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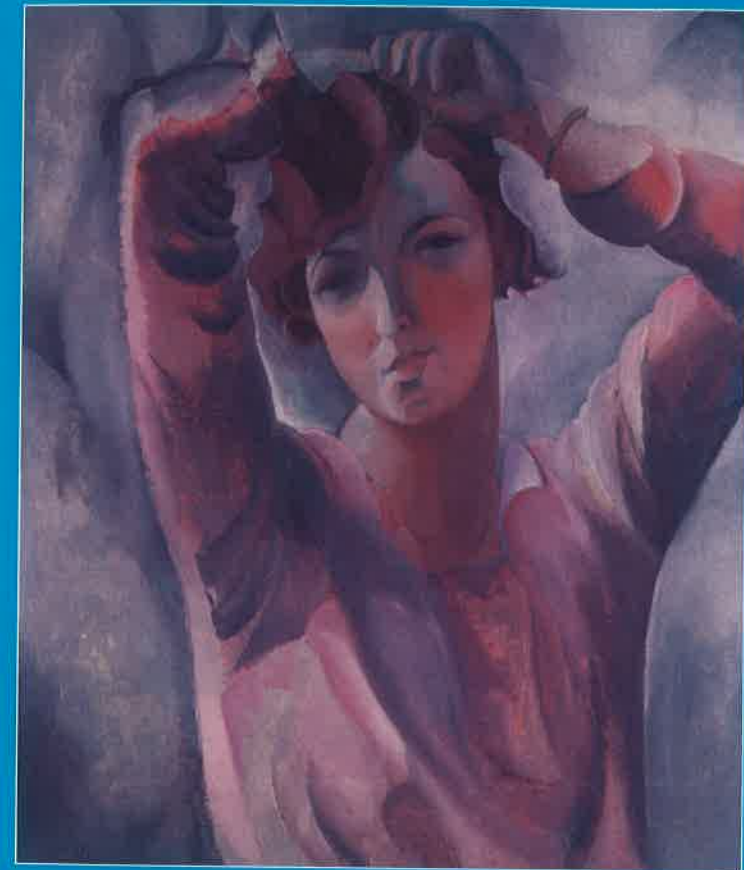
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# FRIENDS NEWS

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Self Portrait Paule Vézelay c.1927-1929

NEWSLETTER FOR THE  
FRIENDS OF THE LAING ART GALLERY

# The Wreck at South Shields by L.S. Lowry

Valerie Hamill *adopts* a Lowry

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Wreck at South Shields 1961 by LS Lowry

Lowry, one of Britain's most popular artists of the twentieth century, is synonymous with the industrial North West of England, where he grew up and lived all his life. He was, however, a frequent visitor to the North East, especially from 1960 until his death in 1976. I have been an admirer of Lowry's work all my life and this article considers Lowry in the North East and describes how I came to *adopt* one of his drawings from the collection at The Lowry, Salford.

Most visitors to the Laing will have seen his painting **Old Chapel, Newcastle upon Tyne** (1965) which hangs in the Gallery café. This is a portrayal of the former Sailors Bethel which still stands on Horatio Street, near City Road. Lowry was known to be interested in buildings which had fallen into disuse

so perhaps the fact the chapel had been empty since 1949 attracted his attention, its role in the heyday of Newcastle as a port long gone.

Anyone who visited the landmark exhibition **Lowry and the painting of modern life** at Tate Britain in 2013 will remember the last room in the exhibition. This brought together the large industrial landscapes he

Painted in the 1950s. These were imaginary panoramas, kaleidoscopes of images of industry and industrial towns, which Lowry termed *composite*.

A decade later, in the sixties, what seemed to attract him to Northumberland and Durham was the North Sea, the coastal landscapes, and the shipping. His base for the area was the then Seaburn Hotel looking out over the promenade at Sunderland. The industrial river is shown in two works, **Dockside, Sunderland** (1962) and **River Wear at Sunderland** (1961), both now in the collection of Sunderland Museum and Winter Garden.

He seemed to have an especial fascination for shipping and the sea, with the entrance to harbours holding

particular interest. He liked the Tyne and is quoted as saying *I'm particularly fond of watching large ships coming into harbour, or being brought down a river by tugs. I love the Tyne for that reason.* A favourite vantage point was the car-park looking onto what is now known as Littlehaven Beach, between South Shields pier and the Groyne lighthouse. The usually calm entrance to the river could also be hazardous and during a storm in January 1963 the Lebanese cargo vessel *Adelfotis II* ran aground on the beach. This shipwreck has passed into history as the last great shipwreck on this part of the coast. It was the last time a shore based breeches buoy was used to rescue the crew. All were saved and a memorable Tyne Tees Television newsreel film records the actual rescue. The ship was unable to be refloated and for a few months remained stranded on the beach until the salvage operation was completed. It became a local visitor attraction. I remember going to see the beached wreck and a family photo which recorded the event recently came to light when sorting some family papers.

Lowry had also gone to see the wreck and I had seen his drawing of the ship stranded on the shore some years ago at the Lowry, Salford. It had always a special significance for me because of this memory of going as a family to

see the wreck. I discovered that the gallery had an *Adopt a Lowry* scheme to help raise funds to preserve, restore and display the Lowry collection. This is how I came to adopt the **Wreck at South Shields 1961** (Lowry made a mistake with the year) which brought it out from the stores and back on display. I had a very interesting escorted tour of the Lowry archives and stores. The Curator was extremely interested in my reasons for selecting this work and last February an unveiling of the work was held at the Gallery, a copy of my photo displayed on the wall next to it explaining my sponsorship. The press photo of the unveiling even made the *Shields Gazette*. The work is still on display in the Gallery and the curatorial staff say that it is a point of interest to visitors when they see my photo, giving context to Lowry's depiction of this event which still lives on in the memories of the folks of Shields. Editorial note. Don't miss the chance to see Lowry's self-portrait in the exhibition in Gallery C and the Lowry exhibition at South Shields – see Art exhibitions in the North East.



Family photo, South Shields 1963

Valerie Hamill