



HISTORY

Dissertation submitted for the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

Module: 662035

(Dissertation)

Academic year: 2024-2025

A Victorian Legacy:

**Sir Robert Hunter, Octavia Hill and Canon
Hardwicke Rawnsley and
the Birth of the National Trust**

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Word count: 11,940

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to those who supported and guided me throughout the research and writing of this dissertation.

In my search for the book *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life* (1923) by E. F. Rawnsley, I contacted the Orkney Arts Society and The Armit Museum and Library. I am especially grateful to them for putting me in touch with Dr Rosalind Rawnsley, great-granddaughter of Canon Rawnsley, who then introduced me to Michael Allen, co-author of *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851–1920* (2023). Michael Allen kindly provided a copy of *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, suggested numerous research avenues, and shared digitised copies of relevant works, all of which greatly enriched my research.

I would also like to thank Darren Beatson, Archivist at the National Trust, who provided access to the *Articles of Association of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Beauty* (1894), as well as to the unpublished biography *Sir Robert Hunter* (1984) by Dorothy Hunter. His support has been invaluable.

Special thanks go to Ben Cowell OBE, author of *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust* (2013), and co-author of *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (2020). A former Director of the National Trust Eastern Region, Ben kindly responded to my many questions regarding Sir Robert Hunter and provided clarifications and sources. This included confirmation that Waggoner's Wells was acquired in Hunter's commemoration, verification that Rawnsley's sonnet (on p. 62 of

The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley) was published in *St Martin's le Grand, The Post Office Magazine* in February 1914 to mark Hunter's passing, his notes on his visit to the British Postal Museum & Archives in August 2012, and a transcript of his speech delivered at the Haslemere Society Spring Meeting on 19 April 2013, for which he kindly granted permission for citation, all of which enriched my research.

I would like to thank Kari Hayden, Administrator at the Haslemere Parish, for her continuing persistence and assistance in researching the date of the erection of the memorial plaque to Sir Robert Hunter in Haslemere Church. And my deepest gratitude to Katherine Jessel, author of *St. Bartholomew's Parish Church, Haslemere: A Short History, 1180 to the present day*, 2007 for her efforts with the search and trying to obtain the information from Haslemere Museum.

And, to thank Mathilde Jordan, Archivist at the Postal Museum and Archives, for guiding me to further records about Sir Robert Hunter and granted me access to the in-house publication of *St Martin's le Grand, The Post Office Magazine*, Vol. 24, Nos. 93-96 (1914), which featured Canon Rawnsley's sonnet and the obituary of Sir Robert Hunter, materials that greatly enhanced my research.

My sincere thanks also go to Jess Dunlop, my peer support buddy, for her constant encouragement and friendship throughout this process. Despite being on sick leave and away from campus for around eight weeks, we remained in regular contact via WhatsApp and phone calls, continuing to support each other until my return to campus, where our collaboration resumed in person.

I am especially grateful to my supervisor, Rachel Williams, for her unwavering support, guidance, and reassurance throughout the duration of this project. I am also particularly thankful for her technical assistance with the dissertation template at the final stage.

Finally, my heartfelt thanks go to my husband, Dave Robinson, for his endless patience and understanding. He has listened to countless hours of dissertation-related discussion, so much so that he could likely recite parts of it himself.

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Introduction

It is a given fact that most people would have enjoyed a day at the seaside, or visited a historic site, national park, a country estate, or parklands. And one of the most popular destinations for tourists from all over the world since the nineteenth century is the Lake District National Park which encompasses cultural heritage, history, archaeology, landscapes, geology, and famous authors.¹ Furthermore, the Lake District National Park 'is owned by organisations such as the National Trust, United Utilities, Forestry Commission and other private landowners'.² Additionally, most people will know or heard about the National Trust and perhaps have a rough idea of when it was founded. But have people considered why the National Trust was established and its importance?

Significantly, in the wake of the Romantic and Gothic movements, a new cultural revival emerged during the nineteenth-century that embraced the idealised vision of ancient times. This revival shaped attitudes towards nature and the environment in response to the rapid industrialisation of the Victorian era, marked by pollution, overcrowding, poverty, disease, and poor urban living conditions. Romantic poets and artists portrayed the natural world as a source of beauty, health, and well-being, emphasising its 'spiritual and restorative' qualities that helped inspire early public health campaigns. Moreover, this growing appreciation for the aesthetic and spiritual value of natural landscapes influenced key figures of the period and laid

¹ Lake District, *History of the National Park* (2024). Available online: https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/aboutus/nat_parks_history [Accessed 24/11/2024].

² Lake District, *Land Ownership in the Lake District* (2024). Available online: <https://www.lakedistrict.gov.uk/caringfor/land-ownership-in-the-lake-district> [Accessed 24/11/2024].

the groundwork for the early conservation movements.³ At the Social Science Congress in September 1884 in Birmingham, Sir Robert Hunter delivered a speech proposed in his paper *A Suggestion for the Better Preservation of Open Spaces*, ‘the creation of a voluntary land-holding preservation association’ to procure “properties to which common rights are attached ... manors ... square gardens, dis-used church yards and burial grounds ... with a view to the protection of the public interest in the open spaces of the country”.⁴ Significantly, Sir Robert Hunter, Miss Octavia Hill and Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley had a meeting on 16 November 1893, in London, to discuss the formation of a National Trust ‘for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty’.⁵ And, decided that there was a requisite for a parent company to preserve and conserve the picturesque countryside of England, Wales and Northern Ireland.⁶ Notably, John Ruskin was a revolutionary conservationist in the nineteenth-century, who had predicted the ‘green-house effect’ and was instrumental in the formation of the National Trust.⁷

³ N. Finneran, ‘Landscapes of the Romantic Sublime: The Legacy of Nineteenth-Century Artistic Visions and Contributions to the Development of the Management of Natural Heritage’ in N. Finneran et al (eds), *Managing Protected Areas: People and Places* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023). Available online: [https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/0191-6599\(90\)90175-E](https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1016/0191-6599(90)90175-E) [Accessed 10/5/2025], 34, 35, 38, 40.

⁴ R. Hunter, *A Suggestion for the Better Preservation of Open Spaces* (London: The Commons Preservation Society, 1884), 12, 16. & J. Ranlett, ‘“Checking Nature’s Desecration”: Late-Victorian Environmental Organisation’, *Victorian Studies*, Vol. 26, Iss. 2 (1983). Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3827006> [Accessed 4/6/2024], 211. & D. Barthel, ‘Historic Preservation: A Comparative Analyses’, *Sociological Forum*, Vol. 4, No. 2 (1989). Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/684437> [Accessed 9/4/2025], 90. & M. Hall, ‘The Politics of Collecting: The Early Aspirations of the National Trust, 1883-1913’, *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. 13 (2003). Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/3679263> [Accessed 9/4/2025], 350.

⁵ E. F. Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life* (Glasgow: MacLehose, Jackson & Co, 1923), 108-109.

⁶ G. Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 2nd edition (Swindon: National Trust Enterprises Ltd, 2002), 98. & J. Taylor, et al, *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World* (London: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd, 1987), 175.

⁷ The Ruskin Museum, *Who Was John Ruskin [1819-1900]?* (2025). Available online: <https://ruskinmuseum.com/who-was-john-ruskin-1819-1900/> [Accessed 10/2/2025]. & M. Waterson, *The National Trust: The First Hundred Years* (London: National Trust (Enterprises) Limited, 1994), 98, 260.

The National Trust ‘for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty’ was founded on the 12 January 1895 by Sir Robert Hunter, Canon Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley, Octavia Hill and was supported by many influential people including Beatrix Potter, her father, Rupert Potter, William Morris, and John Ruskin.⁸ ‘To promote the permanent preservation for the benefit of the Nation of lands and tenements (including buildings) of beauty or historic interest’.⁹ Notably, for the three years preceding the Trust’s foundation, Sir Robert Hunter and Miss Octavia Hill had been compiling a list of distinguished individuals to serve on its inaugural council. This list included representatives from Britain’s leading universities, prominent geologists and botanists, members of the literary and artistic elite, and forty-five council members drawn from among Liberal Members of Parliament and Liberal peers in the House of Lords.¹⁰

In July 1899, Canon Rawnsley recalls the original objectives of the Trust which were legally binding within the Memorandum and Articles of Association within his paper *The National Trust: Its Aim and Its Objectives* which stated that ‘To Promote the permanent preservation, for the benefit of the nation, of lands and tenements (including buildings) of beauty or historic interest; and as regards lands, to preserve (so far as practicable) their natural aspect, features, and animal and plant life; and for this purpose to accept, from private owners of property, gifts of

⁸ M. Allen. & R. Rawnsley, Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920 (Essendon: The New Beaver Press, 2023), 185. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 13-14. & P. Clayton. et al., *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (London: Pitkin Publishing, 2020), 7. & L. Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius* (London: Penguin Group, 2008), 140.

⁹ National Trust, *Memorandum and Articles of Association of the National Trust for Places of Historic Interest or Natural Beauty* (London: C. F. Boworth, 1894), 5-20.

¹⁰ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 104-105. & Hall, ‘The Politics of Collecting: The Early Aspirations of the National Trust, 1883-1913’, 348.

places of interest and beauty, and to hold the lands, houses and other property thus acquired by gift or by purchase in trust for the use and enjoyment of the nation'.¹¹ Furthermore, he also stipulated 'it should be clearly understood that the Trust is forbidden by the Memorandum and Articles of Association to divide any profits that may be made among its members'.¹²

To understand the significance of the formation of the National Trust in 1895, it is necessary to recognise the early influences of the founders during the nineteenth-century which had intertwined them socially, through socialist activism, religion, philanthropy, literature, environmentalism, heritage conservation and preservation. Fundamentally, it was in response to the escalating industrial revolution and the enormous population growth and migration from the countryside into the towns and cities and their passion for open spaces, fresh air, and public spaces.¹³ Ultimately, there was a demand 'to save open spaces for the enjoyment of the general public' which included parks, playgrounds, the countryside and to secure common land and this was the beginning of the Open Space Movement.¹⁴

This thesis will explore and investigate the early influences on the founders of the National Trust, with a primary focus on the period up its initial formation in 1895. In addition, it will consider the impact of the industrial revolution during the nineteenth-century, and address issues about class, gender, culture, reform and

¹¹ Rev. Canon. H. D. Rawnsley, 'The National Trust: Its Aim and its Work', *The Journal of the Ruskin Society of Birmingham*, No. 7, Vol. II (1899). Available online: <https://www.proquest.com/historical-periodicals/national-trust-aim-work/docview/4047793/se-2> [Accessed 23/11/2024], 116. & Allen. &. Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 165.

¹² Rawnsley, 'The National Trust: Its Aim and its Work', 116.

¹³ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 19-20.

¹⁴ *ibid*, 19-20.

evolving attitudes towards public spaces and the environment by the founders of the National Trust. Notably, there has been wide range of literature on this subject, including biographies, books, academic articles, blogs, newspapers and websites which provides invaluable insights into the lives of founders and the origins of the National Trust. While the list of sources consulted in this thesis is not exhaustive, it reflects and highlights the central themes of research that inform this study, demonstrating that a biographical approach remains both fruitful and analytically valuable. Fundamentally, it is acknowledged that similar studies undertaken to this thesis where it has been identified that Sir Robert Hunter, Miss Octavia Hill and Canon Rawnsley as he key figures in establishment of the National Trust. Notably, among these is the work of Peter Clayton, Ben Cowell and Vivian Griffiths, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (2020), a publication aimed at a popular audience and published by the National Trust. Furthermore, this book also provides a list of further reading including Elizabeth Battrick's, *The Most Active Volcano in Europe* (1997), Elizabeth Crawford's, *Enterprising Women: The Garretts and their Circle* (20020), John Gaze's, *Figures in a Landscape: A History of the National Trust* (1988), and George Shaw-Lefevre's, *English Commons and Forests*, re-issued in 2009.¹⁵

Arguably, opinions on who should be credited with the idea of forming the National Trust are largely dependent on the perspective of the author or biographer of the literature, which is often shaped by their biases or emphasis on a particular founder. One of the earliest biographies of Octavia Hill, *Life of Octavia Hill as told in*

¹⁵ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 93.

her Letters (1913), edited by Charles Edmund Maurice records in a letter dated 9 May 1879 from Octavia Hill to the Commons Preservation Society, in which she proposes the formation of a combined organisation “the much larger work you propose to yourselves than the CPS ... that you have to encourage gift and purchase and beautifying as well as ‘preservation’; that you have to with *private* land as well as *commons*”.¹⁶ Another of Hill’s biographers, Enid Moberley Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (1942), notes that Sir Robert Hunter “as early as 1884 he had been convinced of the desirability of founding some corporation which could hold land and buildings in trust for people ...”.¹⁷ Likewise, Canon Rawnsley’s first biographer, Eleanor Rawnsley’s, *An Account of his Life* (1923), claims that it was Rawnsley’s idea to “form some sort of association, or trust ... should exist solely in the interest of the public, for the purpose of holding lands in their natural beauty ...”.¹⁸ Fundamentally, there is, an existing body of scholarship that argues in favour that Sir Robert Hunter was the first to propose the idea of the formation of the National Trust, citing his remarks at the Social Science Congress in Birmingham in September 1884. This view is supported in articles written by John Ranlett, “*Checking Nature’s Desecration*”: *Late-Victorian Environmental Organisation* (1983), Diane Barthel, *Historic Preservation: A Comparative Analyses* (1989) and Melanie Hall, *The Politics of Collecting: The Early Aspirations of the National Trust, 1883-1913* (2003).¹⁹ Moreover, these views are also supported within many biographies

¹⁶ C. E. Maurice (ed.), *Life of Octavia Hill as told in her letters* (London: MacMillan and Co. Limited, 1913), 387-388.

¹⁷ E. M. Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1942), 232.

¹⁸ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 109.

¹⁹ Ranlett, ‘“Checking Nature’s Desecration”: Late-Victorian Environmental Organisation’, 211. & Barthel, ‘Historic Preservation: A Comparative Analyses’, 90. & Hall, ‘The Politics of Collecting: The Early Aspirations of the National Trust, 1883-1913’, 350.

about the founders of the National Trust written by Michael Allen and Rosalind Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920* (2023), Peter Clayton, Ben Cowell and Vivian Griffiths, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (2020), Elizabeth Baigent and Ben Cowell, 'Nobler imaginings and mightier struggles' *Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (2016), Ben Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust* (2013), and Graham Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust* (2002).²⁰ While the literature consulted in this thesis explores the formation of the National Trust in considerable detail, it places particular emphasis on the personal influences that shaped the founders and guided them toward conservation and preservation. Notably, Peter Clayton, Ben Cowell and Vivian Griffiths, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (2020) along with Ben Cowell's, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust* (2013) highlight the prominence of Sir Robert Hunter's prize essay, *The Preservation of Commons in the Neighbourhood of the Metropolis and Large Towns*. This essay which brought him into contact with the Commons Preservation Society and as Cowell notes, "This boost to his confidence inspired Robert in July 1867 to approach

²⁰ Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 162. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 39. & E. Baigent & B. Cowell (eds.), 'Nobler imaginings and mightier struggles' *Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London: University of London School of Advanced Study, 2016), 212. & B. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust* (Stroud: Pitkin Publishing, 2013), 2. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 101.

Philip Lawrence, solicitor to the Commons Preservation Society, to see if he could be taken into partnership”.²¹

Today, the National Trust stipulate on their website that ‘the founders of the National Trust believed that everyone needs nature, beauty, and history, so they set up the Trust to look after the nation's coastline, historic sites, countryside, and green spaces’.²² Furthermore, the National Trust with nearly five and half million members, approximately eleven thousand dedicated staff and thousands of committed volunteers, the organisation stands as the largest ‘conservation charity in Europe’.²³ It is entrusted with the stewardship of over two hundred and fifty hectares of farmland, eight hundred and ninety miles of coastline and more than five hundred ‘historic properties, gardens and nature reserves’, ensuring these invaluable assets are preserved for the benefit of current and future generations.²⁴ Together, the chapters that follow offer a critical contribution to understanding the origins and development of the National Trust.

²¹ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 46. & Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and ‘Inventor’ of the National Trust*, 10.

²² National Trust, *The History of the National Trust* (2024). Available online: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/who-we-are/about-us/the-history-of-the-national-trust> [Accessed 25/8/2024].

²³ National Trust, *The History of the National Trust*.

²⁴ *ibid.*

Chapter 1

Sir Robert Hunter: the 'Legal Mastermind'

(27 October 1844 – 6 November 1913)

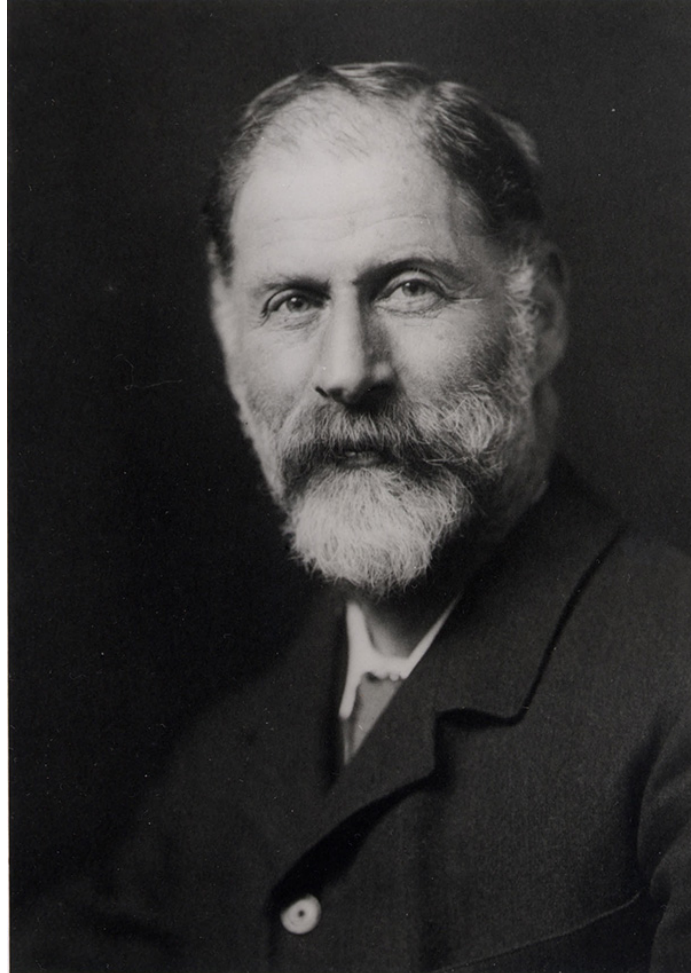


Figure 1: Sir Robert Hunter, c. 1907
Photograph Courtesy of the Haslemere Museum [CC0 1.0 Public Domain](#)

Significantly, during the nineteenth century, Victorian England was grappling with the escalating effects of industrialisation, including increasing pollution, overcrowding, poverty, disease, and poor living conditions in towns and cities. The poignant phrase 'the open space movement' captured the spirit of a growing campaign, which was led by various private societies who were advocating for access to green spaces and fresh air. These groups believed that nature was essential for the mental and

physical well-being of urban dwellers and their aims included securing ‘commons, playgrounds, parks, and countryside’ areas for public enjoyment.²⁵ The first and most influential of these environmental organisations was the Commons Preservation Society, founded in 1865 by Liberal MP George Shaw-Lefevre, and today known as the Open Spaces Society.²⁶ The organisation’s early efforts were focused on saving commons which were distinctive types of land where commoners (individuals other than the landowner) who held traditional rights, including collecting wood for fuel, grazing animals, or digging peat.²⁷ These unique open spaces were different to urban parks that were being established up and down the country as they were ‘increasingly owned and managed by public authorities’, whereas the commons were owned by individual landlords, making their preservation campaigns more complex. Many of these open spaces, particularly around London, had been under threat since the sixteenth century following the decline of manorial courts.²⁸ Pressures included enclosure, encroachment, development, and their misuse as dumping grounds or gravel pits. And, despite the 1845 General Enclosure Act which was introduced to protect green spaces and common land, landowners often exploited enclosure powers in urban areas to convert commons into building plots, frequently without compensating local tenants. Fundamentally, among the

²⁵ G. Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 2nd edition (Swindon: National Trust Enterprises Ltd, 2002), 19.

²⁶ E. M. Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1942), 143. & Open Spaces Society, *Saving Open Spaces – Introduction and Contents: An Introduction to Saving Open Spaces* (2022). Available online: <https://www.oss.org.uk/about-us/our-history/saving-open-spaces-introduction-and-contents/> [Accessed 9/9/2024].

²⁷ Open Spaces Society, *Saving Open Spaces – Introduction and Contents: An Introduction to Saving Open Spaces*.

²⁸ P. Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (London: Pitkin Publishing, 2020), 47-48. & B. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and ‘Inventor’ of the National Trust* (Stroud: Pitkin Publishing, 2013), 11-13.

Commons Preservation Society's early successes were the preservation of Hampstead Heath, Wimbledon Common, and Epping Forest.²⁹

Sir Robert Hunter, who was the first child of Captain Robert Lachlan Hunter, a ship-owner and master mariner and his wife, Anne Lachlan, was born into an affluent household on Saturday 27 October 1844, in Addington Square, Camberwell.³⁰

Arguably, Hunter appears to be the least celebrated among the co-founders of the National Trust, despite serving as its first Chairman and his contributions have often been overshadowed, and as his biographer, Ben Cowell notes, this oversight is "in many ways a travesty of history".³¹ And, unlike Octavia Hill and Canon Rawnsley, Hunter has not been commemorated to the same extent, perhaps due to his quiet, behind-the-scenes role, which, though vital, did not attract the same public recognition.³² Hunter was a revolutionary British solicitor, whose legal acumen was both profound and far-reaching, an authority on commons and public rights of way, he was known for his deep enthusiasm and extensive knowledge.³³ Today, he is recognised as the 'legal mastermind behind the National Trust' and 'Inventor', and although he was the 'least conspicuous' of the trio, he was also the 'most effective architect and engineer', whose contribution to the National Trust was his impeccable

²⁹ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 47-48. &. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 11-13. 7. &. Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 19.

³⁰ D. Hunter, *Sir Robert Hunter* [Unpublished Draft Biography]. Accession No. 14, National Trust Archives, 1984, 15.

³¹ E. Baigent, 'Octavia Hill: 'the most misunderstood ... Victorian reformer' in E. Baigent & B. Cowell (eds.), *Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London: University of London School of Advanced Study, 2016), 23. &. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 2.

³² Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 39. &. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 1.

³³ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 39. &. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 2.

‘legal expertise and political connections’, qualities that perfectly complemented ‘Hill’s social concerns and Rawnsley’s campaigning energy’.³⁴

Fundamentally, Hunter’s achievements were extraordinary, yet he has never received the widespread recognition he deserved for his role in protecting numerous commons and open spaces, as well as for his vital contributions to the General Post Office.³⁵ He was appointed by Mr Fawcett, the Postmaster General, as Solicitor to the General Post Office in February 1882, and during that time had been legal adviser to thirteen Postmaster Generals, and acted as Chairman of several departmental committees and notably, “appointed for the examining and overhauling of postal rates”.³⁶ Furthermore, he was the Chairman of the Committee which undertook the reforming and rearrangement of the Postal Guide.³⁷ His success in pursuing litigation against several railway companies, “it referred differences as to remuneration of railway companies for the carriage of mails to the Railway and Canal Commissioners, and imposed the obligation to carry mails on tramway companies”, had resulted in savings of tens of millions pounds of the taxpayers money.³⁸ Moreover, his instrumental role in passing fifty Public General Acts through Parliament, including the enactment of the Conveyance of Mails Act in 1893,

³⁴ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 39. & Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and ‘Inventor’ of the National Trust*, 2. & National Trust, *Robert Hunter: Legal mastermind behind the National Trust* (2024). Available online: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/people/robert-hunter-legal-mastermind-behind-the-national-trust> [Accessed 5/9/2024].

³⁵ H. D. Rawnsley, ‘A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter’, *The Cornhill Magazine* (1914-02), Vol. 36. Iss. 212 (1914). Available online: https://archive.org/details/sim_cornhill-magazine_1914-02_36_212/ [Accessed 8/5/2025], 231, 233.

³⁶ E. Bennett, ‘Sir Robert Hunter, K. C. B.’, *St Martin’s le Grand, The Post Office Magazine*, Vol. 24, Nos. 4-9 (1914), 73. General Post Office: The Postal Museum & Archives. POST 92/1143 [In-house Publication]. Published by the GPO. Issued quarterly. Available online: https://catalogue.postalmuseum.org/collections/getrecord/GB813_P_92_03_02_024 [Accessed 16/5/2025].

³⁷ Bennett, ‘Sir Robert Hunter, K. C. B.’, 4.

³⁸ *ibid*, 5.

which he both proposed and drafted. And he overhauled and simplifying the Post Office Savings Bank regulations and received a Knighthood in 1894.³⁹ Interestingly, in November 1913 at the Savings Bank dinner, the Controller, Mr Davies said that, “Sir Robert’s name, ever since he came to the Post Office has been a household word in the Bank, and there was no Department in which his loss would be more deeply deplored”.⁴⁰ Fundamentally, his devotion to preserving open spaces and his love of natural beauty within nature and the quiet pleasures of the countryside remained constant throughout his life.⁴¹ His writings were mostly impersonal and business-like, revealing little of his sensitivity, unlike Hill and Rawnsley, he never lapsed into poetry or lyrical expression. And, like many of his contemporaries he admired Wordsworth and Ruskin from whom derived much of his appreciation for nature.⁴² Hunter cared little for money and was too self-effacing to seek recognition, devoting his life to preserving natural beauty for the nation, and his sense of public duty is reflected in one of his favourite quotes from the educator Sir Joshua Fitch, “every piece of good work he achieves, does something to alter for the better the conditions of life for those with whom he comes into contact. It helps to make the path of duty and of honourable ambition easier, safer, more accessible, more attractive to all who come after him”.⁴³

³⁹ Bennett, ‘Sir Robert Hunter, K. C. B.’, 5. & Rawnsley, ‘A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter’, 231, 233.

⁴⁰ Bennett, ‘Sir Robert Hunter, K. C. B.’, 5-6.

⁴¹ Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and ‘Inventor’ of the National Trust*, 2-3.

⁴² R. Hunter, ‘Essay on the Preservation of Commons in the Neighbourhood of the Metropolis and Large Towns’ in H. W. Peek et al, *Six Essays on Commons Preservation: Written in Competition for Prizes Offered by Henry W. Peek, Esq., of Wimbledon House. Containing a legal and historical examination of manorial rights and customs, with a view to the preservation of commons near great towns* (London: Sampson Low, Son and Marston, 1867), 371.

⁴³ R. Hunter, ‘Sir Joshua Fitch; A Reminiscence’, *The Contemporary Review*, Vol. 84 (1903). Available online: <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/sir-joshua-fitch-reminiscence/docview/1294612593/se-2> [Accessed 12/5/2025], 818.

Notably, Hunter's career path began when Sir Henry Peek, who was one of the leading figures in the fight to save Wimbledon Common offered £400 in 1867, for the best essays on the preservation of open spaces. At the time, Hunter was a young man who had recently earned an MA from the University of London and had just qualified as a solicitor. He submitted one of the winning essays, titled *The Preservation of Commons in the Neighbourhood of the Metropolis and Large Towns*, which was later published in *Six Essays on Commons Preservation*, edited by Henry W. Peek.⁴⁴ The essay provided a detailed legal and historical analysis of manorial rights and customs whilst emphasising the importance of maintaining public access to common land for the health and well-being of urban populations. This achievement brought Hunter into contact with the Commons Preservation Society, an association that would mark the beginning of his lifelong commitment to environmental and public land advocacy. Furthermore, his essay, which displayed both legal acumen and a visionary understanding of the social value of open spaces, caught the attention of the Society's leading figures. As a result, he was soon appointed their honorary solicitor. And, in this role, Hunter played a pivotal part in defending public rights over common land, using his legal expertise to challenge enclosures and protect key spaces such as Epping Forest and Wimbledon Common.⁴⁵ Moreover, his association with Commons Preservation Society brought him into contact with many key advocates for public rights including, John Stuart Mill, Mr Fawcett, Lord Mount Temple, Baron Pollock, Sir Fowell Buxton, Lord Fitzmaurice,

⁴⁴ Rawnsley, 'A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter', 233-238. & Bennett, 'Sir Robert Hunter, K. C. B.', 6.

⁴⁵ Rawnsley, 'A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter', 233-238. & Bennett, 'Sir Robert Hunter, K. C. B.', 6.

Sir Charles Dilke, Sir William Harcourt, Dean Stanley, Duke of Westminster, Lord Farrer, Lord Thring, Miss Octavia Hill, Mr Raper, Mr James Bryce, Sir Fowell Buxton, Mr Edward North Buxton, Lord Eversley, Mr Briscoe Eyre and Canon Rawnsley. Hunter's contributions were instrumental in shaping the early conservation movement in Britain, laying both the legal and philosophical foundations for what would become modern environmentalism.⁴⁶

Sir Robert Hunter died on Thursday 6 November 1913 and *The Times* reported his sudden death at his home, Meadfields, Haslemere, on 7 August 1913 and depicted him as "Sir Robert Hunter proved himself to be a diligent and laborious departmental chief ... He made it is rule to form his own conclusions and to give his own advice instead of relying on opinions obtained from outside ... Sir Robert Hunter was not only a faithful servant of the State, within the limits of his professional responsibility, but, in the larger sense, an eminent servant of the people".⁴⁷ And, on the 15 November 1913, *The Spectator* honoured his life's achievements "In Sir Robert Hunter the country has a lost a friend and a servant ... a man endowed with more than average energy and enterprise ... Truly Sir Robert Hunter deserves a public monument. Let we hope he may find it in what he would have most desired – some place of natural beauty or historic interest ...".⁴⁸

Notably, just four months earlier, he had retired from the General Post

⁴⁶ Rawnsley, 'A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter', 233-238.

⁴⁷ 'Sir Robert Hunter', *The Times*. 7 November 1913 [Online]. Available at: <https://link-gale-com.hull.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS152502631/TTDA?u=unihull&sid> [Accessed 27/9/2024], 9-9.

⁴⁸ 'Sir Robert Hunter and Box Hill', *The Spectator*, Vol. 111, Iss. 4455. 15 November 1913 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.proquest.com/magazines/sir-robert-hunter-box-hill/docview/1295509215/se-2> [Accessed 8/5/2025], 815-816.

Office and had spent the previous week laboriously ‘in handing over his duties to his successor’, and his death from blood poisoning ‘was a cruel end’ which had ultimately deprived ‘him of a long well-deserved retirement in his beloved Surrey hills’.⁴⁹ On Monday 10 November 1913, the funeral of Sir Robert Hunter was held in St. Bartholomew’s Parish Church in Haslemere. Among those in attendance were many prominent and distinguished figures, as well as his colleagues of all ranks and genders from his department in the Post Office, including Captain Lane who represented Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll. The service was officiated by “Prebendary A. Moncrief, a cousin of Sir Robert Hunter, along with Rev. G. H. Aitken and Rev. T. Bromley”.⁵⁰ Canon Rawnsley delivered a sonnet *In Memory of Sir Robert Hunter* which later was published in February 1914, in the in-house publication of the General Post Office, *St Martin’s le Grand, The Post Office Magazine*.⁵¹

*Who laboured in the restless City’s roar
And gave this strength to service of the Sate
With Nature did his soul communicate
And loving her – he loved the people more.
Unresting ever, armed with wisdom’s lore,
True Knight, he stood to guard the open gate
Kept paths and common still inviolate
To bless the nation with their restful store.
Now has he gone to where the world is fair
And free for all, and we who weep and mourn
The wise, great hearted, gentle, genial man,
May hear this voice clear from yonder bourne*

⁴⁹ ‘Sir Robert Hunter’, *The Times*. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 60. & Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and ‘Inventor’ of the National Trust*, 25.

⁵⁰ ‘Funerals: Sir Robert Hunter’, *The Times*. 11 November 1913 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.com/tto/archive/article/1913-11-11/11/9.html#start%3D1913-11-06%26end%3D1913-12-> [Accessed 8/5/2025], 11-11.

⁵¹ H. D. Rawnsley, ‘In Memory of Sir Robert Hunter’, *St Martin’s le Grand, The Post Office Magazine*, Vol. 24, Nos. 93-96 (1914), 73. General Post Office: The Postal Museum & Archives. POST 92/1143 [In-house Publication]. Published by the GPO. Issued quarterly. Available online: https://catalogue.postalmuseum.org/collections/getrecord/GB813_P_92_03_02_024 [Accessed 16/5/2025].

*All selfish ways and worldliness to ban
And all earth's common loveliness to share.*⁵²

Sir Robert Hunter is 'buried according to his wishes in an unmarked grave at St. Bartholomew's Parish Church, Haslemere', which even today is "shrouded in mystery" as to why the grave's location is unmarked.⁵³ Interestingly, there is a Memorial plaque honouring him located "to the right-hand side of the chancel", and, although there are no official records in St Bartholomew's Church regarding its installation, it is likely to have been erected sometime after 1932, as Hunter's wife is also commemorated, and before 2007, as Katherine Jessel's book, *St Bartholomew's Parish Church, Haslemere: A Short History, 1180 to the present day*, was published in 2007, and clearly mentions the location of it inside the church, with the following inscription.⁵⁴

To The Honoured Memory of
ROBERT HUNTER M.A. .. K. C. B.
27th Oct. 1844 6th Nov. 1913
(Solicitor to the General Post Office 1881-1913)
A tireless worker in the cause of preserving
And acquiring open spaces for the free
Enjoyment of the public in town and country
A FOUNDER AND FIRST CHAIRMAN
OF THE NATIONAL TRUST
A regular worshipper in this Church during
His 32 years residence at Meadfield
Also his WIFE ELLEN 10th Sept. 1851 25th Jan. 1932
WHOSE LOVE AND BEAUTY AND WIT WERE HIS SUPPORT AND DELIGHT
Erected in gratitude and affection by their three daughters⁵⁵

⁵² Rawnsley, 'In Memory of Sir Robert Hunter', 73.

⁵³ M. Allen. & R. Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920* (Essendon: The New Beaver Press, 2023), 328. & T. Gupta, 'National Trust 'quiet man' Sir Robert Hunter remembered', *BBC News*. 3 November 2013 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-surrey-24642057> [Accessed 13/5/2025].

⁵⁴ K. Jessel, *St Bartholomew's Parish Church, Haslemere: A Short History, 1180 to the present day* (Surrey: The Friends of the Parish of Haslemere, 2007), 35.

⁵⁵ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 62. & Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 27. & Jessel, *St Bartholomew's Parish Church, Haslemere: A Short History, 1180 to the present day*, 35.

On Saturday 31 January 1914, *The Times* reported that “many friends and fellow-workers of the late Sir Robert Hunter, K. C. B., have felt that there should be some suitable memorial to commemorate his life of service to the nation, and a committee has therefore been formed to carry out the proposal ... Those who wish to give expression to their desire thus to create a permanent memorial of his services are invited to send contributions to the fund”.⁵⁶ And, in response to the request, the ‘woods and water of Waggoners Wells were purchased by public subscription in 1919 in memory of the Trust’s first Chairman’, and a memorial stone was installed near Grayshott on the Hampshire/Surrey border.⁵⁷

In February 1914 an article in *The Cornhill Magazine* titled, ‘A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter’, Rawnsley wrote of how friends remembered him, “They speak of his simplicity and single-mindedness, of his gentle goodness, sympathy ... of his fierce fighting spirit whenever public rights were in danger. A great lawyer ... he showed the utmost consideration for all concerned, including his opponents”.⁵⁸ Unfortunately, in this article he inadvertently upset the Hunter family by appearing to take credit for the idea of forming the National Trust, “ ... the first person consulted was Robert Hunter”.⁵⁹ However, regardless of which biographer attributes the naming of the new body, it is clearly demonstrated that Hunter was the true ‘Inventor’ with the legal acumen to bring the concept to life and, Octavia

⁵⁶ ‘Memorial to Sir Robert Hunter’, *The Times*. 31 January 1914 [Online]. Available at: <https://www.thetimes.com/tto/archive/article/1914-01-31/9/6.html#start%3D1913-11-01%26end%3D1914-12-> [Accessed 13/5/2025], 9-9.

⁵⁷ J. Parry (ed.), *Properties of the National Trust* (Reading: Cox & Wyman Ltd, 1973), 148. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 61. & Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and ‘Inventor’ of the National Trust*, 26.

⁵⁸ Rawnsley, ‘A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter’, 238-239. & E. F. Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life* (Glasgow: MacLehose, Jackson & Co, 1923), 226.

⁵⁹ Rawnsley, ‘A National Benefactor – Sir Robert Hunter’, 237.

Hill's biographer, Enid Moberly Bell, stipulates in *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 1942, that correspondence in February 1885 between Hill and Hunter, Hill had suggested the name, "Commons and Gardens Trust" and in response, Hunter "scribbled in pencil '? National Trust' across the letter.⁶⁰

Fundamentally, to celebrate the centenary of Sir Robert's death in 2013, a book titled *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust* was written by Ben Covell, and he also delivered a speech to The Haslemere Society at their Spring meeting on 19 April 2013, in which he presented a biographical account of Hunter's life and his contribution to the founding of the National Trust.⁶¹ Notably, the speech drew attention to the absence of a blue plaque at Hunter's birthplace and included a call to "launch a campaign to secure one". It was not until 2020 that English Heritage erected a blue plaque at 5 Louvaine Road, Battersea, London, where Hunter had lived between 1869 and 1872. Significantly, the proposal to place a plaque at his birthplace in Camberwell was rejected in 2013.⁶² Fundamentally, the *BBC* reported on the 3 November 2013 that a performance will be held on the 6 November 2013 at Haslemere museum to commemorate him, followed by the National Trust's Director-General, Dame Helen Ghosh, on the following day.⁶³

⁶⁰ E. M. Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1942), 232-233. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 328.

⁶¹ B. Cowell, *Haslemere Talk on Hunter* [Speech]. Spring Meeting of the Haslemere Society, 19 April 2013. & The Haslemere Society, *The One Hundred and Twenty-Eighth Annual Report* (2013). Available at: http://www.haslemeresociety.org/uploads/1/0/3/8/10380361/2013_ar_for_website.pdf [Accessed 14/5/2025].

⁶² English Heritage, *Blue Plaques: Hunter, Sir Robert (1844-1913)* (2025). Available online: <https://www.english-heritage.org.uk/visit/blue-plaques/robert-hunter/> [Accessed 1/5/2025]. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 329. & Gupta, 'National Trust 'quiet man' Sir Robert Hunter remembered'.

⁶³ Gupta, 'National Trust 'quiet man' Sir Robert Hunter remembered'.

To fully appreciate the significance of Sir Robert Hunter's pivotal role in the formation of the National Trust in 1895, it is essential to consider the formative influences of his early life, particularly his family, close associates, and Scottish heritage. These included his father, Robert Lachlan Hunter, who at the age of forty, retired from life at sea, but remained highly active in maritime affairs. He became part-owner of several ships with Messrs Wilson and Coote, served as Deputy Chairman of the Local Marine Board, was a member of the Thames Conservancy and Lloyd's of London, and acted as a special constable in Sir Robert Peel's Metropolitan Police Force. He also played a key role in founding the Belvedere Institute in Surrey in 1865, now the Royal Alfred Seafarers' Society, which offered support and care to retired seafarers and their families. Additionally, he served on the management committee of the Seamen's Hospital Society and "advocated the cause of these institutions in the press, in public speeches, as well as by financial contributions".⁶⁴

Poignantly, when the Hunter family moved to Denmark Hill in 1853, which was then part of the expanding south London suburbs, but it was still on the fringes of the city. Green fields were still actively farmed, that stretched almost to the railway station and yet signs of urban development were already emerging, evident in the fine houses and landscaped gardens beginning to appear. Across London, both north and south, open fields and wooded areas were steadily being replaced by bricks and mortar, as the city's population grew at an astonishing rate.⁶⁵ In 1861, the

⁶⁴ Hunter, *Sir Robert Hunter*, 13-15. & Royal Alfred Seafarer's Society, *Our Society – 160 Years of Care* (2025). Available at: <https://royalalfredseafarers.co.uk/about-us/> [Accessed 14/5/2025].

⁶⁵ Hunter, *Sir Robert Hunter*, 18.

family relocated again, this time to Brixton. But by the mid-1860s, they had left the capital altogether, settling at Carrick House in Surbiton, Surrey, a move that may have reflected a desire to escape the pressures of rapid urbanisation. At that time, Surbiton remained largely rural, still untouched by the encroachment of trains and trams. The decision to move was likely inspired by a tranquil holiday near Hampton Court, where Hunter and his sister had delighted in watching deer roam freely in Bushey Park.⁶⁶ And, while Hunter no doubt inherited his deep love of moors, heaths, woodlands, and open hilltops from his Scottish ancestry, it was also shaped by the experiences and associations of his early youth and adulthood.⁶⁷ Later, Hunter's daughter reflected and wrote "the rapid transformations which he witnessed of the surroundings of his early homes may well have fostered and encouraged his desire to secure for the dwellers in the towns gardens, parks or wide open spaces, as some reminder of the beauties and amenities of the country".⁶⁸ Furthermore, another significant influence on Hunter's personal development was his tutor, Joshua Fitch (1824–1903), the prominent English educationist who exemplified a deep commitment to public service and had introduced Hunter, through their many conversations, to the 'world of life and letters', once remarking that "all [man's] struggles after a higher life are distinct though humble contributions to the improvement of the race to which he belongs". And, finally, Leonard Seeley (1831–1893), the legal scholar and writer, who had also played a key role in shaping

⁶⁶ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 43. & Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 7.

⁶⁷ Hunter, *Sir Robert Hunter*, 18.

⁶⁸ *ibid*, 18.

Hunter's character, and who guided him in preparing for his examinations which fostered the attention to detail and dedication that would define his later career.⁶⁹

The profound influence of his father's deep commitment to public service left a lasting impression on the young Hunter, shaping his own lifelong dedication to civic and charitable causes. Furthermore, the early key influences instilled in him for a love of open spaces, the countryside and fresh air, along with a strong sense of duty, meticulous attention to detail, a habit of legal scrutiny, and a spirit of independent thought.⁷⁰ Simon Jenkins, Chairman of the National Trust said in 2012, "Hunter was by profession a lawyer, his official post being Solicitor to the Post Office. But he was a legal polymath. An enthusiasm for building preservation, town planning and the open air led him into concert with Octavia Hill and the firebrand Lake District champion, Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley".⁷¹

⁶⁹ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 44. &. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 8.

⁷⁰ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 40, 44-45. &. Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 4, 8-9.

⁷¹ Cowell, *Sir Robert Hunter: Co-founder and 'Inventor' of the National Trust*, 1.

Chapter 2

Octavia Hill: the 'Philanthropist and Social Reformer'

(3 December 1838 – 13 August 1912)



Figure 2: Portrait of Octavia Hill (1838-1912), c. 1882
Photograph © Wellcome Collection [CC BY 4.0](#)

During the nineteenth-century, the roles of upper-class and middle-class Victorian women typically involved unpaid, non-contractual work, including social work, domestic duties, estate management, and participation in family businesses. Although these responsibilities were considered essential, they were not formal employment and, a central aspect of their lives was philanthropy. This encompassed their social, political, economic and religious connections, and through

charitable work, and these women could enhance their influence within the social networks.⁷² Furthermore, Sue Morgan depicts the role of Victorian women in her book *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900*, that “The growth of voluntary female involvement in church life through educational work and organised philanthropy, and the emergence of full-time roles for women in domestic evangelism, the deaconess movement, sisterhoods and missionary work provided an unprecedented array of opportunities ...”⁷³

Fundamentally, Octavia Hill emerges as one of the most celebrated and influential women of the Victorian period and one of the three co-founders of the National Trust.⁷⁴ Hill was a pioneering British social reformer, environmentalist and philanthropist who was a key figure in the development of urban housing reform, access to urban parks and green spaces.⁷⁵ She believed that access to green spaces, fresh air and nature was essential for the mental and physical health for people in towns, “the healthy gift of air and the joy of plants and flowers”.⁷⁶ Significantly, she was a prominent and active female involved in many institutions, societies and organisations, of which, many of them are still active today.⁷⁷ Hill's

⁷² K. Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Palgrave Publishers Ltd, 2001), 51, 56, 63-64.

⁷³ S. Morgan (ed.), *Women, Religion and Feminism in Britain, 1750-1900* (London: Palgrave MacMillan Ltd, 2002), 2.

⁷⁴ E. Baigent. & B. Cowell. (eds.), ‘*Nobler imaginings and mightier struggles*’ *Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London: University of London School of Advanced Study, 2016), xix.

⁷⁵ W. Whyte, ‘Octavia Hill: her life and legacy’, *National Trust* (2025). Available online: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/people/octavia-hill-her-life-and-legacy> [Accessed 27/3/2025], 1-2, 5.

⁷⁶ A. Wyper, ‘RHS Chelsea celebrates Octavia Hill and the joy of plants and flowers’, *That's Not My Age*. 22 September 2024 [Online]. Available at: <https://thatsnotmyage.com/lifestyle/rhs-chelsea-celebrates-octavia-hill-and-the-joy-of-plants-and-flowers> [Accessed 9/9/2024], 3. & P. Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (London: Pitkin Publishing, 2020), 24.

⁷⁷ E. Baigent, ‘Octavia Hill: ‘the most misunderstood ... Victorian reformer’ in E. Baigent & B. Cowell (eds.), *Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London: University of London School of Advanced Study, 2016), 3.

passion for her various interests and causes was evident in the many essays she wrote for periodicals and collections, including *The Homes of the London Poor* (1875) which examined the living conditions and housing management for the poor in London, focusing on Hill's experiences and her efforts to reform and improve their circumstances.⁷⁸ And, *Our Common Land* (1877) which challenged social issues concerning public spaces, charity, and the living conditions of the poor in urban settings, particularly in London.⁷⁹ Additionally, she sent numerous letters to the press, and her public speaking engagements, including her essay on *Open Spaces* (1877), which was read by Hill at a lecture addressing the National Health Society on 9 May 1877, demonstrated her religious view on the roles women could play in public life.⁸⁰ Although Hill fought for women's rights in 'education and property ownership', 'and encouraged the women she knew, friends and family to take public office'.⁸¹ At times, her views on the role of women was contradictory, as she firmly opposed women's suffrage and envisioned working-class women staying at home, shaping a stable environment in which children could form their values.⁸² Additionally, on 20 July 1910, it was reported in the *Dundee Evening Telegraph* "Miss Octavia Hill writes to the *Times* against any form of women suffrage she makes an earnest plea to women still to seek 'the quiet paths of helpful, real work',

⁷⁸ O. Hill, *Homes of the London Poor* (London: State Charities Aid Association, 1875), 1-78.

⁷⁹ O. Hill, *Our Common Land and Other Short Essays* (London: MacMillan and Co., 1877), 105-51.

⁸⁰ Baigent, 'Octavia Hill: 'the most misunderstood ... Victorian reformer'', 4.

⁸¹ G. Darley, *Octavia Hill: Social reformer and founder of the National Trust*, 2nd edition (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2010), 7.

⁸² Darley, *Octavia Hill: Social reformer and founder of the National Trust*, 7.

and voices the opinions of 'thousands of silent women' in her opposition to female suffrage".⁸³

Miss Octavia Hill died on Tuesday 13 August 1912 and many obituaries widely described her as a 'philanthropist and social reformer', the *Aberdeen Journal* reported her death on 15 August 1912 and depicted her as "Miss Hill was one of the most practical and most energetic women philanthropists of her day, especially in connection with housing and social reform".⁸⁴ The family turned down the government's offer to hold the funeral in the Abbey, knowing she had wished to be buried beside her sister, Miranda, in Crookham churchyard, where the view had given her "such a delicious sense of space".⁸⁵ Octavia Hill was commemorated soon after her death by a few biographies and memoirs published by her family and close friends including *Life of Octavia Hill* (1913), edited by Charles Edmund Maurice, *Octavia Hill: Early Ideals* (1923), edited by Emily Southwood Maurice, *Canon Barnett: His Life, Work and Friends* (1918), by Henrietta Barnett, *Memoir in the Dictionary of National Biography* (1927), by Helen Bosanquet, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (1942), by Enid Moberly Bell and *Octavia Hill: Pioneer of the National Trust and Housing Reformer* (1956), by William Thomson Hill.⁸⁶ Hill's celebrity continued long after her death, as supporters established memorials including a bench (1913), tomb effigy (1928), window (1995) at Crookham Hill Church, Kent, and blue plaques positioned at 2 Garbutt Place, London (1991) and Hill's birthplace in

⁸³ 'Notes – mainly Personal', *Dundee Evening Telegraph*. 20 July 1910 [Online]. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JE3236778460/BNCN?> [Accessed 28/3/2025], 1-1.

⁸⁴ 'Death of Miss Octavia Hill', *Aberdeen Journal*. 15 August 1912 [Online]. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/ID3229923858/BNCN?> [Accessed 28/3/2025], 5-5

⁸⁵ E. M. Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* (London: Constable & Co Ltd, 1942), 277.

⁸⁶ Baigent, 'Octavia Hill: 'the most misunderstood ... Victorian reformer'', 7.

Wisbech (1992). Furthermore, to celebrate the centenary of her death in 2012, a memorial stone was installed at Westminster Abbey and the National Trust established the Octavia Hill Woodlands Centenary Trail at Toys Hill, Kent.⁸⁷

To fully understand the significance of Octavia Hill's role in the formation of the National Trust in 1895, it is important to firstly acknowledge the key influences in her early life through family and friends, including her mother, Caroline Southwood Hill, grandfather, Dr Thomas Southwood Smith, Frederick Denison Maurice and John Ruskin. These early influences helped shape her values which, were deeply rooted in education, public health, poverty, religion, nature and art which were the underlying essence of her beliefs, character and her commitment to social reform.⁸⁸ Furthermore, the struggles of poverty and misfortune that she personally endured, along with her own observations of lives of the underprivileged society during her early childhood, would remain with her throughout her life.⁸⁹

Octavia Hill was the third daughter of James Hill (d. 1871), former banker and corn merchant and his third wife, Caroline Southwood Smith (1809-1902), educationist and writer, was born on Monday 3 December 1838 in Wisbech, Cambridgeshire.⁹⁰ Her parents were devoted Unitarians, Christians who did not accept the 'doctrines of the Trinity and of original sin', but instead believing 'in the unity of God' and natural goodness of humanity.⁹¹ Furthermore, they advocated for

⁸⁷ Baigent, 'Octavia Hill: 'the most misunderstood ... Victorian reformer', 7-21.

⁸⁸ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 5-7, 18-21, 30.

⁸⁹ Darley, *Octavia Hill: Social reformer and founder of the National Trust*, 12.

⁹⁰ P. Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (London: Pitkin Publishing, 2020), 12. & G. Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 2nd edition (Swindon: National Trust Enterprises Ltd, 2002), 49.

⁹¹ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 49.

the utopian socialist movement based on the ideas of the welsh philanthropic, cotton mill-owner Robert Owen (1771-1858), who believed that “all human beings were essentially good; it as not original sin but their environment – the physical and social conditions in which they were raised – that corrupted them”.⁹² The movement emerged during the late 1820s which stimulated a small group of devoted female followers and at the heart of Owenism, demonstrated ‘support for the co-operative trade unions, shops, educational activities and health insurance’.⁹³ Hill’s parents founded Wisbech Infant school for the poor in July 1838 and through contact with the parents of the impoverished children, they also, established a ‘Hall for the People’ in the evenings.⁹⁴ The hall provided a variety of social activities including singing, dancing and hosted lectures and meetings by the Mental Improvement Society which members financially subscribed to. Notably, the hall featured a co-operative store that sold goods at cost, which provoked anger amongst local traders.⁹⁵

Unfortunately, within the next couple of years, Hill’s father’s utopianism had crumbled due to the country’s financial banking crisis.⁹⁶ Consequently, on 25 March 1840, the *Worcestershire Chronicle* reported the notice of bankruptcy of James Hill and his partner, Thomas Hill.⁹⁷ And, on 29 May 1840, the *Stamford Mercury* reported that an auction was to be held at the Saracen’s Head Inn, Peterborough “by order of the Commissioners in a Fiat of Bankruptcy against James and Thomas Hill,

⁹² Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 13.

⁹³ Gleadle, *British Women in the Nineteenth Century*, 31.

⁹⁴ G. Mowat, ‘Octavia Hill. 1838-1912’, *Social Work (1939-1970)*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (1956). Available online: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/43760248> [Accessed 2/4/2025], 172.

⁹⁵ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 15.

⁹⁶ Mowat, ‘Octavia Hill. 1838-1912’, *Social Work (1939-1970)*, 172.

⁹⁷ ‘Latest Intelligence’, *Worcestershire Chronicle*. 25 March 1840 [Online]. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/IS3243340860/BNCN> [Accessed 3/4/2025], 2.

merchants, brewers, and co-partners, and under the direction of the Assignees of the said bankrupts".⁹⁸

The result of the bankruptcy led to the Hill family moving away from Wisbech, and over the next few years, moving between Essex, Yorkshire and London, in attempt to salvage dignity and financial independence. However, by the mid 1840s, Hill's father's mental health had deteriorated, and he suffered a serious nervous breakdown, causing her parents to part company.⁹⁹ By 1846, Dr Thomas Southwood Smith, Hill's grandfather assumed the role of father, providing moral and financial support to the family. He arranged for an idyllic cottage in rural Finchley for his daughter and granddaughters, close to his home in Highgate.¹⁰⁰ The Hill family settled into their new lives in rural Finchley, and Hill and her sisters enjoyed playing outdoors in all weathers, 'leaping ditches and climbing trees', and became locally known as 'the young ladies who are always up in the hedges'.¹⁰¹ Furthermore, Hill's initial chronicled words were, "Mummy. I wish I could have a field so large I could run forever".¹⁰² Hill's mother, Caroline Southwood Hill, now practiced her educational theories on her daughters and was a fervent believer in the education through playing. She read the English classics to her daughters, but ultimately, allowed them the freedom to educate themselves, through playing. And on one occasion, Hill and her sisters created a school for their dolls, producing lesson plans

⁹⁸ Advertisement and Notices', *Stamford Mercury*. 29 May 1840 [Online]. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/ID3230612144/BNCN> [Accessed 3/4/2025], 1.

⁹⁹ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 5-10.

¹⁰⁰ Mowat, 'Octavia Hill. 1838-1912', *Social Work (1939-1970)*, 172.

¹⁰¹ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 16. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 50.

¹⁰² Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 5.

and learnt History, Geography and French to teach their pupils (dolls).¹⁰³ Notably, Hill and her sisters especially cherished their adventures when they visited their grandfather in Highgate.¹⁰⁴

Fundamentally, Hill's grandfather, Dr Southwood Smith (1788-1861), was a pioneering figure in medicine, public health, and social reform. He was a Unitarian minister, physician and a passionate advocate for the rights of the poor and campaigned on issues from child labour.¹⁰⁵ And, whilst working in the London Fever Hospital during the cholera outbreaks of the 1840s, he witnessed the devastating effects of the disease and championed for sanitary reforms in urban areas. He was made acutely aware that the cholera outbreaks were not an infection, but was due to 'slum housing, overcrowding, poor sanitation and lack of clean water and open spaces'.¹⁰⁶ He canvassed energetically for improvements which were eventually incorporated in the first Public Health Act of 1848.¹⁰⁷ Hill had assisted her grandfather in copying out extracts from medical reports and legislation, which exposed her for the first time of the appalling poverty that overwhelmed Victorian cities.¹⁰⁸ The significance of her grandfather's tutelage, his contribution to society and the power of the pen and paper used as a platform when fighting for a cause, would remain a lasting influence on her throughout her life.¹⁰⁹

¹⁰³ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography* 11.

¹⁰⁴ *ibid*, 12.

¹⁰⁵ R. K. Webb, 'Smith, (Thomas) Southwood (1788-1861)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2009). Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25917> [Accessed 2/4/2025], 1, 3-5.

¹⁰⁶ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 50.

¹⁰⁷ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 12.

¹⁰⁸ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 50.

¹⁰⁹ Darley, *Octavia Hill: Social reformer and founder of the National Trust*, 12.

Significantly, another factor that was instrumental in shaping Hill's values was when in 1851, her mother accepted a position in the management of a Christian Socialist Co-operative venture by the Ladies Guild, which was a blend of 'school and craft workshop' for unskilled women.¹¹⁰ Gillian Darley explains that although the venture was 'not financially successful, it was important for early feminist activists as a strategy for helping women to earn an independent living'.¹¹¹ Subsequently, the Hill family relocated from rural Finchley to urban Fitzroy Square in London.¹¹² Notably, when Hill was fourteen years old she was made responsible, by her mother, for the 'Ragged School girls' who worked in the Guild's workroom, making 'toys and doll's house furniture'.¹¹³ Working with the 'Ragged School girls' exposed Hill to the severe poverty affecting the city's women and children and during a visit to a child missing from Guild workroom, she saw first-hand the over-crowded living conditions, malnutrition, disease, exhaustion and abuse they faced.¹¹⁴ Fundamentally, she arranged daily 'mid-day meals for the workers', organised regular 'nature-study walks across the London commons', and numerous accounts describe Hill's abrupt entrance through a hedgerow 'followed by a troop of ragged toymakers, happy and flushed, each with an armful of bluebells'.¹¹⁵ Her work with the 'Ragged School girls' would lay the foundation in her future involvement in 'housing and social reform' and

¹¹⁰ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 18. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 51.

¹¹¹ G. Darley, 'Octavia Hill: lessons in campaigning' in E. Baigent & B. Cowell (eds.), *Octavia Hill, social activism and the remaking of British society* (London: University of London School of Advanced Study, 2016), 33.

¹¹² Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 18. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 51.

¹¹³ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 18. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 51.

¹¹⁴ Darley, 'Octavia Hill: lessons in campaigning', 33.

¹¹⁵ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 29.

provided her with the experience in business acumen.¹¹⁶ Her work at the Guild introduced her to Christian socialism and its key figures, including its' founder, Frederick Denison Maurice (1805-1872), a theologian and Church of England clergyman and Charles Kingsley (1819-1875), author and Church of England clergyman.¹¹⁷ These influential people played significant roles in the development of Christian socialism during the nineteenth-century which encompassed Christian ethics with social justice and reform and advocated for social equality, better working conditions and alleviation of poverty.¹¹⁸ The Hill family had regularly attended services at Lincoln's Inn Chapel where they listened to the preaching's of Maurice and, Hill would ask Maurice many questions about the doctrines of Unitarianism and Christian socialism.¹¹⁹ Hill was deeply moved by Maurice's sermons, finding them both intellectually and spiritually convincing, and was impressed by the impact of his public speaking. Consequently, by 1857, Hill was confirmed into the Church of England and Maurice's prolific writing and preaching had a philosophical effect on her, which shaped her throughout her life.¹²⁰ She later wrote to her sister, Miranda, "It was he who had led me to the Church, who had shown me a life in the creeds, the services and the Bible; who had interpreted for me much that dark and puzzling

¹¹⁶ Mowat, 'Octavia Hill. 1838-1912', *Social Work (1939-1970)*, 173-174. & Darley, 'Octavia Hill: lessons in campaigning', 34.

¹¹⁷ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 19. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 51.

¹¹⁸ D. Ryan, 'Octavia Hill: From theology to action' in S. Spencer (ed.), *Theology Reforming Society: Revisiting Anglican Social Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2017), 42-43.

¹¹⁹ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 19. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 51.

¹²⁰ Ryan, 'Octavia Hill: From theology to action', 42-43.

life”.¹²¹ Her faith remained profound throughout her life, preferring action over words and only to her close friends that she spoke of God.¹²²

The other major influence on Hill was John Ruskin (1819-1900), an established proficient artist, social and art critic, art historian and philanthropist. He was a prolific writer, and his deep passion for his various interests, causes, and accomplishments was reflected in his numerous lyrical works and lectures, which was a blend of cultural history, art criticism, natural science, and political economy.¹²³ Hill first met Ruskin in 1853 when he was visiting the Ladies Guild and he was instantly enchanted by the ‘Hill family of articulate young women’ and notably, gave Hill some tips on various colours to use in artwork.¹²⁴ Hill found Ruskin could be sociable and charming and she requested art training from him, and to her delight, she was invited to his home in Denmark Hill whereby she observed the walls of his study were full of Turner’s paintings.¹²⁵ They discussed loneliness, pleasure, happiness, colour and beauty in painting, which were the beginnings of a long-lasting friendship.¹²⁶ Ruskin encouraged her to develop her skills as an artist and in 1855, offered her work as a copyist, ‘making watercolour copies of Venetian paintings in public collections’ and ‘was commissioned to undertake work for the

¹²¹ C. E. Maurice (ed.), *Life of Octavia Hill as told in her letters* (London: MacMillan and Co. Limited, 1913), 34.

¹²² Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 19.

¹²³ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 20. & R. Hewison, 'Ruskin, John (1819–1900), art critic and social critic', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2016). Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/24291> [Accessed 23/5/2024], 27.

¹²⁴ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 30-32.

¹²⁵ *ibid*, 30-32.

¹²⁶ *ibid*, 30-32.

Society of Antiquaries'.¹²⁷ In addition to her responsibilities at the Guild, Hill spent the next decade, training under Ruskin, while regularly reporting to him on the harsh conditions faced by the urban poor in their 'overcrowded slums'.¹²⁸ Through their many discussions, they deliberated about education, public health, poverty, art and the healing powers of nature.¹²⁹ Seemingly, Hill and Ruskin had much in common and endured several bouts of 'severe depression' throughout their lives and would 'turn to thoughts of the countryside for solace', the fresh air and open space of the Lake District cleansed their souls spiritually.¹³⁰ Fundamentally, Hill often found herself torn between her passion within her 'artistic work' and her sense of duty towards addressing the social concerns of the urban underprivileged within her 'human work'.¹³¹ Ruskin had already acknowledged that Hill's true calling was to the living conditions of the poor, and in 1864, when he had inherited a large annual income, he asked her, "what she would do in his position?" and she replied, "something to provide better homes for the poor".¹³² He replied, in a letter to Hill on 19 May 1864, "you will give me one of the greatest pleasures yet possible to me, by enabling me to be of use in this particular manner, and to these ends".¹³³ Notably, as Ruskin was now a wealthy man with a social conscience, he provided her with financial assistance in purchasing her first properties to provide housing for the impoverished in London. This was the birth of social housing schemes.¹³⁴ Terms of

¹²⁷ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 20-21.

¹²⁸ *ibid*, 21.

¹²⁹ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 5-7, 18-21, 30-32, 141.

¹³⁰ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 53.

¹³¹ E. S. Maurice (ed.), *Octavia Hill, Early Ideals from letters* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1928), 129-31. & Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 72.

¹³² Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 22.

¹³³ Maurice (ed.), *Life of Octavia Hill as told in her letters*, 213.

¹³⁴ Ryan, 'Octavia Hill: From theology to action', 43.

contract were drawn up between Ruskin and Hill, with an agreement of five percent return on his investment, hoping it would inspire other affluent philanthropists to invest in social housing.¹³⁵

Ruskin initially purchased three properties in the slum area of Paradise Place and entrusted the management over to Hill, who proceeded to renovate and refurbish them, and filthy, over-crowded and damp rooms were cleared, and improved sanitation applied.¹³⁶ She established a system for collecting rent on a weekly basis, refusing to tolerate any excuses for non-payment. This strategy achieved three main objectives, it ensured investors received their payments, enabled quick resolution of any repair issues, and created an early connection to tenant welfare, which ultimately contributed to the development of modern social work.¹³⁷ Furthermore, whenever there was a 'small open space' within the properties, she converted it into urban children's playgrounds with shrubs and flowers, creating a pleasant area for her tenants to enjoy.¹³⁸ By 1874, the housing renovation projects had gained such popularity that Hill and her group of trained volunteers, referred to as her 'fellow workers', were managing 'over three thousand tenancies' across seventeen sites across London.¹³⁹

By 1875, Hill often reflected on her idyllic childhood in Finchley, playing outdoors in all weathers with her sisters, remembering the beauty of the hedgerows,

¹³⁵ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 76. & Ryan, 'Octavia Hill: From theology to action', 43.

¹³⁶ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 77-80.

¹³⁷ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 22-23. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 53-54.

¹³⁸ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 22-23. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 53-54.

¹³⁹ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 23-24. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 54-55.

trees and pastures.¹⁴⁰ She saw nature and beauty to be vital for the well-being of her tenants, “I have tried, as far as opportunity has permitted, to develop the love of beauty among my tenants. The poor of London need joy and beauty in their lives”.¹⁴¹ Crucially, she recognised that London was expanding at an overwhelming pace and engulfing its open and green spaces without planning regulations.¹⁴² Realising that her housing schemes were now well-established, she redirected her focus on the ‘provision of open spaces for town people’, and felt the need for the sights and sounds of the countryside, ‘all beauty moved her, but none so deeply as the beauty of earth and sky, of trees and flowers, of nature whether wild or cultivated’.¹⁴³ She launched into the first of her many campaigns to save open spaces and attempted to defend Swiss Cottage Fields from development and sought the advice from the Commons Preservation Society, where she first met Robert Hunter.¹⁴⁴ Hunter gladly shared his experience with her, and they formed a long-lasting friendship and partnership, working together on many projects and campaigns. She became a member of the society and continued to be an enthusiastic supporter, along with many others, for the rest of her life.¹⁴⁵

The early key influences on Octavia Hill were shaped by her close family and friends, through education, public health, poverty, religion, nature, and art, were deeply rooted in the appreciation of nature's beauty. And she is remembered today

¹⁴⁰ Ryan, ‘Octavia Hill: From theology to action’, 47.

¹⁴¹ R. Whelan (ed.), *Octavia Hill and the social housing debate: essays and letters* (London: St Edmundsbury Press, 1998), 56.

¹⁴² Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 25. & Ryan, ‘Octavia Hill: From theology to action’, 47.

¹⁴³ Bell, *Octavia Hill: A Biography*, 141.

¹⁴⁴ *ibid*, 143.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, 143.

as a pioneering social reformer, environmentalist and philanthropist who played a key role in the development of urban housing reform, access to urban parks and green spaces, and the co-founder of the National Trust and, Dame Fiona Reynolds, Director-General, National Trust said in 2012 “her beliefs – in beauty, in history, in the importance of fresh air and places to roam, and in well-designed, well-managed places to live – were ahead of their time”.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁶ G. Knappett. (ed.), *Octavia Hill: Social Reformer and Co-Founder of the National Trust* (Andover: Pitkin Publishing, 2012),1.

Chapter 3

Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley: the 'Volcano Campaigner'

(28 September 1851 – 28 May 1920)



Figure 3: Commemorative print showing
Canon Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley, c. 1920
Photograph Courtesy of Cumbria Image Bank [CC0 1.0 Public Domain](#)

Arguably, the most significant figure in popularising the Lake District and inspiring the National Trust was Canon Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley. His charisma, passion, enormous energy, and 'lyrical advocacy' were crucial to the project.¹⁴⁷ Rawnsley's enthusiasm for all of his interests, campaigns and

¹⁴⁷ M. Allen. & R. Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920* (Essendon: The New Beaver Press, 2023), xiv.

achievements were depicted in many of his published literature which was a blend of natural history and culture of Lakeland, travel-writing, nature-writing and cultural-writing included outputs as diverse as verses, sonnets, poems, essays, and books.¹⁴⁸ The dynamism and influence of Rawnsley provoked and stimulated many groups of devoted followers, and as he was a regular traveller who had visited many countries, his many campaigns and literature followed him and ultimately were published in many of those countries, which included America.¹⁴⁹ Rawnsley, as an ordained minister in the Church of England, believed passionately and ardently that the Church, the Monarchy, and the Empire were the three fundamental pedestals that upheld Victorian society.¹⁵⁰ Furthermore, his views were fervently expressed in his published and unpublished writings, and from the pulpit to delivering sermons and lectures.¹⁵¹ It could be argued that he had a more significant role in shaping the Lake District as we know it today and he would be considered, as a famous ‘celebrity’ with his own fan club.¹⁵² Moreover, when Rawnsley died on 28 May 1920, many flowing obituaries seemed endless, reported in newspapers throughout the country, and, on 29 May 1920 the *Derby Daily Telegraph*, depicted him as “The famous Rector of Crosthwaite may almost be said to have been made for the Lake District”, and *The Times* portrayed him as, “It is no exaggeration to say – and it is

¹⁴⁸ M. Townend, *The Vikings and Victorian Lakeland: The Norse Medievalism of W. G. Collingwood and His Contemporaries* (Kendal: Titus Wilson & Son, 2009), 175-176.

¹⁴⁹ National Trust, *Hardwicke Rawnsley: ‘Defender of the Lakes’* (2024). Available online: <https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/discover/history/people/hardwicke-rawnsley-defender-of-the-lakes> [Accessed 17/8/2024].

¹⁵⁰ Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, xvii-xviii.

¹⁵¹ *ibid*, xvii-xviii.

¹⁵² *ibid*, xvi.

much to say of anyone – England would be a much duller and less healthy and happy country if he had not lived and worked”, respectively.¹⁵³

To fully understand the significance of Rawnsley’s role within the formation of the National Trust in 1895, it is fundamental to acknowledge the early influences on his life through family, friends and the Lincolnshire connections, which was paramount to his character.¹⁵⁴ The Rawnsley lineage were part of a wider elite social network in Lincolnshire that included the Tennyson’s and Franklin’s families.¹⁵⁵ The Rawnsley’s were prosperous and prominent that held distinguished roles and benefices “and were generous in caring for those less fortunate than themselves”, within Lincolnshire.¹⁵⁶

Hardwicke Drummond and his twin sister, Frances Anna, who were the fourth and fifth children of Robert Drummond Burrell (1817-1882), and Catherine Ann née Franklin (1818-1892), were born on Sunday 28 September 1851 at Shiplake Vicarage, near the Thames, in Oxfordshire.¹⁵⁷ Rawnsley’s love for natural science was first ignited whilst living in Shiplake whereby he enjoyed the terraced rectory garden which provided a panoramic view of the countryside, with flowing rivers and

¹⁵³ ‘Canon Rawnsley’, *Derby Daily Telegraph*. 29 May 1920 [Online]. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/JF3232989693/BNCN> [Accessed 25/2/2025], 2-2. & ‘Death of Canon Rawnsley: Poet of the Lake District’, *The Times*. 29 May 1920 [Online]. Available at: <https://link-gale-com.hull.idm.oclc.org/apps/doc/CS186060477/TTDA> [Accessed 17/1/2025], 11-11.

¹⁵⁴ Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, xxx.

¹⁵⁵ G. Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 2nd edition (Swindon: National Trust Enterprises Ltd, 2002), 74-75.

¹⁵⁶ E. F. Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life* (Glasgow: MacLehose, Jackson & Co, 1923), 2-3. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, xxxi-xxxiv.

¹⁵⁷ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 3, 9-10. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, xxxvii. & P. Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley* (London: Pitkin Publishing, 2020), 68. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 74-75.

blossoming wildlife.¹⁵⁸ The countryside was the playground for Rawnsley and his siblings to revel in and in later years, he would reflect, “the sound of the bells borne down the stream, the chalk cliff and the violets, all these, though I left Shiplake when I was ten years old, had made impressions on me for life”.¹⁵⁹ In March 1862, at the age of eleven years old, the Rawnsley family relocated back to Lincolnshire, whereby his father, Robert Drummond accepted his father’s, Thomas Hardwicke’s, benefice, the Parish of Halton Holgate.¹⁶⁰ This was the beginning of the influence from his Lincolnshire family connections and, the launch and embarkation of his lyrical works whereby the sorrow he had felt at leaving his home in Shiplake was reflected in his first poem at the age of eleven years old, *Ode to Shiplake*, which consisted of twenty-five stanzas which was gleaned from Thomas Hood’s poem, *I remember, I remember*.¹⁶¹ Some twenty years later in 1892, he would reflect on his memories of Shiplake and his friendship with Tennyson who had died in 1892, within his sonnet called, *At Shiplake* and he also gave permission to Emily Climensohn to publish his sonnet within her book, *The History of Shiplake*, 1894.¹⁶²

Despite his regret at leaving Shiplake, young Rawnsley embraced his new surroundings in the Lincolnshire countryside, where below Halton Holgate, there was a vast new playing ground for him to indulge, explore and discover which ignited his

¹⁵⁸ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 68. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 75.

¹⁵⁹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 7.

¹⁶⁰ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 7. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 1.

¹⁶¹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 7. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 2. & M. Allen, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley (1851-1920): Ode to Shiplake* (2024). Available online: <https://hdrawnsley.com/index.php/2-uncategorised/433-ode-to-shiplake> [Accessed 17/8/2024].

¹⁶² E. S. Climensohn, *The History of Shiplake* (London: Eyre and Spottiswood, 1894), 391. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 2.

continuing love for natural science.¹⁶³ He was sensitive to the ‘natural world’, and observed everything that surrounded him, from the wildlife, birds, the meadows with copious colourful wildflowers and he loved swimming and fishing in the river.¹⁶⁴ A few years later, whilst ‘observing the wildlife of the Fens’, he would be witness to the erection of a new railway from Holbeach to Spilsby, and eagerly observing the ‘navvies’ constructing embankments, which ‘were to be formative experiences’.¹⁶⁵ Unfortunately, despite its obvious benefits of the railway with faster and safer travel, the new development had begun to have detrimental effects on the surrounding countryside, which disturbed the peace and tranquil ambiance and, it also impacted on the local community.¹⁶⁶

Rawnsley was from an ecclesiastic Lincolnshire family and when he entered Uppingham School in 1862 at the age of eleven years old, there would be another significant guardian who would be influential throughout his life, his godfather and headteacher of Uppingham School, Edward Thring.¹⁶⁷ Thring was an ordained clergyman and arguably, considered the ‘greatest public school’ headmaster of the late nineteenth-century.¹⁶⁸ His principles for teaching and learning incorporated the obvious academic subjects such as, English, Chemistry, German and French as well as, other disciplines that were outside of the normal curriculum, such as art,

¹⁶³ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 68. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 76.

¹⁶⁴ Rev. H. D. Rawnsley, *Memories of the Tennysons*, 2nd edition (Glasgow: James MacLehose and Sons, 1912), x.

¹⁶⁵ ‘Great Northern Railway’, *Morning Post* (London). 17 August 1868 [Online]. Available at: <https://link.gale.com/apps/doc/R3212080826/BNCN?u> [Accessed 8/3/2025], 8. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 68

¹⁶⁶ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 68. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 76.

¹⁶⁷ H. D. Rawnsley, *Edward Thring: Teacher and Poet* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1889), 44-47.

¹⁶⁸ D. P. Leinster-Mackay, ‘Thring, Edward (1821-1887)’, *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004). Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/27389> [Accessed 31/1/2025], 3-4.

woodwork, drawing and music.¹⁶⁹ He was passionate and a believer of ‘fostering all-round ability in young people’, not only in the classroom but also within exercise, sports, and games.¹⁷⁰ In 1859, Thring was recognised as a pioneering educationalist in establishing the first gymnasium at a public school in England, and in 1869, was ‘the first public school’ establishing an ‘educational mission in the East End of London (north Woolwich)’ and the founder of the ‘Headmasters Conference’.¹⁷¹ Additionally, he strongly advocated for ‘girls secondary education’ and invited ‘the leaders of the girls’ public school movement to hold their annual conference, at his School in 1887.’¹⁷² Thring’s passion, compassion and enthusiasm for education were evident in his work which significantly influenced the young Rawnsley.¹⁷³ Thring introduced Rawnsley to the ‘Bible of life’ and although Rawnsley was brought up in an ecclesiastical family, Thring had revolutionised Rawnsley’s appreciation and understanding of the Bible, by showing him that the ‘Bible was the word of God’ and ‘nature was the living and visible manifestation of God’s gift to mankind’.¹⁷⁴ In 1869, Thring invited Rawnsley to join him and his family at their holiday cottage in Grasmere, in the Lake District.¹⁷⁵ Instantaneously, Rawnsley appreciated the beauty of the Lake District whereby he had enjoyed the swimming, fell walks and other activities, but ultimately, it was instrumental in

¹⁶⁹ Leinster-Mackay, ‘Thring, Edward (1821-1887)’, 2-3.

¹⁷⁰ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 68. & Leinster-Mackay., ‘Thring, Edward (1821-1887)’, 2-3.

¹⁷¹ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 68-69. & Leinster-Mackay, ‘Thring, Edward (1821-1887)’, 2-3.

¹⁷² Leinster-Mackay., ‘Thring, Edward (1821-1887)’, 3.

¹⁷³ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 68-69.

¹⁷⁴ Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 8. & Rawnsley, *Edward Thring: Teacher and Poet*, 46-47.

¹⁷⁵ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 69.

Rawnsley embracing Thring's love of God in nature, passion and adoration of Wordsworth's 'literary landscape', which would fervently be reflected in his later years.¹⁷⁶ And, recorded within his journal, "the sense of majesty and beauty and repose, the blended holiness of earth and sky".¹⁷⁷

During the summer of 1870, Rawnsley left Uppingham School and recorded within his journal, "I have longings of being someday a poet; if such proves to be the case and my rude verses are ever published, - which in truth to nature are feeble imitations of my favourite poet, Wordsworth, - any merit they may have will be due that good man Thring, who made me see some beauty in the least of God's creatures".¹⁷⁸ In October 1870, Rawnsley commenced his studies as an undergraduate at Balliol College at Oxford University, under the tutelage of the famous Greek scholar, Dr Benjamin Jowett (1817-1893).¹⁷⁹ Although Rawnsley was a popular, friendly, easy-going and courteous individual, he did have the tendency to be distracted by other 'social activities' such as 'ballad-singing' and 'ragging' and, initially Dr Jowett was not impressed with the young undergraduate.¹⁸⁰ Moreover, Thring had reflected that he was often frustrated with Rawnsley's lack of concentration which was quite often mirrored in his academic work.¹⁸¹ And, Dr

¹⁷⁶ Rawnsley, *Edward Thring: Teacher and Poet*, 46-47. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 69. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 8.

¹⁷⁷ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 19.

¹⁷⁸ *ibid*, 18.

¹⁷⁹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 20. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 70. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 9, 12. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 76-77.

¹⁸⁰ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 23-25. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 76-77. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 70.

¹⁸¹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 14.

Jowett had noticed this too and in a letter to Rawnsley, he had advised him to stop writing lyrical works “You must get rid of all excitable ways which will altogether unfit you for any place of responsibility or authority”.¹⁸² Perpetually, Rawnsley persisted in pursuit of his extra-curricular activities whereby on one occasion, he was showing off his athletic ability of ‘leaping over a donkey cart, complete with passenger’ and, in 1871, he won the ‘5 ft. 3 in.’ high jump for Balliol College.¹⁸³ Notably, a couple of years later, Rawnsley would replicate his interests in outdoor pursuits and physical activities when in charge of high-spirited young men at Clifton College Mission in Bristol.¹⁸⁴

Initially, Rawnsley studied the classics for the first two years whilst simultaneously studying a ‘third class in Classical Moderations’ at Balliol College, whereby his interest reverted to natural sciences, and, ultimately, he began to study Natural Science with focus on Chemistry, fuelling his objective of specialising in medicine as a doctor.¹⁸⁵ It was at Balliol that Rawnsley encountered the infamous John Ruskin who was Slade Professor of Fine Art at Oxford, and was well-known for his ability to arouse ‘social conscience’ in his undergraduates through his lectures and public meetings.¹⁸⁶ When Rawnsley encountered him at a college breakfast, Ruskin was drafting undergraduates to join his ‘Hinksey road-menders’, to assist with the repairing of the potholed and unsanitary ‘road between north and south Hinksey’, which fundamentally, would improve access to the city to the impoverished people

¹⁸² Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 24-25.

¹⁸³ *ibid*, 23, 24-25.

¹⁸⁴ W. O. Moberly, *The History of Saint Agnes Parish* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1890), 3-4.

¹⁸⁵ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 22-23. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 70.

¹⁸⁶ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 26. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 77.

who were isolated.¹⁸⁷ Ultimately, the project aimed to link both communities to the city whilst simultaneously stimulating the 'philanthropic spirits' and social conscience of the students.¹⁸⁸ Instantaneously, Rawnsley was profoundly inspired by Ruskin, and embraced the influence of Ruskin's philosophy about nature, art and social conscience, and participated into the project.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, some of the elite 'sons of professional classes' that were laying stones and digging ditches included some of the 'future' famous writers and social reformers, including Alfred Milner, Oscar Wilde, Arnold Toynbee, and William Gershom Collingwood, who would become Ruskin's 'devoted interpreter and, first biographer'.¹⁹⁰ Ruskin provoked and stimulated many groups of devoted followers which would be affectionately called 'Ruskinians', including, William Morris, Edward Burne-Jones, and Walter Crane.¹⁹¹

Rawnsley's association with Ruskin not only awakened his social conscience but had overturned his direction in life, and in 1874, after achieving an acceptable Third-Class degree in Natural Science, he decided to follow in his fathers' and grandfathers' path into the church.¹⁹² In 1875, he made a profound pledge to improve the lives of the urban impoverished and 'began work as a lay preacher' in the St. Mary's parish in Soho, and simultaneously volunteered at a refuge house 'for

¹⁸⁷ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 70.

¹⁸⁸ Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 15.

¹⁸⁹ L. Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius* (London: Penguin Group, 2008), 52. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 77.

¹⁹⁰ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 77. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 70. & J. S. Dearden, 'Collingwood, William Gershom', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2010). Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/39918> [Accessed 17/12/2024], 1. & Hewison, 'Ruskin, John (1819–1900), art critic and social critic', 28.

¹⁹¹ Dearden, 'Collingwood, William Gershom', 1. & Hewison, 'Ruskin, John (1819–1900), art critic and social critic', 15, 28. & Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 68.

¹⁹² Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 77. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 71.

vagrants'.¹⁹³ Furthermore, during this period, Ruskin introduced him to Octavia Hill, who was already a long-established housing and social reformer, and he too, was keen to improve the lives of the impoverished people who were living in the slums of London.¹⁹⁴ Additionally, Hill introduced Rawnsley to Emma Cons and Caroline Martinea, who were Hill's lieutenants, and Rawnsley 'found himself rent-collecting' for them, in Drury Lane.¹⁹⁵ Fundamentally, this was also the period that Hill introduced Robert Hunter, who had been active since the 1860s 'as a preserver of open spaces, public parks and commons', to him.¹⁹⁶ Rawnsley's passion and vigour for his parish duties, and 'high standards of Victorian propriety', to improve the lives of the underprivileged in London, took its toll on his health, and subsequently, he suffered an acute nervous 'collapse' due to over-working.¹⁹⁷ Consequently, Hill and Ruskin arranged for him to convalesce in the Lake District with his cousins at Wray Castle, to enjoy the fresh air and open space, as they were fully aware of the healing benefits of the countryside.¹⁹⁸ Rawnsley was once again, 'delighted in the beauty of his surroundings' and embraced Wordsworth's and Ruskin's Lake District, and enjoyed the company of Thring from Grasmere, and the Fletchers at Croft, Ambleside.¹⁹⁹ Interestingly, he enjoyed the companionship of the Fletchers' three

¹⁹³ Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 77. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 71. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 19.

¹⁹⁴ Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius*, 99. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 77. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 71. & Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 29.

¹⁹⁵ G. Darley, *Octavia Hill: Social reformer and founder of the National Trust*, 2nd edition (London: Francis Boutle Publishers, 2010), 174. & Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius*, 99.

¹⁹⁶ Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius*, 99. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 71.

¹⁹⁷ Darley, *Octavia Hill: Social reformer and founder of the National Trust*, 174. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 71.

¹⁹⁸ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 30. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 53.

¹⁹⁹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 30.

daughters, Alice, Edith, and Helen, with whom he shared an admiration for Ruskin and his teachings of art, literature, music, and nature.²⁰⁰

In December 1875 he was ordained Deacon in Gloucester Cathedral by the Bishop of Gloucester and Bristol, and in the following January 1876, on Hill's recommendation to Samuel Barnett (1844-1913), who was a clergyman and social reformer in Bristol, Rawnsley became Curate at the Clifton College Mission in Bristol.²⁰¹ The idea of creating a mission centre for the underprivileged people in Bristol had originated from Thring's pioneering project in the east end of London, and ironically, Rawnsley's first 'church', was a converted carpenter's workshop on the upper floor of a building on Newfoundland Road.²⁰² The mission encompassed a variety of activities, from the Sunday morning services, mothers meetings, cooking/reading classes to playing chess, draughts, dominoes, social gatherings and providing a workmen club.²⁰³ Notably, Rawnsley provided activities for the seventeen to twenty-year old boys who could be high-spirited, and under his wing, he had engaged with organising football matches on Saturday afternoons, and walks in the countryside on Sunday afternoons, 'to keep them out of mischief'.²⁰⁴ One of Rawnsley's first campaigns concerned the demolition of the fourteenth-century St. Werburgh's Church and Tower to create space for new developments.²⁰⁵ Rawnsley, successfully campaigned to the authorities to save the building, and the authorities

²⁰⁰ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 30.

²⁰¹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 31. & Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 73. & S. Koven, 'Barnett, Samuel Augustus (1844-1913)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2008). Available online: <https://doi.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/30612> [Accessed 31/1/2025], 1.

²⁰² W. O. Moberly, *The History of Saint Agnes Parish* (Bristol: J. W. Arrowsmith, 1890), 1-3.

²⁰³ Moberly, *The History of Saint Agnes Parish*, 3-4.

²⁰⁴ *ibid*, 4.

²⁰⁵ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 73.

reluctantly agreed to the building being ‘taken down stone-by-stone’ and reassembled elsewhere in the district.²⁰⁶ Rawnsley would reflect upon his experiences and the local history of Bristol within his ‘first volume of verse’, *A Book of Bristol Sonnets* published in 1877.²⁰⁷ Rawnsley had become disillusioned by the unrefined surroundings and living conditions of the underprivileged people of Bristol and confessed to William Moberly, that he was ‘crippled by the want of noble surroundings’.²⁰⁸ And when his cousin, Edward Rawnsley offered him the parish of ‘Wray on Windemere’, during Autumn of 1877, he gladly accepted it and promptly proposed marriage to Edith Fletcher.²⁰⁹ Events progressed swiftly from there, and on the 23 December in 1877, Rawnsley was ordained in Carlisle Cathedral, and just a month later on 29 January 1878, he married Edith Fletcher at Brathray.²¹⁰ The ceremony was officiated by his father, Robert Drummond, and his godfather, Edward Thring and was celebrated by family and friends, including his good friend, Lewis Nettleship from Uppingham and Balliol.²¹¹

The Rawnsleys settled into married life and found comfort in their small country parish in Wray, enjoying the companionship of John Ruskin, who lived nearby at Brantwood, on the eastern shore of Coniston Water.²¹² In the following years, the Rawnsleys embraced a vibrant social and cultural life in the Lake District, becoming well-established within the community. They had worked on numerous

²⁰⁶ H. D. Rawnsley, *A Book of Bristol Sonnets* (London: Hamilton, Adams & Co, 1877), 24-25.

²⁰⁷ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 35.

²⁰⁸ Moberly, *The History of Saint Agnes Parish*, 5.

²⁰⁹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 37-38, 40.

²¹⁰ *ibid*, 37-38, 40.

²¹¹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 40. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 79.

²¹² Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 75.

projects together, from selecting a monument for the Wordsworth Society to organising the grand annual Harvest Festival.²¹³ Interestingly, they enjoyed travels abroad, including trips to the Holy Land and Egypt, visiting the pyramids on camel back through to journeying throughout Europe.²¹⁴ Fundamentally, Rawnsley was the Vice-President and a regular lecturer at the local 'Literary and Scientific' Society depicting talks on 'The Sonnets of Charles Tennyson Turner' and 'The Teachings of John Ruskin', and on 14 December 1880, Noel was born at Wray Vicarage, and would be the only child of Rawnsley and Edith's.²¹⁵ Notably, during the winter months of 1881, Rawnsley contributed to a series of lectures at Ambleside, and the topics that he delivered concentrated on social conscience with focus on 'air and health', and 'cleanliness and health'.²¹⁶

Significantly, during July 1882, Rawnsley first met the prosperous Potter family from London, who were taking their annual three-and-half month holiday at Wray Castle, Lake Windemere and instantaneously formed life-long friendships with Rupert Potter (1832-1914) and Beatrix Potter (1866-1943).²¹⁷ Rupert Potter was captivated by Rawnsley, and they both shared their mutual and knowledgeable interests in Lakeland literature, landscapes, religion, politics, photography and

²¹³ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 75. & Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 43-44.

²¹⁴ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 75. & Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 43-46.

²¹⁵ Allen. & Rawnsley, *Hardwicke Drummond Rawnsley: An Extraordinary Life 1851-1920*, 44, 50.

²¹⁶ *ibid*, 44.

²¹⁷ M. Lane, *The Tale of Beatrix Potter* (London: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd, 1946), 44-45. & L. Linder, *The Journal of Beatrix Potter **from 1881 to 1897** Transcribed from her code writings by Leslie Linder* (London: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd, 1966), 19-23. & J Taylor. et al, *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World* (London: Frederick Warne & Co. Ltd, 1987), 14-15.

collections of Lakeland literary autographs.²¹⁸ Likewise, when Rawnsley first met the young sixteen-year-old Beatrix Potter, he instinctively appreciated and held admiration for her 'artistic talent', and that they shared mutual interests in natural history, archaeology, and geology.²¹⁹ Interestingly, this was a momentous period in Rawnsley's life, as he was already campaigning and fighting to 'preserve natural beauty of the Lake District' from the infiltrations of industrialisation and 'tourism', and he passionately emphasised his beliefs to Beatrix Potter, of the significance of conservation and preservation of the Lake District.²²⁰ The significance of Rawnsley's life-long relationship with the Potter family would arguably add to his wider social network, and his influence of conservation and preservation of the Lake District was extended to the rest of the country.²²¹

Notably, over the next ten years, Rawnsley's extra-curricular activities alongside his parish duties would lead him to passionately and fervently advocating and supporting many campaigns against industrialisation, through activism and environmentalism. By early 1883, Rawnsley was already depicted as the 'champion and defender' of Lakeland and had already established the Lake District Defence Society, with the support from the Commons Preservation Society and Kyrle Society, and the committee members included John Ruskin, Duke of Westminster, Alfred,

²¹⁸ Lane, *The Tale of Beatrix Potter*, 44-45. & Taylor. et al, *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World*, 14-15. & L. Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius* (London: Penguin Group, 2008), 52-53.

²¹⁹ Taylor. et al, *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World*, 14-15. & Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius*, 52-53, 170.

²²⁰ Lane, *The Tale of Beatrix Potter*, 45. & Taylor. et al, *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World*, 15.

²²¹ Taylor. et al, *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World*, 14-15. & Lear, *Beatrix Potter: The extraordinary life of a Victorian genius*, 175.

Lord Tennyson and Robert Browning.²²² Rawnsley, travelled up and down the country, passionately and fervently, delivering talks, sermons and being guest speaker at many events, publicising the conservation and preservation of the Lake District.²²³ Notably, The Lake District Defence Society attracted attention from all over Britain and overseas, including America, which intertwined local and national apprehensions to preserve the landscape and vulnerable buildings, encapsulating a 'growing national movement'.²²⁴ Additionally, in July 1883, Rawnsley had accepted the larger Parish of St. Kentigern's, Crosthwaite and perpetually, continued with his extra-curricular activities which included being involved in every committee and society, to inhibiting pollution in rivers, safeguarding of footpaths and access to common land, establishing a parish magazine, arranging bonfires to celebrate Queen Victoria's Golden Jubilee in 1887, depicted at focal points throughout England.²²⁵ Moreover, in response to the 'agricultural depression' caused by industrialisation and 'seasonal' tourism within the Lake District, Rawnsley and his wife established the Keswick School of Industrial Arts supported by the instigators of the Arts and Craft Movement, William Morris and Walter Crane.²²⁶ The school provided classes in metalwork and woodwork and would ultimately excel in the 'design and manufacture of domestic art metalwork' in copper, pewter, silver, stainless steel and brass.²²⁷ In 1889, Rawnsley became a County Councillor in

²²² Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 49, 52. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 87. & Taylor. et al., *Beatrix Potter 1866-1943: The Artist and Her World*, 173.

²²³ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 79.

²²⁴ *ibid*, 77.

²²⁵ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 79. & Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 59.

²²⁶ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 66-68. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 88-89.

²²⁷ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 66. & Murphy, *Founders of the National Trust*, 89.

Keswick to the dismay of Hill, who did not agree with intervening in local politics and unlike Hill, he saw an opportunity to influence and officiate his authority over local issues. And, as Chairman of the Transport and Education Committee, instantaneously, opposed to the widening of roads around the Lakes, and encouraged secondary school education for girls.²²⁸ In November 1893, in recognition of Rawnsley's advocacy to the broader community and the diocese, he was officiated as 'Honorary Canon' of Carlisle Cathedral.²²⁹

The early influences on Canon Rawnsley were rooted in family, faith, education, and a profound love for nature and art which shaped a life dedicated to cultural preservation and environmental activism. His literary works, blending natural history, travel, and poetic reflection, not only celebrated the beauty of Lakeland but also served as powerful tools for advocacy. He was inspired by Edward Thring, John Ruskin, and the spiritual presence of God in nature, as well as the poetic vision of Wordsworth. Rawnsley's writings and campaigns vibrated far beyond Britain which help lay the foundation for modern conservation movements both at home and abroad.

²²⁸ Clayton. et al, *The Three Founders of the National Trust: Octavia Hill, Robert Hunter and Hardwicke Rawnsley*, 82.

²²⁹ Rawnsley, *Canon Rawnsley: An Account of his Life*, 108-109.

Conclusion

This thesis has clearly demonstrated how the early influences on the three founders of the National Trust, Sir Robert Hunter, Miss Octavia Hill, and Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley were deeply rooted in the social, cultural, and political fabric of the nineteenth-century. While the literature consulted explores the formation of the National Trust in considerable detail, this study has placed particular emphasis on the personal influences and ideologies that shaped each founder's path toward conservation and preservation. Their lives were intertwined through shared commitments to socialist activism, philanthropy, religion, literature, environmentalism, and heritage conservation. Collectively, they had responded to the accelerating pressures of industrial revolution, urbanisation, and the dislocation of rural populations. Fundamentally, their passion for open spaces, fresh air, and accessible public land was not simply nostalgic, but a visionary effort to safeguard nature and heritage for public benefit and future generations.

Chapter One examined the formative years and professional achievements of Sir Robert Hunter. His early life was shaped by a strong family tradition of public service, particularly through the example of his father, Robert Lachlan Hunter. Furthermore, influences from key figures such as Joshua Fitch and Leonard Seeley further shaped his legal and moral outlook. His pioneering work with the Commons Preservation Society and his award-winning essay on the preservation of open spaces marked the beginning of a legal career defined by an unwavering dedication to public good. As Solicitor to the General Post Office, his efforts saved millions in public funds and reformed key aspects of the postal system. His drafting of over fifty

Public General Acts, including the Conveyance of Mails Act, underscored his legislative influence. These achievements, culminating in his knighthood in 1894, exemplify the depth and breadth of his civic commitment, making him a crucial legal and strategic architect of the National Trust. Arguably, Hunter appears to be the least celebrated among the co-founders of the National Trust, despite serving as its first Chairman and his contributions have often been overshadowed. And, unlike Octavia Hill and Canon Rawnsley, Hunter had not been commemorated to the same extent, perhaps due to his quiet, behind-the-scenes role, which, though vital, did not attract the same public recognition.

Chapter Two turned to Octavia Hill, whose life was shaped by her formative experiences with poverty and social inequality. She received moral guidance from her mentors including John Ruskin and Frederick Denison Maurice, which fundamentally influenced her a lifelong devotion to improving housing in urban London. Her work in housing reform, education, and the preservation of green spaces was informed by a deep belief in the spiritual and physical well-being that nature could offer, particularly to the urban poor. Hill's character was shaped as much by hardship as by opportunity, and her unique position as a woman navigating the intersecting spheres of social work, faith, and activism made her a pioneering figure in the conservation movement and one of the Trust's most celebrated founders. Hill's pioneering role as a woman in the spheres of social work and conservation highlighted both the opportunities and contradictions of her time, particularly in her opposition to women's suffrage despite advocating for women's involvement in social reform. Her enduring influence is evident in the many institutions she helped shape, several of which remain active today.

Chapter Three explored the life and influence of Canon Hardwicke Rawnsley, a figure whose passion for nature, education, and cultural preservation was grounded in family, faith, and the inspiration of Romanticism, particularly through Wordsworth and Ruskin. Rawnsley's activism in the Lake District brought national attention to the importance of environmental conservation, while his prolific writings, that ranged from poetry and essays to travel and cultural commentary, which fundamentally, helped build public awareness and support for preservation efforts. His energetic and charismatic personality inspired many followers, and his campaigns reached international audiences, particularly in America. Rawnsley's global vision for conservation contributed to a philosophical foundation that echoes with contemporary environmental movements.

In uniting their diverse but complementary strengths, Sir Robert Hunter, the 'Legal Mastermind', Miss Octavia Hill, the 'Philanthropist and Social Reformer', and Canon Rawnsley, the 'Volcano Champion', the founders of the National Trust established a powerful alliance. Their collective vision was not merely reactive to the transformations of their time, but proactively shaped a model for preserving spaces of beauty, history, and community value. The National Trust was, and remains, a testament to their belief that access to nature and heritage is a right to be protected, not a privilege to be possessed.

This thesis has shown that the formation of the National Trust was not a singular moment of institutional creation, but the culmination of decades of personal conviction, collaborative vision, and progressive thinking. The legacy of Hunter, Hill, and Rawnsley endures not only in the properties and landscapes protected under the Trust's care but also in the continuing relevance of their ideals in the face of

today's environmental and social challenges. Their efforts serve as a reminder that visionary change often begins with individuals willing to act on deeply held values in pursuit of the common good.

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