

## WORDSWORTH'S ASSOCIATION WITH ULLSWATER REPORT ON NOVEMBER'S MONTHLY MEETING

At our November meeting, Catherine Kay, who is Education and Outreach Officer and Romanticism expert at the Wordsworth Trust, Dove Cottage, Grasmere was our speaker. Though a late replacement for her colleague she proved an able and enthusiastic speaker, having a teaching background and previous experience of speaking to u3a's, with her mother having been a founder member of one.

Catherine began her talk with the most well-known Wordsworth poem associated with Ullswater, which is of course *The Daffodils*, a poem which many of us had learned by heart at school. "Beside the lake" doesn't name Ullswater, but Catherine then went on to read from Dorothy Wordsworth's *Grasmere Journal*, the original surviving notebooks of which the Wordsworth Trust holds, along with thousands of other documents.

The entry for 15 April 1802 describes William and Dorothy leaving Eusemere, near Pooley Bridge, then the home of the Clarksons. Catherine Clarkson was the wife of the anti-slavery campaigner Thomas Clarkson, and a close friend and correspondent of Dorothy's. The day was very windy and Dorothy described in beautiful detail first seeing the daffodils in the woods "beyond Gowbarrow Park" and how they grew more numerous and "tossed and reeled and danced, and seemed as if they verily laughed with the wind, that blew upon them over the lake;" Her description is echoed in Wordsworth's poem written 2 years later and first published in 1807, though the final version we are more familiar with is from 1815 and we were shown both versions. I think the final version is closer to Dorothy's description but you can always compare all three on line!

Catherine then went on to reference Wordsworth's poem "The Prelude" a semi- autobiographical poem, a lifetime in the writing and revision, published after his death and given its title by his wife Mary. Catherine touched on the description it contained of Wordsworth's childhood experience, when living in Penrith, of coming across the place where a murderer had been hanged on the Beacon Hill. We returned to Ullswater for another disturbing experience when, as a youth, Wordsworth had taken a shepherd's boat from its moorings. As he rowed "the moon was up, the Lake was shining clear" when suddenly there appeared the shadow of a towering cliff which seemed to rear up and follow him. We know the lake was Ullswater because one of the three versions we were shown, mentioned that the boat was "within a rocky cave"...."by the shores of Patterdale"

Verses from the poem first appeared in a letter which Dorothy and William had written to Coleridge in 1798, after they had travelled with him to Germany. Straitened circumstances and travelling with his sister – taken by society to mean his mistress – had forced them to part from Coleridge and take cheaper lodgings. We were given a facsimile of the original letter which was fascinating to see – not least for what one sheet of paper could contain in tiny writing and how simply writing Herrn Coleridge, Ratzeburg resulted in its delivery! NB Herrn is correct on an envelope, not Herr, for reasons our German group might explain.

**Josie Dunlop**