

Stones and Lilies: Ruskin's legacy since 1969

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Figure 1 Delegates to the Brantwood Conference, March 1969, including J.S Dearden (far left)
Courtesy of Robert Hewison

On a cold Spring morning in 1969, a small group of scholars gathered at Brantwood, John Ruskin's last home in the Lake District (fig. 1). They were commemorating Ruskin's 150th birthday and sharing their interests and knowledge. Taking that historical conference as its starting point, this article will describe and explain various threads of scholarship and outreach which have taken place over the intervening fifty years. It will draw on interviews with Ruskin specialists from different disciplines, carried out in anticipation of Ruskin's 200th anniversary in 2019.¹

Ruskin's legacy encompasses institutions and buildings with which he is associated, directly and indirectly, including Bembridge School, the collections of the Guild of St George in Sheffield, and the Ruskin Library at the University of Lancaster. It also embraces productive landscapes at Brantwood, Cumbria and Ruskin Land in the Wyre Forest, Worcestershire. This study will consider the

¹ My thanks for help in researching the Ruskin revival since 1969 go especially to Tony Cann, James Dearden and Robert Hewison. I have also been greatly helped by Howard Hull and Sandra Kemp, as well as Beatrice Bertram and her team at York Art Gallery. Thanks also, for their time and wisdom, to Janet Barnes, David Barrie, Alan Davis, Mike Dibb, Rachel Dickinson, Stuart Eagles, Peter Miller, Louise Pullen, Jenny Robbins, Julian Spalding, Michael Wheeler, Jacqueline Whiteside, Stephen Wildman and Clive Wilmer.

pressures of caring for physical relics of Ruskin's life, and the need for growth and renewal. It will also draw attention to the gaps we would now recognise in the conference line-up of March 1969, especially the contested place of Ruskin in gender studies.²

The multi-faceted nature of Ruskin's afterlife in the last fifty years has recently been revealed in the diverse activities that have sprung up in relation to the Ruskin200 anniversary. Talking to the many leaders of these projects, it is clear that there are two main driving forces for their work. One is the need to maintain and protect Ruskin's life and work - the concrete remains. These we can think of, perhaps, as part of an ongoing response to Ruskin's focus on stones, in *The Stones of Venice* (1851-53) or his geological collections, like the 2,000 specimens and their manuscript catalogues, which have recently been returned to his home at Brantwood. The other is the impetus that Ruskin gives to renewal, rethinking and nurturing, especially in relation to his relationships with women. His writings on female education and potential, in the flower-filled metaphors of *On Queens' Gardens* (1865) and his botanical studies in *Proserpina* (1875-79), have become some of the most contested areas of his work. This essay revisits these arguments. It suggests how we might open up his ideas about sowing, tending and raising. By contemplating Ruskin's enthusiasm for both stones and lilies, we can see our modern responses to his work more clearly.

His own works of art, especially his studies of living rock in *Gneiss Rock, Glenfinlas* (Ashmolean Museum, Oxford, 1853) or *Chamonix: Rocks and Vegetation* (Lakeland Arts, 1854) offer an insight. His first love, as his father acknowledged, was geology. For Ruskin, the land beneath his feet suggested stories of shape-shifting and rebirth. Stones are never static. They are always in a state of erosion or recreation, as water and ice flow across their surfaces, into their crevices, undercutting. Mosses and lichens slowly embrace them, softening, finding chinks. They co-exist. The interconnectedness of geology and botany, of things flexible and fixed, demonstrate the strengths of Ruskin's work for new generations.

Ruskin's reputation has been transformed since 1969. In the aftermath of the Second World War, Ruskin's encouragement to his readers to work together to 'do the best you can for *all men*', as 'St. George's soldiers' sounded outmoded. Ruskin's militaristic, overtly religious tone - 'You are called into a Christian ship of war' - was distasteful to many in the post-1945 generation.³ Even reading Ruskin was an

² The Brantwood conference took place on 23-26 March 1969 and ended with a minibus tour of the Lake District. For a contemporary account, see the first number of *The Ruskin Newsletter*, Autumn 1969, 3-4. This includes a list of all the attendees: S.E. Brown, C.A. Cate, J.S. Dearden, P. Fontaney, M. Hardman, R. Hewison, A.E. Howard, L. Johnston, H. Kimura, P.L. Messenger, H.I. Shapiro, Miss Rachel Tricket, Mr and Mrs R.G. Lloyd, Mr and Mrs G. Stead, Miss C. Williams, Don Manuel Domecq, Luis Gordon, Charles Gordon, David Palengat, Michael Bunney, Anthony Hoyland, and J.C. Dearden

³ Letter 79 (dated July 1877) in *Fors Clavigera*, quoted from (as in all cases of Ruskin's texts in this article) the *Library Edition* of Ruskin's works and quoted henceforth as *Works of John Ruskin*, followed by volume and page number. Edward Tyas Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, eds, *The Works of John Ruskin*, London: George Allen / New York: Longman, Green, and Co, 1903-12, 39 vols. Here, XXVII, 148.

effort. His collected works, brought together in the 39 volumes of the *Library Edition*, were daunting. They had been assembled with such care by his editors and disciples E.T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn, but now too often they gathered dust on the top shelves of antiquarian booksellers or public libraries. His works were no longer common currency. Cook and Wedderburn had insisted that all their readers would remember the passage describing the gold and blue and green of scented Alpine meadows from Ruskin's 1849 diary. That might have been the case in 1912. But by 1969, the intensity of public engagement with Ruskin had faded. The art historian, broadcaster and former Director of the National Gallery, Sir Kenneth Clark was one of the few art critics who continued to champion Ruskin's writing. He published a new edition of Ruskin's autobiography, *Praeterita*, in 1949, and an anthology of his own favourite extracts in *Ruskin Today* in 1964.⁴ But the shine had come off Ruskin's name.

The conference at Brantwood represented a small but significant return to critical favour. Official proceedings began on Sunday 23 March 1969, with James Dearden's presentation on the history of the house. He outlined the complex relationship between the building and its contents: many of the objects owned by Ruskin had been dispersed after this death, and then brought back together at Bembridge School on the Isle of Wight, through the efforts of the headmaster, John Howard Whitehouse. Dearden came to work at Bembridge in the 1950s, caring for the collection, and adding to it when he could. Whitehouse had made a pilgrimage to the Lakes as a young man in 1899 to visit Ruskin. He had been able to buy Brantwood as an empty shell in 1934 and establish it as a memorial to his hero.

The complex intersections between the house and its contents, between private and public, between 'apostolic' and academic approaches to Ruskin persisted even a hundred years after his death. These overlaps were in many ways left over from Ruskin's own use of autobiography as the foundation of his work. His insistence on direct experience of places and things, at the heart of his writings and drawings, fed into the continuing idea of the need for a direct connection back to Ruskin the man. Brantwood and Bembridge were the points of access. The conference of 1969 was, on the one hand, a reflection of this persistent focus on the personal and the urge to follow in his footsteps – with papers on the *Iteriad*, a new edition of *Praeterita*, Ruskin's travels on the Rhone. But, on the other, it also allowed for an opening up of scholarship. In particular, a growing academic interest was starting to express itself in the possibilities of building on Ruskin's inherent interdisciplinarity.

One result was that critical focus shifted beyond his words, to reconsider his images. Dearden himself organised regular displays from the Whitehouse collection at Bembridge and in Brantwood. Furthermore, as another way of disseminating an interest in and love of Ruskin's visual art, drawings and watercolours from this collection were increasingly loaned to exhibitions, firstly across Britain, and then further afield, with a major display abroad being curated by Robert Hewison at the J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky (16 October-19 November 1978) on

⁴ John Ruskin, introduction by Kenneth Clark, *Praeterita: The Autobiography of John Ruskin. Outlines of Scenes and Thoughts perhaps worthy of Memory in my Past Life*, London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1949; Kenneth Clark, ed, *Ruskin Today*, London: John Murray, 1964.

Ruskin and Venice (fig. 2). This event also showcased the vast oil painting of St Marks, Venice, made between 1877 and 1882 by John Wharltton Bunney, which was lent by the Guild of St George's collection.



Figure 2 Robert Hewison, Curator, at the *Ruskin and Venice* exhibition at J.B. Speed Art Museum, Louisville, 1978
Courtesy of Robert Hewison

The inclusion of this fragile work (measuring over 7 ft wide), drew attention to a number of concerns in Ruskin studies. Firstly, it was a reminder of Ruskin's insistence on the proper care of older buildings. It demonstrated his delight in pleasing decay, and his horror of the invasive stripping and acid-cleaning of the time-worn surfaces of the Venetian basilica. Bunney recorded the impact of this approach to restoration on one corner of the building. It reinforced the centrality not only of the creation of ancient buildings themselves within Ruskin's thinking – their decoration, or their architectural strengths - but the equal importance of their afterlife, and each generation's responsibility to bequeath them unharmed to succeeding generations. This part of his legacy is particularly clearly demonstrated in his formation of the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings with William Morris in 1877.

Secondly, it drew attention to particular conservation worries about Ruskin's own collections of paintings and works on paper – drawings he himself had created and those he had commissioned from others. When Bunney's work arrived in the pristine American galleries, it looked like it needed care and cleaning. As the spotlight was turned on Ruskin's pictures, at home and overseas, it was becoming clear that the institutions that held his works would need to reconsider how they looked after them in the future. The Louisville show demonstrated there was also a market for Ruskin's artistic output. His watercolours and sketches were rising in value, and overseas galleries were increasingly keen to borrow and even to acquire examples for their permanent collections.

A third and related issue raised by increased interest in works like Bunney's *Western Façade of the Basilica of San Marco* was visibility. This particular loan was, at

the time of the *Ruskin and Venice* show, stored in Reading. Along with most of the collection given by Ruskin to the people of Sheffield, it had been crated and moved to the University of Reading in 1953. Initial plans to give the works a permanent home there had come to nothing, and so they remained largely untouched and unseen, hidden from public view. With renewed academic and curatorial engagement with Ruskin, the Guild needed to reconsider access to their collections – and how they might pay for their upkeep. It also raised questions of whether the group of objects should remain intact.

In Ruskin's lifetime, his own watercolours, and the works bought for him by his father, were constantly moving. He travelled with cases of Turner's studies. He made gifts of carefully selected works to universities and schools. His personal collection was always a work in progress, with major oil paintings, like Turner's *The Slave Ship* sold to an American buyer in the 1860s. Ruskin's relationship with his objects was fluid and sometimes pragmatic. So, the consequent movement of Ruskin's collections firstly from Reading to Sheffield, and later on again within Sheffield, from Norfolk Street to the new Millennium Galleries in the heart of the city, fit this pattern. So does the sale of a valuable object – Verrocchio's *Madonna and Child* (bought by National Galleries Scotland in 1975) - in order to subsidise the preservation of the rest of the works and to make them accessible. They are Ruskinian responses to the complexities of looking after the physical relics of his life and ones which allow the collections to flourish in other fresh ways. The development of outreach programmes, like 'Ruskin in Sheffield', is one fruitful response. Since 2014, Ruth Nutter has steered this project, using Ruskin's gift to the city as a springboard to re-engage with Ruskin's ideas in a contemporary context.

'Ruskin in Sheffield' was awarded £67,100 by the Heritage Lottery Fund to reconnect locals with Ruskin and show how his legacy might be encouraging today. Nutter has concentrated on themes like art, craft and nature, as well as thinking about memory and place. Between 2014 and 2019, she worked with over thirty community groups, in and around Walkley, on the edge of Sheffield, as the original home of Ruskin's collection. Beekeepers, gardeners, bakers and photographers have been involved, alongside ten volunteers, trained to host events, and to learn more about the history of where they live. Together they have created hands-on spaces for sewing, drawing, painting and sharing stories. Some of the activities were brought into the city centre as part of the 'Year of Making' in Sheffield, which took place in 2016 and was organised by a consortium comprising the University of Sheffield, Sheffield Hallam University, Chamber of Commerce, Made in Sheffield, the Company of Cutlers in Hallamshire and Sheffield City Council. Nutter facilitated connections between residents and makers, through the 'Make Good Livelihoods' events in the summer of 2016. And in 2018, the focus shifted towards Meersbrook Hall, in south Sheffield, which was the second home of Ruskin's collection in the city. There was a week-long celebration at Meersbrook Hall, including oral history workshops on 'Memories of the Ruskin Museum' and colourful light projections on the front of the building. The aim of all these projects was to open up conversations about shared values, and improve access to art, outdoor spaces and community memories.

Nutter describes the process as 'gentle'.⁵ She has often been working with the most deprived areas in Sheffield, challenging the residents to make something beautiful. It takes time. It requires constant negotiation with organisations across the sectors, and persistent fund-raising. The rewards are there, if you know where to look: perhaps in the gardening clubs for people with chaotic lives or mental health challenges, perhaps in the plans to display new works created in the community in the Ruskin Gallery.

These activities reveal the possibilities that open up when we step beyond the concrete or biographical imperatives that have shaped much of Ruskin's afterlife. As Nutter explains, most of the people she encounters are not interested in Ruskin the Victorian. They are inspired and guided by Ruskin the artist and observer, in his enthusiasm for both hand-skill and the natural world. And, as Louise Pullen, curator of the Ruskin Gallery puts it, Brantwood tells Ruskin's personal story better than she can.⁶

Listening to Nutter and Pullen describe the diverse projects that have grown out of Ruskin's collections in Sheffield, we become aware of another shift – the prevalence of women's voices. This is a significant move away from the opening scene of the Brantwood conference of 1969. As the photographic evidence makes clear, only a very few women were present. The event was convivial, but, in hindsight, masculine, with late night conversations over whisky in ice-cold rooms. A photograph in James Dearden's memoirs, *Rambling Reminiscences: a Ruskinian's Recollections* (2014) show a cheerful group of men, young and old, standing outside Ruskin's dining room.

Mary Lutyens, editor of Effie Ruskin's letters, was unable to attend. Virginia Surtees, who was creating a catalogue raisonné of the Pre-Raphaelite artist Dante Gabriel Rossetti, had hoped to be there, but was prevented at the last minute. Catherine Williams, who was cataloguing the Guild's collection at Reading, gave a presentation on the last day, but she was the only acknowledged female speaker. These facts reflect the state of historical and literary critical studies across the board in the late 1960s. Given Ruskin's own interest in women's education, there was evidently still work to be done in this area, as in many others.

However, that 1969 conference was a turning point. The inspiring example of Rachel Trickett, Fellow and later Principal of St Hugh's College, Oxford, is particularly remembered by those who were there. Her small circle of research students was significant in the revival of Ruskin's literary fortunes in the coming years. And Ruskin's name was increasingly being invoked in the growing academic debates about literature, art and gender. In 1970, for instance, Kate Millett published her essay on *The Debate over Women: Ruskin vs Mill* in *Victorian Studies*.⁷ This quickly became a set text for a new generation of scholars, looking to read the Victorians afresh. In her interrogation of the ideal of 'separate spheres' for men and women, Millett singled out Ruskin's essay *On Queens' Gardens* as an example of the

⁵ In conversation with the author, and quoted in Suzanne Fagence Cooper, *The Ruskin Revival, 1969-2019*, London: Pallas Athene, 2019, 108.

⁶ In conversation with the author, and quoted in Cooper, *Ruskin Revival*, 106.

⁷ Kate Millett, 'The Debate over Women: Ruskin vs. Mill', *Victorian Studies*, 14:1, September 1970, 63-82.

patriarchal limitations placed on young women. She defined his view of the feminine as an insight into 'that compulsive masculine fantasy' underpinning 'the official Victorian attitude'.⁸ Millett focussed on Ruskin's description of the 'separate characters' of men and women: 'He is eminently the doer, the creator, the discoverer, the defender (...) her intellect is not for invention or recreation, but sweet ordering, arrangement and decision.'⁹

This was certainly where Ruskin began his argument, but as another woman writer on Ruskin Dinah Birch demonstrated in her later article, *Ruskin's Womanly Mind* of 1988, it was only the start of a more subversive vision of girls' education. Ruskin lulled his audience with floral imagery and suggestions of 'true wifely subjection',¹⁰ before outlining a bold and innovative curriculum. He wanted girls to enjoy physical and intellectual freedoms, full access to a library, training in languages, history, geography and science. Yes, he hesitated when it came to their study of theology, but he encouraged young women to see themselves as Queens, not housewives. Ruskin's lecture had been delivered in 1865. That is only five years since the first women were admitted to study at the Royal Academy Schools, and three years before the earliest public meetings in Manchester promoting female suffrage. Ruskin was writing at a time of flux and a moment of reassessment. Clearly, his ideas would never fully meet the standards of late twentieth-century feminists. But for Ruskin, there was nothing inferior about working towards 'ordering, arrangement and decision'. These were the qualities he valued most highly: 'Government and co-operation are in all things and eternally the laws of life', he wrote in *Modern Painters V* (1860).¹¹

In this connection, it might be helpful to reconsider Ruskin's focus on gardening imagery, in his lecture 'Of Queens' Gardens' and in his botanical researches for *Proserpina* (1875-1886). In both places, he encouraged his audience to step out of the garden and onto the roads less-travelled. He hoped the young women who read his words would be made aware of alternative ways of thinking and living. Indeed, the final paragraphs of his 1865 lecture can almost be seen as a rallying cry, a challenge to his readers. There, Ruskin exhorted educated girls to use their skills and take responsibility for the world outside. This might begin with a young woman choosing to 'go out in the morning to her garden, to play with the fringes of its guarded flowers, and lift their heads when they are drooping'. Yet, he insists that this is not enough, because 'she knows in her heart (...) that outside of that little rose-covered wall, the wild grass, to the horizon, is torn up the agony of men.'¹² Ruskin invokes the metaphors of tending and blooming to frame a fierce demand: that young women, privileged and empowered by education, should look in the 'darkness of the terrible streets' where the 'feeble florets are lying, with all their fresh leaves torn'. The vulnerable and the destitute were just beyond their gate. He continues: 'Will you not go down among them?'.¹³ The potential for changing

⁸ Millett, 'The Debate over Women', 64.

⁹ Millett, 'The Debate over Women', 68.

¹⁰ 'Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, XVIII, 121.

¹¹ *Modern Painters*, volume 5, in *Works of John Ruskin*, VII, 207.

¹² 'Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, XVIII, 141.

¹³ 'Of Queens' Gardens' in *Sesame and Lilies*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, XVIII, 142-43.

lives was in their hands. The harebells, wild violets and woodbines Ruskin scattered across his pages are, on the surface, highly decorative but at heart, his message was uncompromising, for girls and their families.

Ruskin's call to rethink our relationship with the world beyond the window was set out again in the late 1870s, with the publication of *Proserpina*. That text was ostensibly a guide to botany and the classification of plants but its wider implications are present in the very subtitle: *Studies of Wayside Flowers, while the Air was yet Pure among the Alps, and in the Scotland and England which my Father Knew*. In the first place, Ruskin was foregrounding the small and the overlooked, flowers which had not been brought within the garden. He walked with his readers, in the early morning, to see the 'wild saxifrages, which are allowed to grow wherever they like, and the rock strawberries and (...) a bunch or two of pale pansies'.¹⁴ He illustrated his pages with heathers and mosses. He encouraged close observation of growing things that were neither showy nor cultivated, but still beautiful and worth consideration despite usually being overlooked and understudied. Ruskin presented a topsy-turvy version of the world, beginning with the humblest plants.

In addition, he suggested that these plants were vulnerable. They were the plants 'which my Father knew' and which grew 'while the Air was yet Pure'. *Proserpina* was part of his wider recognition that the natural world which his generation had taken for granted, was under threat. Ruskin wrote, almost in passing, about the importance of trees in a mountainous landscape. Their roots, he explained 'stitch the stone together'. He went on: 'roots, small and great, bind and do not rend'. And this means that 'by cutting down forests on great mountain slopes, not only is the climate destroyed, but the danger of superficial landslip fearfully increased.'¹⁵ Ruskin identified the direct impacts of deforestation: soil erosion, landslides and changing weather patterns. He pointed out, in the clearest terms, the interconnectedness of stones and green growth. Ruskin saw how the landscape, the rocks beneath us, the sky over our heads, and the plants that shelter and refresh us as we walk, are all part of the same whole. This holistic view of what he called Creation, and we would call ecosystems and environments, has become an increasingly significant aspect of Ruskin's afterlife in the early twenty-first century.

Both 'Of Queens' Gardens' and *Proserpina* suggest a radically different legacy for Ruskin and his readers, one that stretches beyond the preservation of man-made structures of archives, historic houses and museums, and towards something more dynamic and earthy. They encouraged and still encourage a concentration on the potential for women to work effectively beyond the narrow space of the home and garden. They urge readers to explore, to find beauty in unexpected places. And they insist that readers take responsibility for their treatment of the earth and the air.

These texts are subtler than *Unto this Last*, Ruskin's essays in political economy that acted as a call to arms against materialism, and which were published in 1860. They address a different audience. They were directed more towards mid-Victorian women and are still attractive to those who want to work in the in-

¹⁴ *Proserpina*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, XXV, 397.

¹⁵ *Proserpina*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, XXV, 221-22.

between spaces and starting from the local (albeit with large ambitions), creating fresh networks of activism and growth.

In the last twenty years, the interplay between the traditional bedrock of Ruskin's legacy – his house, his Guild, his manuscripts and pictures – and these organic responses to his work has become, arguably, more fruitful. Interestingly, in this timeframe too, women have become much more visible in associations linked with Ruskin and his legacy. Janet Barnes, for example, became Keeper of the Guild's collection after it returned to Sheffield in 1985, with the intention of using the objects for the public good, to make it 'an active inheritance'.¹⁶ She has since become a Director of the Guild, as well as Director of the Crafts Council, CEO of York Museums Trust and, from 2004 to 2013, chairperson of Arts Council England in Yorkshire. The foregrounding of women has continued, with Rachel Dickinson becoming the first female Master of the Guild in 2019 (fig. 3).



Figure 3 Rachel Dickinson, Master of the Guild of St George, since 2019, with Clive Wilmer, previous Master.
© Guild of St George.

The new approach is characterized by the evolution of a series of flexible, pop-up activities created by 'Ruskin in Sheffield'. And alongside these lies the pioneering work of the visual literacy charity, 'The Big Draw'. This was established by Ruskin's Guild of St George as 'The Campaign for Drawing' in 2000, his centenary year. Imaginative events since the campaign started, under the umbrella of 'The Big Draw', have encouraged people across Britain, and now internationally, to think about drawing in a plethora of new ways: with light, with pixels, with embroidery, even with pipe cleaners! Making mistakes, experimenting and

¹⁶ Janet Barnes, in conversation with Suzanne Fagence Cooper, 24 April 2018.

developing agile working are part of the process. They tie in with Ruskin's polymathic, experimental and organic approach. They are rigorous but not regimented. The theme for 2020, announced by The Big Draw's current Director Kate Mason, is 'A Climate of Change', with a focus on the important connections between art and nature, and the pressing need to be more kind to our earth.

Thinking about the natural environment, a transformative engagement with Ruskin's ideas is also increasingly visible in the farms and ancient oak forest in Ruskin Land, the ground near Bewdley given to the Guild in the 1870s. The productive acts of planting, coppicing and harvesting on the land are shared by the Companions of the Guild, and other volunteers, as well as people on the edge of society needing a supportive community and a place to nurture self-confidence and skills. The saw mill and the herd of Dexter cattle are Ruskinian projects, representing a low-impact, hands-on approach to land management. It is an out-of-the-way place, which allows visitors and volunteers to work with the hand, the head and the heart. Ruskin Land is undisturbed by external distractions, with a fruitful community, bound by a common vision.

One of the most impressive examples of this tendency towards renewing and cherishing the landscape is found in the gardens and meadows of Brantwood. Here, the interconnectedness of the house and its grounds, set on the shores of Coniston Water, has shown that the two tendencies in recent responses to Ruskin – the weight of his physical relics and the blooming of the imaginative freedoms he encouraged – do not have to pull apart. Instead, here, they have been woven together through the inspired partnership of Howard Hull, Director of the Brantwood Trust, and head gardener, Sally Beamish.



Figure 4 Sally Beamish (left) and estate staff at Brantwood, credit Val Corbett

The beautifying and thoughtful re-establishment of the gardens, woods and fields was the vision of Beamish, a trained horticulturalist, who started as a volunteer, and was appointed head gardener in 1988 (fig. 4). Very sadly, Sally died of a brain tumour in the summer of 2018, aged only fifty-four. Even in her final illness, she continued to teach people to 'find and deepen their innate empathy with

nature, to read the soil, the vital signs of plants and the impact of their own presence'.¹⁷ Her work on the estate enabled visitors and colleagues to see a new side of Ruskin. She enacted and embodied his practical engagement with the earth and its plants, its waters and its seasons, visible for the first time in a century. Her colleagues remembered how 'Sally looked closely at the evidence of the land itself'.¹⁸

As part of the programme of regeneration, Beamish and longstanding colleague and woodsman, Peter Wright, rediscovered and rebuilt the dry-stone penthouse in the Professor's Garden, which had sheltered Ruskin's bee skeps. They replanted the espaliered apple trees, bringing fourteen old varieties into the garden, including the Cornish Aromatic, the Belle de Boskoop and the Ribston Pippin. The whole appearance of the cottage garden is now underpinned by a careful organic and seasonal planting system. In fact, as part of Beamish's vision for the estate, she introduced organic husbandry across the site. This is one aspect of Ruskin in action. It allows the estate management to keep true to his vision in new ways which also reflect best practice today.

The ever-changing displays inside the house, including new commissions from artists, and the homecoming of Ruskin's geological specimens, on show as *Treasures from Dust* (8 August – 11 November 2019, curated by Howard Hull) are the other face of his legacy. Finding a balance between old and new, preserving the past, and enabling new generations to discover their own, unexpected, productive, ways into Ruskin, is the task for the next 50 years. Looking after the stones while encouraging the lilies to bud and blossom continues to be a challenge for the inheritors of Ruskin's things. Since 1969, Ruskinians have witnessed the upheaval of removing the Whitehouse Collection from Bembridge to the University of Lancaster. In the anniversary year of 2019, we saw the formal transfer of the Collection into the permanent care of the Ruskin Library at Lancaster, and the winding up of the Ruskin Foundation. It is good to know that Ruskin's things are now at home in state of the arts storage facilities and with full public access.

Perhaps it is worth remembering two of Ruskin's most thoughtful passages. One, found in *The Elements of Drawing*, gives us a startling litany of stones, insisting that we take nothing for granted. A stone, he wrote:

may be round or angular, polished or rough, cracked all over like an ill-glazed teacup, or as united and broad as the breast of Hercules. It may be flaky as a wafer, as powdery as a field puff-ball: it may be knotted like a ship's hawser or kneaded like hammered iron, or knit like a Damascene sabre, or fused like a glass bottle, or crystallised like hoar frost, or veined like a forest leaf: look at it.¹⁹

There is no such thing as a typical stone. We have to respond to each one separately. And so it is with the physical relics of Ruskin's life and work. Each collection looks and feels different. It has its own beginning, its own end.

¹⁷ Quoted by Rachel Garnett, 'Obituary: Brantwood's Sally Beamish was a "visionary gardener"', *Westmoreland Gazette*, 28 June 2018.

¹⁸ Garnett, 'Sally Beamish'.

¹⁹ *The Elements of Drawing in Works of John Ruskin*, XV, 97.

And as, Ruskin explained, sometimes we should let things pass and perish. Standing outside Ribblesford Church, not far from the woods and fields now known as Ruskin Land, he was studying the 'old perpendicular traceries.' His friend said that the carved stone was so fragile, that the parish was planning to restore the church, and copy the traceries. Ruskin disagreed. 'Why in the world', he asked, 'cannot the congregation pay for a new and original church, to display the genius and wealth of the nineteenth century somewhere else and leave the dear old ruin to grow grey by Severn side in peace?'"²⁰

Ruskin's legacy has not ossified. The objects and buildings have been secured for the future, but they are only one element in his legacy. The many events and conversations of his anniversary year have shown us that his work still has the potential to uplift, to disrupt. Women are no longer side-lined but are at the heart of this process. The all-male line-up of the 1969 conference photograph is now unthinkable. From Sandra Kemp, Director of The Ruskin, Lancaster, to Emma Stibbon, R.A., who in 2019 created monumental drawings of Alpine glaciers in response to Ruskin's *Storm Cloud* lecture, female voices are heard, and their works of art are seen. In his words and pictures, Ruskin reminds us that nothing in Nature stands still. Stones and lilies are both, constantly, being transformed, along with the women and men who cherish them.

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²⁰ Letter to the Editor of *Kidderminster Times*, 24 July 1877, published in *Arrows of the Chace*, in *Works of John Ruskin*, XXXIV, 532.