

## L.S. Lowry & Philip Larkin – Some Personal Reflections

Alice on behalf of Alistair

Both famous northern artists, one a painter and the other a poet, '*L.S. Lowry & Philip Larkin – some personal reflections*' was one of Alistair's plans for retirement writing during the last ten years or so. He never got very far with the exercise, perhaps because while he was acquainted with both men, the connection was not strong enough to write anything in depth. However, he did reminisce about his memories of them, so I'll relay the little that he told me.

The village where Alistair spend his early childhood, Mottram-in-Longdendale, was also Lowry's home. My grandfather, Harold, would sometimes go to Lowry's house in the evenings and chat to him about painting. A gentle soul, Harold used painting to dispel the shell-shock of being a radio operator in tanks in WWII. His paintings were not very good, and Lowry encouraged him to paint boats which was apparently a bit of a put-down!



Harold's painting of Peterhead harbour in North-East Scotland, close to Sophia's family home (Alistair's mother)



Since Lowry had a day job as a rent collector, Alistair would often take the same bus to school that he took to work. Some characters in his paintings were other regular passengers. The skateboarder figure in the Cripples, for example, would throw his skateboard onto the bus, clamber on, pay his fare, and head off for the day.

Philip Larkin also had a day job as University Librarian at Hull ([read his original application](#)). Indeed, for a short time, he also lived in Cottingham where our family lived. We had four exceptionally tall Black Poplar trees at the end of our garden, which were used by starlings as a roost, and I remember my parents saying that the next tallest landmark was the Brynmor Jones Library (of Hull University). We liked climbing them as far as we

could, and sometimes I would see the library in the distance and picture Philip Larkin sitting in an office somewhere on the top floor.

When Alistair resigned from Hull University, Larkin permitted him to continue using the library facilities for several years until he moved to Norwich. Apparently, Alistair wanted to draw parallels between him and Lowry even back then, but Larkin did not take kindly to this comparison! However, at some point he came up to Alistair quite excitedly and said, "My aunt knows your mother." He had discovered that both women belonged to the same social club, possibly in Glossop. One of Larkin's poems, *Trees*, was read at Alistair's memorial service by his daughter-in-law, Gail Pitty.

### The Trees

The trees are coming into leaf  
Like something almost being said;  
The recent buds relax and spread,  
Their greenness is a kind of grief.

Is it that they are born again  
And we grow old? No, they die too.  
Their yearly trick of looking new  
Is written down in rings of grain.

Yet still the unresting castles thresh  
In fullgrown thickness every May.  
Last year is dead, they seem to say,  
Begin afresh, afresh, afresh.

PHILIP LARKIN

Thanks to Geoff Weston for clarifying the references to Philip Larkin. A long-time friend of Alistair, who worked at the Brynmor Jones Library since the late 60s and later became a senior administrator at Hull University, Geoff has been researching Larkin's life and writing for over 15 years. He has contributed many articles to the journal of the Philip Larkin Society, and given lectures to literary and bibliographical societies.