

# The Lost World of **NORMAN CORNISH**



Norman Cornish 1919 – 2014, won his first drawing prize at the age of four and began his working life as a miner at the age of fourteen. Soon afterwards, having enrolled at the Spennymoor Sketching Club, he embarked on the subject that was to preoccupy him for the rest of his artistic life. His “narrow world” as the novelist Sid Chaplin described it, was one where below ground at the Dean and Chapter Colliery, the shapes of the miners echoed the “musculature” of the pit, while above ground he recorded “pigeon-crees and allotments, pit rows and pubs, fish and chip vans and market stalls” and “off-shift miners squatting on their hunkers and soaking in the sunshine and the good crack.”

Cornish was born, in 1919, one year after the end of the First World War and seven years before the General Strike. Major events, the Depression of the 1930's, World War II, pit disasters, the Nationalisation of the coal industry provided a mere backdrop to his life which was resolutely focused on his art and family.

At the age of forty-seven, he left mining to become a professional artist. It was 1966 and he had doubts about making a living from painting, but his wife, Sarah, told him she would cope with what little they had and that anyway he would make it! That it was a successful move is irrefutable. He has been the subject of numerous documentaries and television interviews, has exhibited nationally, received honorary degrees from three universities and in 2008 was awarded an MBE.

Long before the Angel of the North, Cornish's work was loved and admired as a symbol of the north east. For all that the mines have closed, his work continues to be an enduring testament to a community whose spirit survives triumphantly.

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