NANCY SANDARS

Nancy Katharine Sandars

29 June 1914 – 20 November 2015

elected Fellow of the British Academy 1984

by

HELEN HUGHES-BROCK

Nancy Sandars (1914–2015) was an archaeologist and prehistorian, the author of original and well-written books and articles examining cultural contacts and interactions of peoples in Bronze and Iron Age western and south-eastern Europe, Greece and the eastern Mediterranean as suggested by artefacts and technological developments, particularly in swords and other metalwork. She wrote on European prehistoric art from Palaeolithic to the Iron Age. She published English versions of poems from ancient Mesopotamia and Syria, notably an influential version of the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. She was also a poet whose work, mostly published late in life, was highly regarded.

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NANCY SANDARS

Nancy Katharine Sandars was one of two women Fellows of the British Academy, near contemporaries, who packed distinguished achievements in a number of separate fields in their very long lives without the advantages of a long-term academic post or support from an institution. Unlike her contemporary Beatrice de Cardi FBA,[1] Sandars started without even a BA—FBA but not BA, a rare species.[2] She had private means to live on and took full advantage of her freedom to pursue her interests unencumbered by professional duties or any need to compete with male colleagues. She worked alongside them as one archaeologist-prehistorian among others and in some cases as a close friend. Experiences 'cured [me] of any faint hankering I might ever have had for the academic life'. Her lack of a succession of students, however, has had the result that some of her work is less known and used than it deserves.[3]

Nancy Sandars' life and career are very fully documented. Her enormous rich body of beautifully written and vividly detailed family letters was kept throughout her long life. Letters she received from friends and colleagues were also kept, but hers to them are often missing.[4] A good selection of letters (including some mentioned or quoted from here) and other material is available on a well-arranged website. It includes an illuminating documentary film, 'The Lucid Life of Nancy Sandars', available also on YouTube,[5] which forms a good complement to this memoir. The 'Published Works' section under Literature/Bibliography on that website lists her four monographs, two translations and two volumes of poetry, with five of some twenty-six articles on archaeology and poetry but not her reviews, which are listed at the end of this memoir. (Nancy was an active reviewer for thirty-six years, in demand for her breadth of learning and probably too because she never couched criticisms in hurtful language.)

Nancy Sandars was born on 29 June 1914, the day of the assassination at Sarajevo, in the Manor House at Little Tew in north Oxfordshire, where she lived all her

[1] See H. Crawford, 'Beatrice Eileen de Cardi 1914–2016', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 16 (2017), 109–18.

[2] She was elected in 1984, when there were 734 men, 37 women.

[3] She gave one or two tutorials to the present writer and perhaps another student in 1962 replacing a colleague on leave from St Hugh's College, Oxford, but I know of no other examples.

[4] Family letters are at the Oxfordshire History Centre in Oxford. Her academic correspondence and work notes are in the archive of the Institute of Archaeology, University of London, and await cataloguing. A few more letters to Stuart Piggott are in the Piggott archive at the Institute of Archaeology, Oxford. Correspondence with David Jones is in the National Library of Wales in Aberystwyth. That with Peter Levi is at Boston College (John J. Burns Library). Katherine Watson's many letters to Nancy 1944–2008 are in the Bodleian Library, Oxford; Nancy's to Watson do not survive.

[5] http://www.nancysandars.org.uk (accessed 21 April 2020). The film was completed in 2019; it was filmed and directed by Mike Tomlinson and presented by Rebecca Huxley. It includes interviews with Nancy herself on her ninety-ninth birthday and with many others. The YouTube source is https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2HgIvNVgrng (accessed 21 April 2020).

101 years. Her father Lt-Col. Edward Carew Sandars, CMG, had served in the Boer War and bought the house in 1913 when he was put in charge of remounts (finding horses for military use) for Oxfordshire, Berkshire and Buckinghamshire. Her mother Gertrude Annie Phipps was a descendant of James Ramsay, an influential abolitionist from 1784, and also had Irish connections. Her sister Elizabeth, always called Betty, was seven years older, the survivor of twins. The sisters remained very close until Betty's death in 1995, living together in the house. Their father, who died in 1944, did not leave the house to his female children but set up a trust so that they got the income from it. Neither married.

The family lived comfortably at Little Tew. Nancy and Betty were country girls—close, sharp and affectionate observers of nature, passionate gardeners with a particular interest in birds. She grew up among horses and loved riding and hunting. A lively picture of her childhood circumstances appears in early letters bravely and idiosyncratically spelt because she did not learn to read and write 'properly' until she was about seven (her mother had always read to her). She already wrote expressively and with imagination. There was writing in the family, by her mother and others, and she always wanted to write. She liked to 'make up a poem' and to draw and paint and sometimes included a poem or a picture in a letter home. At 12 she was sent to Luckley School in Wokingham, Berkshire, but was seriously unhappy and moved after a year to Wychwood School in north Oxford. Eye trouble, ocular tuberculosis, had already set in. Her eyes were a lifelong problem.

In 1930 and 1931 Nancy had two exciting, formative times in Germany at a remarkable establishment, Die Klause near Darmstadt, where young people not only learnt the language but were introduced to all aspects of German culture.[6] She loved her time there but at the same time was well aware of the sinister economic and political situation in Germany, describing people's miserable lives and seeing the likely outcomes in an acute and sensitive letter to her father.[7] Next came a stay in France for cultural and social purposes. There she had begun to see 'games and hunting ... as idle as the slipperiest reverie' and herself as 'communist, international, pacifist'.[8] In London she found social life enjoyable and exciting, but when the question of presentation at court was raised she suggested a stay in Paris with her mother and friends instead. In Rome with her mother in 1932 (her father and Betty did not share their love of travelling) she found Etruscan art a revelation, while Roman left her absolutely cold. In February 1934 they witnessed the unsuccessful socialist uprising in Vienna.[9]

[6] http://www.nancysandars.org.uk/letters/index.php, 1930–1931 and http://www.nancysandars.org.uk/other/index.php (accessed 21 April 2020).

[7] http://www.nancysandars.org.uk/letters/index.php, 8 June 1931 (accessed 21 April 2020).

[8] Ibid., 1932 to her mother Easter Sunday and Palm Sunday (27 and 20 March).

[9] Ibid., 1934 and http://www.nancysandars.org.uk/other/index.php (accessed 21 April 2020).

Her mother died that spring, when Nancy was not quite 20. They had always been close; Nancy's letters to her are exceptionally frank and trusting. There followed some months in Switzerland and Hampshire for eye treatments involving injections, modulated exposure to light and what she referred to as 'battery business' supervised by the distinguished Scottish ophthalmologist Sir Stewart Duke-Elder (who was surgeon oculist to the sovereign from 1936 to 1965). This saved her sight, although her eyes were always troublesome and being read to always a part of her life. At that time she took up Braille but she never needed to make real use of it. Travelling again, in Spain on the eve of the Civil War, she was suddenly hit by romantic love at 22 on her last evening on a single meeting with a young German artist whom she never saw again.

In 1938 Nancy made a brave brief trip to her beloved but now horribly transformed Germany. She had been fond of the two women who ran Die Klause. One was Jewish, was warned to leave in 1937 and fled to England. Her companion could not bear to stay in Germany alone and Nancy went over to bring her out, a tricky procedure during which she witnessed the crowds of desperate people trying to flee.

Betty had gone up to Oxford to read history. On visits to her there Nancy met Betty's friend Kathleen Kenyon and found archaeology, which she began to think would be a better pursuit than history because it would require less reading and be easier for her eyes. She joined Kenyon digging in Shropshire in 1939 and wanted to dig with Mortimer Wheeler, who with his wife Tessa Verney Wheeler was setting up the Institute of Archaeology in London (founded in 1934), but war came. Firmly pacifist, she tried nursing first but then became a despatch rider in the Motorised Transport Corps. Physical fearlessness and a liking for danger and speed no doubt went back to her hunting days. (Despatch riders had no helmets. It was Col. Sandars, her horrified father, who got the government to issue them.) Seeing effects of the bombing turned her away from pacifism, however. When one is really frightened, she found, one has the choice—kill or be killed. In 1943 she joined the Women's Royal Naval Service (WRNS—known as the 'Wrens') on the strength of her German, was taken on for Intelligence and spent the last year of the war intercepting communications of German E-boats and aircraft. She is on the Bletchley Park Roll of Honour.

Letters between Nancy and Betty flowed, often several a week, but their wartime correspondence is almost comically lopsided. Nancy's top secret Intelligence work could of course not be mentioned in her letters. She writes of walks taken, social life and parcels of clothes and books. Betty responds with rich details of life at Little Tew, the illnesses and problems of villagers, the new vicar, garden and farm news, the food production work of the Women's Institute, her boring war job with the Government Light Metal Control, shortages, evacuees, the white and black American soldiers in the area. The wartime elements apart, this was the stuff of the sisters' home life.

In the Wrens Nancy made friends with Katherine Watson, who shared her serious interest in poetry. They were quickly invited to each other's homes and began to correspond and to exchange poems and criticise each other's work frankly and in detail. Watson, a complicated person with a deep inner life, almost gave up writing poetry from about 1953 but their close friendship and frequent exchange of letters continued until her death in 2008.[10] This was the first, the closest and the longest-lasting of Nancy's several poetry friendships.

In October 1944, looking ahead to peacetime, Nancy approached the Institute of Archaeology. The Institute was willing to waive the degree requirement, accept London Matriculation instead and even admit her on trust before she had taken it. She was enrolled in 1947 and in its small circle made close lifelong friendships with future distinguished archaeologists such as Stuart Piggott FBA (also a fellow poet and artist), his then wife Cecily Margaret Piggott (later Margaret Guido), Sinclair Hood FBA and particularly Rachel Maxwell-Hyslop FBA, who taught Mesopotamian archaeology.[11] In the Prehistoric Society, which she joined in 1946, she had two other important lifelong friendships, which originated from their shared interest in swords: T. G. E. ('Terence') Powell, Senior Lecturer in Prehistoric Archaeology at Liverpool 1948–75, and J. D. Cowen, an autodidact who had never done any formal study of archaeology (an executive in Barclays Bank and Director 1965–74) but published work of significance and was President of the Prehistoric Society in 1969.

The Director of the Institute was Vere Gordon Childe FBA, in his heyday (1947–56), inspiring the students' respect and affection with his unorthodox but effective teaching methods and his courtesy and generosity, of which Nancy herself later wrote.[12] His lectures were 'electrifying', as Sinclair Hood has described them to the present writer, adding that he thinks that he and Nancy were Childe's favourite pupils.[13] Childe indeed recognised Nancy's worth. When in 1949 she obtained the Post-Graduate Diploma in European Archaeology from the University of London, Childe and Christopher Hawkes, the External Examiner (Oxford), considered her likely to make 'a really substantial contribution to knowledge' and recommended her for a travel grant.[14]

[10] See C. King, *Katherine Watson: a Life of Poetry, Faith, and Love* (St Louis, MO, 2011) where many of Nancy's letters are quoted.

[11] See R. Mercer, 'Stuart Piggott 1910–1996', *Proceedings of the British Academy*, 97 (1998), pp. 28–37; J. Curtis, 'Rachel Maxwell-Hyslop 1914–2011', *Biographical Memoirs of Fellows of the British Academy*, 14 (2015), pp. 311–40.

[12] N. K. Sandars, 'Gordon Childe at St. John's Lodge: some early recollections', *Archaeology International*, 3 (1999/2000), 11–12. Available at http://www.nancysandars.org.uk/articles/index.php (accessed 21 April 2020).

[13] At his 102nd birthday party, 31 January 2019.

[14] Report by Childe 15 December 1949.

By May 1950 she had made two study trips in France in hard post-war conditions and Childe in September entrusted her with giving a lecture in a new series.[15] In that year also she attended the Third International Congress of the Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences in Zurich, a very junior scholar beginning to mix with the leaders who had been making prehistoric archaeology in Britain a recognised field. She was present at the major and historic debate about the chronology of the European Bronze Age, in which Gero von Merhart in 'a brilliant tour de force' argued for an earlier dating scheme than Childe and Hawkes.[16] She took part in the rescue excavation of a Neolithic cemetery near Dorchester in Oxfordshire and contributed a chapter to its publication, her first published archaeological writing. Her co-authors Richard Atkinson (a Quaker and, like Sinclair Hood, an unswerving pacifist) and Cecily Piggott were already established archaeologists.[17]

What 'electrified' Childe's students was his view of archaeology as a sister to anthropology, honed by his time spent among anthropologists in America who had experience of living among indigenous peoples.[18] Both disciplines could observe consistently associated objects, behaviour patterns and so on to plot what could be termed a 'culture' (though the term is versatile and slippery) and eventually widened to a 'people'. For archaeologists the classification and typology of objects was fundamental both to identifying an archaeological 'culture' and to plotting the spread of objects and their features from one 'culture's' territory to another's. Nancy with her country child's keen eye for types and details and her interest in people's behaviour took naturally to this. With their anthropological bent, Childe, Piggott, Nancy and Powell took part in correspondence in *Man* arising from an article by Glyn Daniel.[19]

Nancy's first article, written for Childe's Festschrift, catalogues details of blades and handles with awareness of the hands that made and used them.[20] Childe was 'exceedingly proud and elated' by the volume, especially by the 'contribution from one whom I'm proud to have recognised among my students'.[21] Their correspondence was

[15] Letter Childe to Nancy 6 September 1950.

[16] J. D. Cowen, 'The LBA chronology of Central Europe', *Antiquity*, 35 (1961), 41, says more on this debate. S. Piggott, 'The Zurich Congress', *Antiquity*, 24 (1950), 171–4 conveys the flavour of the period. A glamorous photograph of Nancy appears in her article *supra* n. 12.

[17] R. J. C. Atkinson, C. M. Piggott and N. K. Sandars, *Excavations at Dorchester, Oxon., 1st report* (Oxford, 1951).

[18] B. McNairn, 'The concept of culture', in B. McNairn, *The Method and Theory of V. Gordon Childe* (Edinburgh, 1979), pp. 46–73.

[19] See *Man*, 51 (1951), 34–7, 70–1, 88, 147.

[20] N. K. Sandars, 'The antiquity of the one-edged bronze knife in the Aegean', *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 21 (1955): *Contributions to Prehistoric Archaeology Offered to Professor V. Gordon Childe in Honour of his Sixty-fifth Birthday by Twenty-seven Authors*, pp. 174–97.

[21] Letter Childe to Nancy 26 October 1956.

scholarly and affectionate, with Childe sometimes working in playful allusions to his Marxist and Communist views. Nancy's political views were more left than right, but her teenage description of herself as 'communist, international, pacifist' did not mean any commitment to Communism or Marxism like his. Their letters flowed until the month of his distressing suicide in 1957.

At Oxford, attached to St Hugh's College (1952–4), Nancy gained a BLitt under Hawkes's supervision. This and the London Diploma were her only academic qualifications. From it came *Bronze Age Cultures in France* (1957), her first major work, a massive piece of learning and thinking on a complicated subject, the technological developments and diffusion of features among the many 'cultures' of the region.[22] Reviewing it, H. N. Savory mentions her 'feeling for prose style' and 'glimpses of the social and economic life of real communities', points repeatedly noted by reviewers of her works.[23]

With financial support from Oxford University, St Hugh's College and (with Terence Powell's support) the University of Liverpool she made the first of many travels, arriving in Greece in 1952.[24] Without Greek (which the tutor for London Matriculation had refused to teach her) but with her sharp eye for country and people, she fell in love with it. She returned in 1954, visiting museums and Crete. Based in Athens at the British School of Archaeology, she met John Campbell, an 'outsider' as an anthropologist in largely archaeological company. Thanks to inspiration from Childe, she appreciated Campbell's work more than the archaeologists generally did. She accompanied him and his wife Sheila on a field trip to Epirus, where he was studying the Sarakatsani, transhumant shepherds.[25] Seeing transhumance in action on that trip made a lasting impression, reflected years later in *The Sea Peoples*.

Sinclair Hood, then Director of the School, recruited her together with George Huxley for his excavation of a Minoan cemetery on Upper Gypsades, a ridge near Knossos. Her background and experience make her contributions to the report

[22] N. K. Sandars, *Bronze Age Cultures in France, the Later Phases from the Thirteenth to the Seventh Century B.C.* (Cambridge, 1957).

[23] H. N. Savory, '*Bronze Age Cultures in France, the Later Phases from the Thirteenth to the Seventh Century B.C.*' by Nancy K Sandars, *Proceedings of the Prehistoric Society*, 24 (1958), 231–2.

[24] The Thomas Eric Peet Travelling Prize from the University of Liverpool 1957–8 for travel in Turkey.

[25] http://www.nancysandars.org.uk/other/other_1955-08_athens.php (accessed 21 April 2020). See R. Hirschon, 'The role of the BSA in social anthropological fieldwork' in 'Home From Home: Anthropology and the Role of the British School in Athens', in M. Llewellyn Smith, E. Calligas and P. Kitromilides (eds.), *Scholars, Travellers, Archives* (London, 2009), pp. 189–99. In 'The Lucid Life' the British School at Athens is erroneously called 'an outpost of the Institute of Archaeology'. It is an independent institution founded in 1886. Nancy used it as her study base only once after 1960 (in 1983) but made donations (among them her Linguaphone Modern Greek records) and continued to support it with an annual subscription.

outstanding both on the bronze objects (knives, razors and pins) and on the amber beads. The beads, though only two, were an important find, since nearly all the amber found in Europe comes from the Baltic region and is thus a major indicator of long-distance contacts, carrying in some cases implications for chronology. Nancy first touched on this matter in *Bronze Age Cultures in France*, using amber spacer-plates from Wessex sites in Wiltshire and from Mycenae, clearly related, to reinforce the higher dates championed at the Zurich Congress of 1950 by von Merhart. In the Upper Gypsades report her two pages on amber in the Aegean, accompanied by an appendix on analyses carried out at the British Museum Research Laboratory, were a significant up-to-date addition.[26] She returned to the Wessex-Mycenae amber chronology debate in a brief article soon after.[27]

A visit to Yugoslavia in 1959 with the American photographer Josephine Powell was followed by an adventurous trip in 1960, when Nancy, Stuart Piggott, Terence Powell and John Cowen were able to venture behind the Iron Curtain to Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. This was a strictly professional visit to archaeologists, contact with other people not permitted. Everywhere they were warmly welcomed and allowed a free hand to study objects in museums (even on May Day, when they were let off attending the public celebrations in Bucharest to put in quiet hours in the museum). Nancy's and Piggott's close association with the Marxist-leaning Childe may have helped. Cowen concentrated on swords, Powell on sculpture and painting, Nancy on both. The four good friends had a wonderful time together but Nancy, as in Germany thirty years before, was well aware of unhappiness around her. In an account of the Romanian sojourn she describes 'a country held on a very tight rope', noticing 'the comparative prosperity of some and the sad sour look of most in trams and buses'.[28] Once, surprisingly, she found herself in a train compartment alone with a woman. The woman, feeling it safe to confide in the foreign visitor, spoke miserably of how people spied on one another and sent reports to the police. The predicament of the archaeologists who gave them such generous help is caught in perceptive and sympathetic thumbnail sketches of individuals and summed up with 'One understands the hate that our self-confidence, freedom and blundering good nature could stir up and the agonising envy and affection too.'

Before the trip the Foreign Office had said they would like to see the four on their return. No written account of this by any of them has been traced.

[26] N. K. Sandars, 'The amber beads', in S. Hood, G. Huxley and N. K. Sandars, 'A Minoan cemetery on Upper Gypsades', *Annual of the British School at Athens*, 53–4 (1958–9), 237–9, 261–2.
[27] N. K. Sandars, 'Amber spacer beads again', *Antiquity*, 33 (1959), 292–5.
[28] Nancy's typed account in the archive of the Institute of Archaeology is not on the website. S. Piggott, 'Neolithic and Bronze Age in East Europe', *Antiquity*, 34 (1960), 285–94 tells more about this trip.

The 1960 trip included much study and discussion of weapons by all four colleagues and in Nancy's case contributed to her two fundamental articles of 1961 and 1963 on Bronze Age Aegean sword types and their origin, for which she demonstrated significant debts to Near Eastern designs.[29] Much new material has come to light since then, but the 1963 article with its sixty-nine illustrations remains in constant use, the foundation of the agreed standard terminology 'Sandars type A, B, etc.'. Her acquaintance with Central and Eastern European sites occasioned an article on transmissions she detected from Anatolia, which was quite up to date in making use of Albanian finds only very recently made known outside the Communist world.[30]

At the end of the 1950s Nancy had turned to an entirely different subject, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. In 1960 her English prose version came out as a Penguin Classic, introducing this classic of ancient Mesopotamian poetry to the general public with such success that it was advertised at 3s 6d among 'Twenty-five outstanding books for Penguin's 25th Birthday', the only ancient work in the list.[31] Nancy did not read the original languages. She worked from translations and her version contains some misunderstandings and some rearrangings and insertions of her own devising (some dealt with in revised editions), but this popular translation (in both senses: it still sells well, over a million copies to date), bore scholarly fruit of the highest order, for it inspired one schoolboy reader to study the original languages under Wilfred Lambert FBA at Birmingham—Andrew George FBA, who has produced both his own new Penguin Classics translation (1999) and a major scholarly edition (2003), making use of more recently discovered tablets and advances in scholarship.[32] Sandars' and George's introductions to their Penguin translations are different in character. It is worthwhile to read them both.

How Allen Lane of Penguin arrived at the idea of approaching Nancy is unclear, but his friendship with Max Mallowan and his wife Agatha Christie may have been the starting point, with Rachel Maxwell-Hyslop the connecting link to Nancy. The two were close friends, sharing an interest in bronze tools and weapons and both publishing on the subject (Rachel with eleven articles in *Iraq* between 1956 and 1970). They travelled together around sites in Turkey and Iran.[33] After *Gilgamesh* Nancy's

[29] N. K. Sandars, 'The first Aegean swords and their ancestry', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 65 (1961), 17–29. N. K. Sandars, 'Later Aegean swords', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 67 (1963), 117–53, pls. 15–20.

[30] N. K. Sandars, 'Some notes on Central Europe and the Near East in the Second Millennium', in *Mélanges de préhistoire, d'archéocivilisation et d'ethnologie offerts à André Varagnac. École Pratique des Hautes Études*, VI[e] Section (Paris, 1971), pp. 631–40.

[31] N. K. Sandars, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Harmondsworth, 1960); Penguin Classics 1960, repr. with revisions 1964 and 1972; Penguin Epics 2006; ebook.

[32] See Andrew George, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (London: Penguin), Preface, p. x.

[33] Curtis, 'Rachel Maxwell-Hyslop 1914–2011', 369–70, 373.

interest in Mesopotamian literature continued to find voice occasionally. *Poems of Heaven and Hell from Ancient Mesopotamia* appeared in 1971 as a Penguin Classic, containing the Babylonian hymn *Enuma Elish* ('When on high the heavens ...', in part a cosmogony), the Sumerian *Descent of Inanna to Hell* and three other poems with Nancy's translations and a lengthy introduction. In 1976 Nancy and Rachel each contributed on a Mesopotamian subject to the second Festschrift for Stuart Piggott. To honour Piggott's interest in poetry Nancy chose as her subject *Enuma Elish*.[34] She argues against the view, expressed in its most extreme form by Martin West FBA, that Greek mythology is fundamentally of Eastern origin: in particular the background landscapes are quite different, an observation which came naturally to her countrywoman's eye. She calls herself by implication a prehistorian—indeed a fuller description than 'archaeologist', as her work was making increasingly clear. (In fact she never took to the business of digging. Her only excavation reports were those of Dorchester and Knossos in the 1950s.) Several passages from the fourteenth-century Ugaritic *Epic of Baal* from northern Syria were her last translations.[35]

The Eastern European museums were an important source for Nancy's masterly *Prehistoric Art in Europe* (1968).[36] Reviewing Powell's *Prehistoric Art* of 1967, Nancy begins admiringly, 'The writer whose subject is prehistoric art embarks on a choppy sea!' while, roles reversed, Powell paid handsome tribute to Nancy's huge learning in her similarly titled but rather different book.[37] Piggott had complained at the Zurich Congress that study of the Old Stone Age and the succeeding Mesolithic had become a closed shop separating *préhistoire*, a largely French preserve, from *protohistoire*. Powell and Sandars would have none of that. Both devoted about a quarter of their pages to Palaeolithic, Nancy giving an entire separate chapter to Mesolithic. She surveys non-utilitarian artefacts from the very earliest to the latest before Christ, seeing them as a continuum of 'art' in Europe, a continuum of poles and tensions which are still with us and which she suggests is particularly European. They deal with the mysteries of fertility and death, with the supernatural, with the animal world, in ways abstract or naturalistic, inspired by conscious emotions or by subconscious drives of the kind recognised only by modern studies, their purposes plainly religious or eventually sometimes sliding towards the more decorative and secular. Throughout she detects the role of technology and factors which seem to reflect the social

[34] N. K. Sandars, 'Are myths luggage?', in J. V. S. Megaw (ed.), *To Illustrate the Monuments, Essays on Archaeology Presented to Stuart Piggott on the Occasion of His Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (London, 1976), pp. 277–82.

[35] N. K. Sandars, 'From *Epic of Baal*', *Agenda*, 18(2) (1980), 51–4.

[36] N. K. Sandars, *Prehistoric Art in Europe* (Harmondsworth, 1968; revised 2nd edn 1985).

[37] The two reviews appear in N. K. Sandars, *Antiquity*, 41 (1967), 76–7 and T. G. E. Powell, *Antiquity*, 43 (1969), 83–4. Grahame Clark was more critical in *Antiquaries Journal*, 50 (1970), 106–7.

development and the formation of communities. All this is brought together with learning, sensitivity and with rich and almost poetic imagination and reflection, since Nancy was indeed a poet. It is a book no one else could have written. After seventeen years she found a good deal to rewrite and reassess for the second edition. Eight new sites appear, more carbon-14 dates, thirty-six more illustrations, new techniques of study and scientific analysis to discuss and a dramatic pushing back of the time-scale from 30,000 BC to 60,000 BC. Moreover, as she points out in the foreword, prehistorians were now in a closer relationship with the social sciences, were more drawn to theoretical approaches and were seeing the aims of their discipline in a very different light. The rewriting is particularly evident in the passages on the development of metallurgy and the role of craft professionals in the growth of societies.

Meanwhile another poetry friendship had come about—like her encounter with archaeology, through a friend of her sister Betty's. Prue Fuller's husband was Roy Fuller's son John, a poet like his father, who moved in Oxford poetry circles and came to know the Jesuit poet Peter Levi. Nancy once said, as a throwaway remark to Prue Fuller, 'What I really would have liked to be was a poet.' The Fullers introduced Levi to the Sandars sisters.[38] He was captivated by them. A fruitful friendship sprang up and when Nancy spoke to Levi of Greece he and she agreed that he must go there. He fell in love with Greece in 1963 as she had ten years before. That sent his life in a new direction, both as poet, because he quickly became deeply involved with Greek poets and modern Greek poetry, and as scholar, because, just as friends had recommended Nancy to Penguin Classics for *Gilgamesh*, now Nancy recommended Levi to Penguin for Pausanias.[39] His seasons of work on Pausanias, travelling and using the library of the British School at Athens, improved his health and allowed him time to spend on poetry interests. He turned to publishing more on Greek subjects ancient and modern. Letters flowed between him and Nancy covering Greek myths and traditions, archaeology, poetry and religious and spiritual questions. She wrote on Oedipus and traditions about royal succession in various cultures for a volume he edited.[40] He, inspired by talk with her about connections between Archaic Greece and Gaul, used the great Greek treasure of Vix in Burgundy in an archaeological thriller.

The year before he went to Greece Levi had met the poet and artist David Jones. Two years later he in turn arranged that Jones should meet Nancy by getting a friend

[38] B. Allen, *Peter Levi: Oxford Romantic* (Oxford, 2014), pp. 145–6. Two statements about Nancy in Greece contain errors (pp. 153, 218).
[39] Pausanias, *Guide to Greece*, trans. Peter Levi (Harmondsworth, 1971).
[40] N. K. Sandars, 'The irrelevance of incest to Oedipus', *Agenda* Greek Poetry Special Issue (ed. P. Levi, S.J.), 7(1) (1969), 23–8.

to invite them to lunch together.[41] Jones had been astounded by *Gilgamesh*: 'It's got *everything*', with the translation 'perfectly straight modern English, but not losing the *poiesis*'. He had not taken it in that his fellow guest was the very translator.[42] Over lunch they talked about 'the Celts, Celtic art—painting etc.'. Just as Nancy was about to leave he happened to mention *Gilgamesh*. Nancy revealed herself, and from then on until Jones's death in 1974 they talked and corresponded about myths, Mesopotamia, the Central European home of the Celts and much else. The visual arts went hand in hand with poetry in this friendship, as with Stuart Piggott, whom Jones already knew and admired and who had been publishing poems since 1945. When they met in 1964, Nancy was working on *Prehistoric Art in Europe.* She was also thinking specifically about Celtic art and about aspects of it which had evidently come from farther east, a matter she was to explore in the 1970s. This was a further bond with Jones, passionate Welshman as he was (though in fact half-English and not a Welsh-speaker). Years before he met Nancy, he drew a culture chart of Western myth and legend with arrows pointing towards the Celts from 'Aryan myth' and 'prehistoric Mediterranean cultures'.[43] In its way, it was not unlike what Nancy was trying to do.

When the poetry journal *Agenda* produced two David Jones special issues, Nancy, Stuart Piggott and Peter Levi contributed a piece to each. The three shared Jones's conviction that it is only through the past that we can understand our present and our future. Nancy's first piece speaks of Jones as 'one of those few who know what we *have* been' and 'in these fragmentary times of disgust and disillusion ... a builder on the side of cosmos against chaos'.[44] At work then on her *Prehistoric Art,* which she calls 'a very prosaic, very factual account', she had found that Jones had supplied the missing flesh to put on it, both through his poetry and, it would seem, through his art and his crafts of engraving and lettering. Jones liked Nancy's piece and best of all liked Piggott's, who sees the past as 'something continuous' and Jones as 'wiser than many historians in his approach' to it.[45] When he himself had first set eyes on the Venus of Willendorf (the small stone Upper Palaeolithic carving of a female figure found in 1908 in Austria) his mind had gone at once to Jones's great poem 'The Anathemata'.

[41] T. Dilworth, *David Jones: Engraver, Soldier, Painter, Poet* (London, 2017), pp. 329–31. Cf. pp. 339, 346 for illustrations of their close personal friendship.
[42] R. Hague (ed.), *Dai Greatcoat: a Self-Portrait of David Jones in His Letters* (London, 1980), pp. 183–4, 212–13.
[43] Ibid., pp. 227–8, fig. 11.
[44] N. K. Sandars, 'The inward continuities', *Agenda*, 5(1–3) (1967), 92–6.
[45] S. Piggott, 'David Jones and the past of man', *Agenda*, 5(1–3) (1967), 76–9, reprinted *Agenda*, 11(4)–12(1) (1973–4), 60–3.

In the second Jones special issue Piggott's piece was reprinted and Nancy's, sometimes verging on the poetic in its language, is more explicit.[46] 'If ... a prehistorian is asked "Why are you so taken up with the past?"' the answer may well be 'Because of the alteration it has made to my understanding of the present and my expectation of the future.' We must look at the past to understand the present or we shall miss 'the delicate forewarnings of future things'. Nancy had understood that at 16, writing that prescient letter to her father about the forewarnings in Germany in 1932.[47] Peter Levi, writing of Jones, whose 'sense of realities is so striking that he has become the great archaeological poet' remarks that his own first realisation that prehistory could make sense came from 'The Anathemata'.[48]

Throughout the 1960s and later Nancy travelled in Turkey (to Kurdish villages, not only sites), Jerusalem, Iraq, Iran and India and with Piggott and the Cowens in 1966 to Georgia and Armenia, where they visited the important burials with wheeled vehicles on Lake Sevan, grist to Nancy's mill about the transmission of design and technology. She was casting her capacious net ever wider over metallurgy, weapons and armour, vehicles, ships, dress, Eastern and Greek texts, questions of style and other matters, always carefully noting typological details, relating objects to the people who made and used them, suggesting ways in which objects or features travelled from one place to another, whether with an individual such as a lone mercenary or with a large social group on the move such as raiders or migrants.

A too-little-known paper of 1962, off the beaten track for Nancy's usual readers, explains the materials, tools and skills of carpenters and joiners, whose perishable work eludes archaeologists except in Egypt and so is seldom considered.[49] The makers of carts and waggons could not be itinerant and needed to work hand in hand with nearby smiths (who sometimes could be). There are implications for wheel types in the Aegean and Egypt and the organisation and locations of craft professionals around Aegean palaces. As elsewhere, Nancy draws on her own knowledge of country life from the time before old ways disappeared for good. She refers to the 'engaging, and for archaeologists particularly interesting book' by George Sturt, *The Wheelwright's Shop,*[50] which she and Katherine Watson both liked for its depiction of old English country ways. George Huxley pointed her to Hesiod's treatment of carts in eighth-century Greece.

[46] N. K. Sandars, 'Some thoughts arising from David Jones's latest published writings', *Agenda*, 11(4)–12(1) (1973–4), 36–45.
[47] *v. supra* n. 7.
[48] P. Levi, 'History and reality in David Jones', *Agenda*, 11(4)–12(1) (1973–4), 56–9.
[49] N. K. Sandars, 'Wheelwrights and smiths', in *CELTICVM* III: *Actes du Second Colloque International d'Études Gauloises ... 1961. Suppl. à Ogam-Tradition Celtique* 79–81 (Rennes, 1962), pp. 403–8.
[50] G. Sturt, *The Wheelwright's Shop* (Cambridge, 1923) and several reissues.

Working on first-millennium matters around the Black Sea, the steppes and south-eastern Europe, she was drawing not only on the archaeological record but on Assyrian and Greek written sources to work out the connections between the settled old societies—Assyrian, Persian, Greek—and other peoples such as Cimmerians, Scythians and ultimately Celts. A brief note on a remarkable life-size stone figure of a man found in Germany gives a foretaste.[51] In 1966 at the Seventh International Congress of the Union of Prehistoric and Protohistoric Sciences in Prague she put together iron-working, horse-harness and Orientalising bronzes and drew attention to the Persian presence in Thrace from *c.* 513 lasting beyond the defeat and departure of Xerxes in 480. Persian weapons, jewellery and other objects could have been taken as booty by Thracian and Macedonian mercenaries and then found their way up inland into Europe.[52]

That paper was the forerunner of an important paper she gave in 1970 at a colloquium arranged for the Arts Council exhibition 'Early Celtic Arts' held in Edinburgh, and in London at the Hayward Gallery, organised by Piggott, which was the first exhibition on the subject. Nancy's paper aroused so much interest that she was invited to publish it in *Antiquity*.[53] It ranges more widely than its forerunner and addresses specifically the question of the 'Orientalising Celtic style' postulated by Paul Jacobsthal in 1944. When Celtic (La Tène) art style emerged in the late sixth and fifth centuries BC, it did not take inspiration from the imported Greek objects available to hand nor specifically from the Scythians or Etruscans yet it undoubtedly was receiving influences from farther east—but from where and how? Typically, Nancy draws on detailed examination of material of many kinds from many regions—costume, weapons, metals, horses (which she knew about), drinking vessels, treatment of the dead—to decipher what kinds of human encounter were taking place. Besides the Persian contact, there were the various loosely defined nomadic and semi-nomadic peoples on the steppes, around the Black Sea and in Eastern Europe, who contributed their taste for fanciful decorative animals and monsters. The paper opened many doors on Celtic art. The exhibition had hugely impressed David Jones, who was cheated by illness of the treat of visiting it together with Nancy.[54]

In 1972 Nancy went to Sofia for the First International Congress of Thracology and set out to debunk the 'myth' (not exactly a lie) fathered by Herodotus that the world was divided, Greeks/Europe *versus* Asia/barbarians, often at odds with each

[51] N. K. Sandars, 'The Hirschlanden stele', *Antiquity*, 38 (1964), 224–6.

[52] N. K. Sandars, 'Cimmerians, Phrygians, Achaemenians and South-east Europe', in J. Filip (ed.), *Actes du VIIe Congrès International des Sciences Préhistoriques et Protohistoriques Prague ... 1966* (Prague, 1970), vol. 2, pp. 873–7.

[53] N. K. Sandars, 'Orient and orientalizing in early Celtic art', *Antiquity*, 45 (1971), 103–12.

[54] Hague, *Dai Greatcoat*, p. 228.

other.[55] Summarising the very long history of iron-working in 'Asia' (Anatolia), she follows it to Cyprus and Macedonia and on down to Greece, with the Phrygians as a bridge people, historically mentioned as being on both sides of the Bosporus. Peoples in eastern Anatolia known from Assyrian sources come into play, as do pottery, pins, carts, burials, metalwork and animal art style—all demonstrating common ground where Herodotus was inclined to see division and conflict. A paper given in Oxford that year brings up the points covered on the previous occasions, adding a few new arguments and references and followed by an interesting discussion.[56]

At the same time Nancy was looking hard farther south, engaging specifically as a prehistorian in the unending and many-sided debate about the collapse of the Mycenaean Greek society and the transition from Bronze Age to Iron Age in the Aegean in the twelfth and eleventh centuries BC. How to explain the fall of the powerful palace centres so impressively built and decorated and so carefully administered by scribes keeping records in the Linear B script (the earliest Greek, deciphered in 1952)? The various explanations proposed include natural disasters and climate change but what Nancy was best qualified to consider was human activities. She tackled this in 1964 in a fairly brief but very meaty article following on from Vincent Desborough's new major book *The Last Mycenaeans and Their Successors*. Concentrating on the human events, she suggested a series of devastating raids from the less developed north.[57] She returned to the debate in 1971 with a contribution to the Festschrift for Hawkes, a very clear and thorough survey and discussion of the evidence and questions as they stood at the time and had been handled separately by colleagues in a large handful of countries.[58] Elements include burial customs, pottery, swords and other bronzes, the Bronze Age in Italy and Sicily, the Adriatic, south-eastern Europe and the Balkans, movements of peoples, relative and absolute chronology. A review article of 1972 on the major Syrian site of Ras Shamra concentrates particularly on Mycenaean pottery, Cyprus and the 'Sea Peoples'.[59]

[55] N. K. Sandars, 'Thracians, Phrygians and Iron', *Thracia*, 3. *Primus Congressus Studiorum Thracicorum* (Sofia, 1974), 195–202. Cf. J. Holmes, 'The First International Congress of Thracology', *Antiquity*, 47 (1973), 149–50, with note by Sandars on the organisation of congresses.

[56] N. K. Sandars, 'Orient and Orientalizing: recent thoughts reviewed', in P.-M. Duval and C. Hawkes (eds.), *Celtic Art in Ancient Europe: Five Protohistoric Centuries/L'Art celtique en Europe protohistorique. Proceedings of the Colloquy held in 1972 at the Oxford Maison Française* (London, 1976), pp. 41–60.

[57] N. K. Sandars, 'The last Mycenaeans and the European Bronze Age', *Antiquity*, 38 (1964), 258–62.

[58] N. K. Sandars 'From Bronze Age to Iron Age: a sequel to a sequel', in J. Boardman, M. A. Brown and T. G. E. Powell (eds.), *The European Community in Later Prehistory* (London, 1971), pp. 3–29.

[59] N. K. Sandars, 'Thirty seasons at Ras Shamra in Syria', *Levant: Journal of the British School of Archaeology in Jerusalem*, 4 (1972), 139–46, on J.-C. Courtois (ed.), *Ugaritica VI*, *Mission de Ras Shamra XVII* (Paris, 1969).

Much of all this was coming together to coalesce in her ambitious monograph *The Sea Peoples* (1978), another book which, like *Prehistoric Art in Europe*, no one else could have written.[60] The 'Peoples of the Sea' are so named in Egyptian sources as coming from Libya, from the north and from 'the islands of the Great Green [sea]', sometimes as allies of Egypt, sometimes as enemy raiders by land and sea, with ethnonyms apparently indicating some sort of relation to Greeks, Philistines, the eventual Etruscans, Anatolia, the Troad, Sicily and Sardinia, though nothing is clear cut. Egyptians, always interested in what foreigners looked like, carefully depict their various facial types, weapons and headgear. There are relevant written sources from Assyria, Hittite Anatolia, Ugarit in Syria and the Bible. The fundamental question is not who these people were and what they were doing but how it happened that prosperous, advanced, highly organised powerful kingdoms and cities fell apart one after another in a series of invasions, battles and possible large-scale migrations. Climate change, disasters, epidemics and wars break up established trade contacts between over-organised states. Refugees, semi-nomadic fringe groups, nobles turned pirate, out-of-work craftsmen—all contributed to economic and political collapse, lawless raiding and piracy. 'The "sound of running history" is a babble of little streams.'[61] The Mediterranean region it all happened in has to be the starting point: the climate and natural disasters, the conditions, fragility and permanence of subsistence farming and the nomadic and transhumant lifestyles on the fringes—these are the constant background. Nancy makes good use of Fernand Braudel's analysis of the permanent features of the region which cause the cycles of its prosperity and decline and which played a part in the movings around of the Sea Peoples and others. Her debt to her anthropologist friends is expressed in the dedication of the book 'To John and Sheila Campbell, who taught me to love the mountains of Greece and to see a fragment of the Bronze Age living.'

The Sea Peoples was an astonishing achievement, received with admiration by its reviewers for its unprecedented breadth and depth of learning, its beautiful writing, altogether its 'grace and insight'.[62] One distinguished reviewer, Jan Bouzek of Prague, in a position to approach the subject from a different viewpoint, would have preferred to see more attention paid to Central European, Balkan and even Caucasian parallels as well as to the possible role of climate change in encouraging large-scale migration

[60] N. K. Sandars, *The Sea Peoples: Warriors of the Eastern Mediterranean 1250–1150 B.C.* (London, 1978, 2nd edn 1985).

[61] Ibid., p. 202.

[62] J. Muhly, '*The Sea Peoples. Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250–1150 B.C.* by Nancy K. Sandars', *American Journal of Archaeology*, 83 (1979), 355–6.

from the north, subjects which he himself treated elsewhere.[63] (Nancy did at least give more attention to these than others had.) The second edition (1985) is a close reprint, the pagination unaltered, and contains some adjustment of pottery descriptions and a little new material, chiefly on the 'Shardana' people and Sardinia. There have been important new discoveries and studies since, but the book will long remain fundamental.

Sea Peoples material was the focus for Nancy's final contribution to the fall of Mycenae debate, which concentrates on weapons and metallurgy.[64] She detects a change in fighting tactics in late Mycenaean Greece and a change in bronze-working techniques in Europe, looks at known historical analogies (the Normans, Slavs in the Balkans, Galatians in Asia Minor) and weaves these together to propose a (pre)historical narrative: some kind of peasant revolt and/or large-scale immigration into Mycenaean territory from the backward mountain country to the north. 'There was much coming and going and exchanges of many sorts continued between the Aegean and the Balkans', adding 'This is of course a quite imaginary scenario.' Her final word on Sea Peoples matters, this time on architecture, came in 1986 and was her last archaeological publication, except for her brief reminiscences of Childe in 2000.[65]

Two short articles in the 1980s concern Chinese poetry, its language, its script and its relation to the visual arts.[66]

When Nancy after her election in 1984 to the British Academy attended her first Academy dinner, she wrote to Katherine Watson and got this response. 'I <u>loved</u> your description of your British Academy dinner. <u>How</u> I agree—anything in the way of ritual & formal grandeur of dress the Englishman performs or wears with apparent natural grace. Women are bound to look a bit untidy, so to speak, with all respect, by comparison.'[67]

Her last thirty years brought her life with Betty at Little Tew to the fore. The Manor House was a place of constant warm hospitality for local friends, archaeologists, poets, artists, all kinds of people. The Campbells' children were allowed to explore the house anywhere they liked while the grown-ups talked about Greece and anthropology. There were people who always spent Christmas there. Friends came to

[63] J. Bouzek, '*The Sea Peoples. Warriors of the Ancient Mediterranean, 1250–1150 B.C.* by Nancy K. Sandars', *Gnomon*, 52 (1980), 499–502.

[64] N. K. Sandars, 'North and South at the end of the Mycenaean Age; aspects of an old problem', *Oxford Journal of Archaeology*, 2 (1983), 43–68.

[65] N. K. Sandars, 'Some early uses of drafted masonry', in *Φίλια έπη εις Γεώργιον Ε. Μυλωνάν δια τα 60 έτη του ανασκαφικού του έργου*, Τομ. 1, 67–73. Βιβλιοθήκη της εν Αθήναις Αρχαιολογικής Εταιρείας 103 (Athens, 1986). On Childe see n. 12.

[66] N. K. Sandars, 'In the margins of paradise', *Agenda*, 20(3/4) (1982–3), 84–98. N. K. Sandars, 'Arthur Cooper 1916–1988', *Agenda*, 26(1) (1988), 71–4.

[67] Letter K. Watson to Nancy 20 July 1985.

stay. The Maxwell-Hyslops moved in next door in 1966, George and Davina Huxley retired nearby in 1983 to a house Nancy had helped them to find, and with her encouragement Katherine Watson had already moved to the neighbourhood in the 1950s.

Betty particularly was very much involved in village life, the person who would drive you to the doctor's, who would help during illnesses and so forth. At 10 she had enthusiastically started helping with farm work, including ploughing. She joined the Women's Institute in the 1930s, was co-opted in 1940 to the National Federation Executive for war work and in 1961 became President of the Oxfordshire Federation. She pursued scholarly work of her own, continuing the study of Napoleon's generals begun by her grandfather and uncle. Unlike Nancy, who respected the church traditions but was essentially agnostic, Betty was devout and was active in the parish and beyond, sitting in Diocesan Conference. Peter Levi paints a picture: 'Their car was the most ancient, cared for like an invalid, their jam the best, their roses the most varied and sweet-smelling, their sitting-room the most crammed and fascinating, their soda-water machine the most wheezing, their typewriter the most eccentric I have ever known' and 'Their garden is their lifework in a way or their life's calendar.'[68] The poem he wrote for them speaks of cuckoo and badger, hedge-parsley, rose and country neighbours.[69]

Katherine Watson, living not far away, loved visiting the sisters and sitting with them talking in the garden, not least about gardening and roses, a passion they all shared. They were an unfailing mainstay to her in practical as well as immaterial ways. She was diffident, constantly apologising, and Nancy was very protective of her. Most of their friendship was carried on in letters. From these we learn something of Nancy at work as a poet. Her letters to Katherine Watson do not survive, but the hundreds of Katherine's reply to their discussions, commenting on Nancy's views and ideas and criticising Nancy's poems, as they had always done since their Wrens days. Some pieces of Nancy's were published singly by John Fuller's Sycamore Press and in *Agenda*, but it was only in 2002 that a collection was published, *Grandmother's Steps,* with a fine introduction, preface by Peter Levi and Nancy's foreword.[70] A second collection, *Evening Primroses*, was compiled for posthumous publication by Prue and

[68] P. Levi, *The Flutes of Autumn* (London, 1983), pp. 128–9. The eccentric typewriter was appreciated by correspondents, as Nancy's hand could be hard to read. Betty had a clear, round hand but Nancy's teacher chose a 'modern' block letter style. When applying to the WRNS Nancy was afraid her slow writing might count against her.

[69] P. Levi, *Collected Poems 1955–1975* (London, 1976), p. 106, no. 99.

[70] N. Sandars, *Grandmother's Steps and Other Poems 1943–2000* selected and introduced by Rosalind Ingrams (London, 2002). 'Idling on' (pp. 28–9) had appeared as *Sycamore Press Broadsheet* 18 (Sandhurst, 1972).

John Fuller.[71] (It was Betty and Nancy's characteristically imaginative new-baby gift to Prue Fuller of a book on typefaces instead of flowers that had spurred the Fullers to establish the Sycamore Press in their Oxford garage.[72])

For some of these poems we have Katherine's comments. She very much likes (a favourite phrase) Nancy's 'ballad of the ivy', and asks why ivy is sinister; this is probably 'An imitation'.[73] Of 'Minoan frescoes' (1952, Nancy's first trip to Greece), although she likes it very much, she writes, 'But—but it is a poem that could, perhaps, have been written by somebody else.' She criticises Nancy's plural 'carps' and the repetition of 'like the meadow' and 'The meadow/Like'. Nancy listened: as published, the fish are 'carp' and there is nothing of meadows.[74] 'Corinth 1955' too was published with some changes and Katherine liked 'Against universities', a poem one might have liked to see.[75] A long letter considers seven poems, including five eventually published.[76] 'Nursery' she liked very much, and 'Metamorphosis' too, including its line 'Thickets explode like snipe, like larks', but Nancy dropped or changed that.[77] 'Nineteen seventy-six' was published alongside a second poem about the heartbreaking 'last summer of the elms', when Oxfordshire, the hardest-hit county, lost 200,000 trees to Dutch elm disease.[78] The most difficult was 'Predella', which Katherine had to read and re-read but ended up loving; she 'shall hope to enter in to it one day'.[79] Retitled 'Nimbus' this demanding poem was published twice, with a change to the middle lines and to the arrangement on the page. (Sophie Huxley remembers the poetry reading in 1986 when the last line hit the slightly wondering audience in 'truly a magic moment' of clarification.[80]) Katherine was 'not happy', however, with 'October': 'a very apt conceit, and you justify it, but I find it too sustained. ... I suppose what I mean is a kind of strain.'[81] She insisted that 'The Alcazar, Seville' and 'Portrait' must go into *Grandmother's Steps*.[82] Also included there is 'The Underground', a long dramatic poem with several speakers set in the London Underground.[83] It was

[71] N. K. Sandars, *Evening Primroses* (Mayfield, 2017).
[72] *John Fuller and the Sycamore Press: a Bibliographic History,* compiled and edited by Ryan Roberts (Oxford, 2010), pp. 38–9, 62.
[73] Sandars, *Evening Primroses*, pp. 25–6. Letter 16 February 1952.
[74] Sandars, *Evening Primroses*, p. 14. Letter 22 May 1952.
[75] Sandars, *Grandmother's Steps*, p. 65. Letter 25 August 1957.
[76] Letter 25 January 1983.
[77] Sandars, *Grandmother's Steps*, pp. 37, 35–6.
[78] Sandars, *Evening Primroses*, pp. 32, 31.
[79] *Agenda* 21(2) (summer 1983), 39. Sandars, *Grandmother's Steps*, p. 34. 'Nursery' was also published twice, respectively pp. 40 and 37.
[80] King, *Katherine Watson*, p. 323.
[81] Sandars, *Evening Primroses*, p. 23.
[82] Letter 13 September 1999. Sandars, *Grandmother's Steps*, pp. 64, 70.
[83] Ibid., pp. 74–103.

intended for the radio, one of eight radio pieces which Nancy wrote (following in the steps of her mother, who wrote plays for amateur performances). None was ever performed, but the compiler ranked this 'tremendous' long poem with 'The Waste Land' and Jones's 'In Parenthesis' 'as witness to the testing of the spirit in our times'.[84]

Nancy and Katherine Watson insisted that the poet must write above all from the heart and must 'see', and feared that we seem to be destroying ourselves by letting intellectual knowledge crowd out the heart, as in 'The World and the door' with its phrases 'the lucid language of the heart' and 'proud intellect'.[85] Not that either woman was shy of the intellect. Both read philosophy and followed developments in scientific research which Nancy's words sometimes reflect. In that respect they differed from David Jones, who had a sort of fear of the modern world. All three, however, had a strong feeling (like some contemporaries such as Edwin Muir, John Heath-Stubbs) for the lost and fading past—the countryside, traditional crafts and handiwork, unmechanised farming, the common cultural heritage of language, history, legends and ritual—and the public responsibility of the poet to remind us of it, not to let it go. Nancy has many allusions to this and expects the reader to recognise them, for example in 'The Inheritance', but she is not as extremely demanding as Jones.[86] 'To poets not yet born' is her powerful lament.[87]

Nancy hoped that Katherine Watson would get to know Jones personally, but Katherine was overawed and did not follow up their first meeting. She took an admiring interest in Peter Levi, but Nancy may never have introduced them, aware of their difference in outlook. Stuart Piggott had a different angle on poetry to share with Nancy. He writes, 'Don't you get more satisfaction out of one poem well finished than a whole book of Prehistory? I would say because there has been much more growth in the poem than in the book, and again you can't write poems without stimuli … Scholarship, like the creative arts, though in a lesser degree, is a form of growing.'[88] It puts us in touch, he says, with the stimuli which lead to growth. Cut oneself off from stimuli and the result is misery and stagnation. The Gulf War in 1991 was her stimulus for an introduction to Michael Hulse's poem 'Mother of Battles'.[89]

There were certainly stimuli in Nancy's later years, with correspondence, visits, poetry and travelling, but light went out of it when Betty died in July 1995. They had been likened by Peter Levi to 'one flame from two candles or one fruit from two

[84] Ibid., p. 12.
[85] Ibid., pp. 21–2.
[86] Sandars, *Evening Primroses*, pp. 18–20. Cf. her remarks in N. K. Sandars, 'The present past in "The Anathemata" and Roman poems', in J. Matthias (ed.), *Introducing David Jones* (London, 1980).
[87] Sandars, *Evening Primroses*, pp. 33–4.
[88] Letter Piggott to Nancy 23 October 1958.
[89] M. Hulse, *Mother of Battles* (Todmorden, 1991).

branches, like sisters in Shakespeare'.[90] Growing old together, each had been concerned for the other, and grateful. Nancy's loss is expressed in two heart-breaking poems, 'Semper in aeternam o mea cella vale' written three days after Betty's death, and 'Waiting'.[91] Betty had been much loved by many people, and many rallied round.

Stuart Piggott died in 1996, a loss to both sides of Nancy's life. She had been touched by his dedication to her of his *Ancient Europe* in 1965.[92] She still travelled, to Shetland, to Morocco, in 1999 even to Mount Sinai, in 2005 to her mother's family's house in Co. Tipperary. There were dinners with the Oxford Antiquaries Dining Club, to which Nancy and Rachel Maxwell-Hyslop came together. Nancy had been elected a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries in 1957 (when about a tenth of the Fellows were women), Rachel in 1943 already as an active archaeologist. After some forty-five years in the Dining Club, Nancy resigned in 2006 by e-mail (which she had taken up in 1997) because of the difficulty of getting to Oxford and her increasing deafness. The letters with Katherine Watson turned more to discussing the great matters of creation and the fall of man, cosmic evil, heaven and hell, advancing age, death. They had always seen some things differently, Katherine being (like David Jones) a strict and devout Roman Catholic convert. Nancy towards the end of her life returned to Holy Communion. Katherine died in 2008, Rachel in 2011. Nancy had an episode of skin cancer near her eyelid but her sight was saved, for the second time, by a fine surgeon in Oxford. People still read to her, as Betty had always done. She continued to play her part in village life in a time of fundamental and not always welcome social change. There were parties for her ninety-ninth and hundredth birthdays. Speakers and occasions filmed in 'The Lucid Life' tell of this.

The last years were hard going. Nancy at 101 died peacefully in the house of her birth on 20 November 2015.

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[90] Allen, *Peter Levi*, p. 146.
[91] Sandars, *Evening Primroses*, pp. 36, 38.
[92] Letters Nancy to Piggott 5 June and 10 October 1965.

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Note on the author: Helen Hughes-Brock FSA is an independent scholar living in Oxford, working primarily on Bronze Age beads and engraved seals of Minoan Crete and Mycenaean Greece and on their part in the long-distance exchange of Baltic amber and other materials.

Book reviews by Nancy Sandars

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