

Increasingly convinced that he could be a writer of more than municipal accounts and quips about colleagues, Wainwright privately wrote a fictional story about a man in agony at contracting a disastrous marriage, reproduced in full in Davies' biography. It was fiction only in name; the main protagonist was called Michael Wayne but his son was called Peter and his circumstances were all Alfred's. On his wife: 'She had tried so hard to please him before her affection for him had gone. Now she knew it was hopeless: she never would please him... She couldn't make him happy; it was beyond her power.' On his own attitude: 'He realized that his marriage had been a ghastly mistake; it had given him Peter, but nothing else. He had married someone who had been his equal. Now he had changed, for the better he thought. Certainly his aspirations were far nobler. But his wife had not changed with him. She never would. She was incapable of change.'

It is a heart-rending document which also contains two sentences which sum up the long, different kind of sentence which social convention as well as a common interest in providing a stable home for Peter, the one joy they shared, now imposed on the Wainwrights. 'There was no companionship, no comradeship. They lived together and were worlds apart.' It was a situation which continued for the next 40 years, while Alfred laboured steadily on at the office, first still in Blackburn where his wartime call-up was deferred, and then from November 1941 in Kendal. There he took a job as accountancy assistant, number three in the small town council's little financial hierarchy, and rose to become Borough Treasurer seven years later. He stayed in the job until 1967 when he retired at the age of sixty. And there the story might have ended, of a man as frustrated and depressed as 'Michael Wayne'. 'There were higher ideals, worthier ambitions. He should be striving for them. But they were not for him.'

Except... the misery of a loveless home was of great significance because it was to come to Wainwright's rescue in an entirely unforeseen way, and to play a fundamental role in the creation of his books. It all began the year before his marriage, when he persuaded a cousin to come with him on a trip beyond the immediate neighbourhood of Blackburn. It was his first adventure into what he regarded as 'another world, beyond reach, unattainable'. Which is to say that it was more than fifty miles from his home. The two young men chose the Lake District.

