlisle, an ex-carpet-fitter who was "the gentleman" whose property was sold at the Sotheby's sale. Murray’s occupation was to buy and sell old stamps and postal markings. "Potters" or tinkers frequently brought him bundles of paper from demolished homes in Carlisle; he bought some of those bundles for £5. He was sorting through those bundles and getting most of the contents ready for the incinerator when he noticed the name Wordsworth, and, after a friend visited Carlisle library, called Sotheby's. Murray did not know who sold him the bundle, but he did nothing illegal. The Wordsworth family had moved to their moral right to ownership, suggesting that the manuscripts may have been stolen at some stage of their descent to the contents of tinker’s bundle of scrap paper (A Walk Around the Lakes [London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1979], pp. 298–302). Jonathan Wordsworth, in a review of My Dearest Love: Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth, edited in facsimile by Beth Darlington (Scolar Press for the Trustees of Dove Cottage, 1981), gave this account in The London Review of Books (Vol. 3 No. 19, 15 October 1981, pages 9–10): "The new letters are part of a large collection of Wordsworth papers that came suddenly on the market three years ago, as ‘The Property of a Gentleman’. Sotheby’s quite correctly refused to give their client’s name, and there was a period of dark speculations and long telephone-calls as members of the family tried to work out where the collection came from, who could have a right to it, who was double-crossing whom. Better sleuths were on the job, however. The papers were traced by the Sunday Times to Carlisle and a dealer in postal stamps, who had a poor memory and a shed at the bottom of his garden full of unconsidered trifles. The Wordsworth material (so the story went) had been brought to the door in a salvage sack, and sold for a
fiver. It had then waited its turn to be sifted, and by now it was too late even to guess who brought it along. The mystery remained; and to some extent it still remains. There were more speculations, and more telephone-calls—coming very often from people who didn’t want to say who they were, but making again and again the same point. The trade in postal stamps (markings on letters that precede 1840 and the modern attachable stamp) depends on the willingness of family solicitors to clear out their cellars. Archives that were deposited for safe keeping are now dispersed for the value that is set upon the franks.

Fortunately in the case of the Wordsworth papers, the literary value was recognised very soon. The collection was sold by Sotheby’s as a single unit, and a year later (after a successful public Appeal) it was bought by the Trustees of Dove Cottage. It is now at the Wordsworth Library, and once more a part of the archive from which it seems to have become separated at the death of the poet’s grandson Reginald in 1916.” Beth Darlington briefly tells the story in the preface to her edition of the letters reviewed by Jonathan Wordsworth and in volume published by Cornell University Press cited in note 20 below.

20 Parrish to Arthur Dean, February 15, 1979; in Parrish Papers, box 6. An important outcome of the sale agreement was that the love letters were to be edited by Beth Darlington and published without facsimiles by Cornell University Press, as indeed they were: *The Love Letters of William and Mary Wordsworth*, ed. Beth Darlington (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1981).

The second agreement, dated March 2, 1978 and signed by Jonathan Wordsworth for the Trust and Stephen Parrish for the Cornell Wordsworth, lists the volumes for which “rights of publication within the Cornell Wordsworth Series are granted without restriction,” and confirms “that their editors and such others who may be working on behalf of the Series will at all reasonable times be permitted access to the manuscript material in question.” The possibility of other volumes and their relevant manuscript materials being included in the future is left open to negotiation with the Trust. Parrish to Gormly Miller, March 2, 1978; in Parrish Papers, box 11.

21 The series is described on the following web site: http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu/collections/?collection_id=133
22 Parrish, “The Editor as Archaeologist,” p. 8.
25 Information about the history of Dove Cottage, the Wordsworth Trust, and the developments in Town End carried out by the Trust can be found in Stephen Hebron’s fine study, *Dove Cottage* (Grasmere: The Wordsworth Trust, 2009).
Matching the new color facsimiles from a multipage manuscript with those appearing in the Cornell Wordsworth volumes will require some patience. While the DCMS number will correspond, the number for each color image will not usually be the same as the folio number of the corresponding transcription and image in the Cornell edition. The two descriptive strategies differ because, for the Romanticism Project, each color image of the web-based index must be the basis for enumeration, while for the Cornell Wordsworth series the physical evidence is paramount, with the result that each leaf (one side a recto, the other a verso) is what has been counted, including stubs but not including loose inserts or paste-overs, which are numbered separately.