



SAMPLE DEVELOPMENTAL EDITORIAL REPORT

THE FELL ROAD

A fictional narrative-non-fiction manuscript

MANUSCRIPT LENGTH	Approximately 72,000 words
SERVICE ILLUSTRATED	Developmental Editorial Report
PREPARED BY	Stonecurrent Press Editorial Services

FICTIONAL SAMPLE · NO CLIENT MATERIAL

Important Note

This sample has been created solely to illustrate the character and depth of a Stonecurrent Press developmental editorial report. The manuscript, author and editorial circumstances are fictional. It does not reproduce or draw upon confidential client material.

This is an abbreviated example. A commissioned report would respond to the complete manuscript and would usually contain more detailed chapter-by-chapter observations.

1. EDITORIAL BRIEF

The Fell Road is presented as a work of narrative non-fiction combining family history, landscape writing and personal memoir.

The manuscript follows its narrator's return to a remote Cumbrian valley after the death of his father. His attempt to restore the family farmhouse leads him into an examination of the land, the history of the surrounding community and the difficult relationship between father and son.

The author has asked for an assessment of:

- the manuscript's central purpose;
- its overall structure and pace;
- the balance between memoir and local history;
- the likely reader;
- sections that should be expanded, reduced or removed;
- the work required before submission or independent publication.

This report addresses argument, structure, purpose, reader expectations and omissions. It is not a proofread or technical copy-edit.

2. OVERALL EDITORIAL JUDGEMENT

The manuscript contains the material for a strong and distinctive book, but it has not yet decided what kind of book it intends to be.

Its most effective passages concern the father, the farmhouse and the narrator's changing understanding of inheritance. These sections possess emotional weight because the author generally resists explaining what the reader should feel. Objects, remembered conversations and physical work carry the meaning.

The weaker sections move away from this central relationship and become a broad history of the valley. Much of that history is interesting, but interest alone is insufficient. At present, the historical material sometimes interrupts the book rather than deepening it.

The principal editorial task is therefore one of selection. The author does not need substantially more material. He needs a firmer governing purpose against which every chapter can be tested.

The manuscript should become a book about what it means to inherit a place from someone with whom the narrator had an unresolved relationship. The history of the valley belongs in the book where it places that inheritance within a longer human story. It should not become a parallel book competing with the memoir.

This distinction matters. If the manuscript continues to give equal weight to family memoir, agricultural history, local biography and landscape description, it will remain diffuse. If the author establishes inheritance as its organising question, much of the existing material will acquire a clearer function.

3. WHAT THE MANUSCRIPT IS TRYING TO BECOME

The manuscript appears to be working towards the following central question:

What do we inherit from the people and places that formed us, particularly when that inheritance includes silence, resentment and unfinished business?

This question is stronger than the more general subjects of grief, rural change or belonging. Those subjects remain important, but they should serve the central enquiry.

The title, *The Fell Road*, supports this interpretation. The road is both a physical route into the valley and the path by which property, habits, loyalties and grievances pass between generations. The manuscript does not need to state this symbolism directly. Its structure can allow the connection to emerge.

The book's most convincing identity would be:

A work of narrative non-fiction in which the restoration of a Cumbrian farmhouse becomes the means of examining a difficult inheritance between father and son.

That description gives the author a practical editorial test. Each substantial section should do at least one of the following:

- develop the relationship between the narrator and his father;
- alter the narrator's understanding of what he has inherited;
- show how the house or land preserves evidence that the family has not articulated;
- place the family story within a relevant history of the valley;
- move the physical restoration of the farmhouse forwards.

Material that does none of these things should be questioned, however well written it may be.

4. STRUCTURE

The present manuscript contains fourteen chapters arranged in broadly chronological order. This gives the reader a clear sequence, but chronology alone does not create narrative movement.

The opening three chapters establish the father's death, the return to Cumbria and the condition of the farmhouse. They contain the book's natural beginning. Chapters Four to Seven then move heavily into local history, delaying the development of the narrator's personal story. The memoir returns in Chapter Eight, but by then the reader has spent a considerable period away from the central tension.

A stronger structure would interweave three strands:

1. The restoration

The physical work provides an external narrative. Floors are lifted, walls opened and objects discovered. Decisions have consequences, and the reader can measure progress.

2. The father

Memories and documentary evidence gradually complicate the narrator's original judgement of him. The father should not be explained too early.

3. The valley

Historical material should enter when the house, land or family story creates a reason for it. History then becomes evidence rather than background information.

The manuscript should not alternate these strands mechanically. Their proportions will vary. The important point is that each chapter should advance the book's central enquiry.

Suggested structural change

The material currently in Chapters Four, Five and Six should be redistributed across the manuscript. These chapters contain approximately 14,000 consecutive words of local history. That length changes the reader's understanding of the book and weakens the tension established by the opening.

The strongest historical episodes concern:

- the original construction of the farmhouse;
- the enclosure and division of the surrounding land;
- the disappearance of a neighbouring settlement;
- the father's involvement in opposing the sale of common grazing rights.

These subjects directly affect the inheritance narrative and should remain.

The extended accounts of three nineteenth-century landowners are less closely connected. They could be substantially reduced or reserved for a separate essay.

5. OPENING

The opening scene begins with the narrator entering the farmhouse after his father's funeral. This is the correct point of entry.

The chapter is less effective when it pauses to explain the complete history of the property before the reader has understood why the narrator's return matters. The present opening supplies information before it creates sufficient curiosity.

The first chapter should remain close to the house and the immediate aftermath of the death. The reader needs to encounter the unresolved relationship before receiving the broader history.

The discovery of the father's labelled tool drawer is particularly effective. Each tool has been cleaned, wrapped and recorded, while personal papers elsewhere in the house have been left in disorder. This concrete contradiction tells us more about the father than the following two pages of explanation.

Recommendation: end the first chapter with the tool drawer and move the explanatory assessment of the father to a later point. Let the reader begin forming a judgement before the narrator supplies one.

6. THE NARRATOR AND THE FATHER

The narrator's anger is understandable, but the manuscript occasionally presents its interpretation of the father as settled fact.

A reader does not need the father to be redeemed. The book will, however, be stronger if it permits uncertainty.

Several moments already complicate the narrator's view:

- the father secretly pays a neighbour's rent;
- he preserves the narrator's school essays while rarely praising his writing;
- he refuses to discuss the death of his own brother;
- he repairs part of the house intended for the narrator, despite insisting that the narrator will never return.

These details suggest a man whose emotional life was expressed indirectly. The manuscript should investigate that possibility without converting it into a simple explanation.

The danger is an overly neat conclusion in which the narrator discovers that his father loved him after all. The existing material supports something less comfortable and more

credible: the father may have loved him, resented him, envied his departure and prepared for his return at the same time.

The book should preserve those contradictions.

7. USE OF HISTORICAL MATERIAL

The author's research is substantial and often absorbing. The problem is not the quality of the research but its editorial function.

Research should answer a question raised by the narrative. It should not appear merely because the author has undertaken it.

For example, the history of common grazing rights becomes important when the narrator discovers that his father spent twelve years disputing a boundary change. That history changes our understanding of the father and explains why the land carried a significance the narrator had previously dismissed.

By contrast, the detailed account of the valley's eighteenth-century coaching inns does not materially affect the house, family or central argument. It reads as the beginning of another book.

Recommendation: retain historical material that changes the meaning of the narrator's inheritance. Reduce material that provides context without consequence.

The author should also distinguish more clearly between documented fact, family recollection and personal inference. In several places these forms of evidence merge within the same paragraph.

A simple discipline would help:

- identify the documentary source where a factual claim matters;
- attribute family stories to the person who told them;
- signal openly when the narrator is drawing a conclusion that cannot be proved.

This would strengthen the manuscript's authority without burdening the prose with unnecessary academic apparatus.

8. READER AND POSITIONING

The likely reader is interested in serious memoir, family relationships, rural life, place and the persistence of the past within ordinary lives.

The book should not be positioned primarily as a local history. That description would understate its emotional and narrative scope while creating expectations the manuscript does not consistently fulfil.

Nor should it be marketed simply as a grief memoir. The father's death begins the narrative, but the book's deeper subject is inheritance.

The manuscript may appeal to readers of literary memoir and place-based narrative non-fiction. Its Cumbrian setting is a strength, provided the landscape remains specific and consequential rather than becoming a sequence of scenic descriptions.

The author should write first for the intelligent general reader. Specialist knowledge of Cumbria, farming or local history should not be assumed.

9. IMPORTANT OMISSIONS

The manuscript requires fuller treatment in four areas.

The narrator's decision to leave

The departure from Cumbria is repeatedly mentioned but never presented as a developed episode. The reader needs to understand what was said, what remained unsaid and what the narrator believed he was escaping.

The mother's position

The mother is present in the family chronology but largely absent from the emotional structure of the book. Her view of the father may challenge both the narrator's original anger and his later reassessment.

The economic reality of inheritance

The farmhouse is treated principally as an emotional burden. It is also property with a financial value, repair costs and possible tax implications. The narrator's ability to retain it should not be left vague. Practical reality will make the emotional dilemma more convincing.

The decision at the end

The current final chapter ends when the restoration is completed. Completion of the building work does not necessarily complete the book. The reader needs to know what decision the narrator makes about the house and what that decision costs him.

10. CHAPTER-LEVEL EXAMPLES

Chapter Two: The Inventory

The list of objects left in the house is too long in its present form. Select items that reveal character or alter the narrator's understanding. A complete inventory reduces the force of the significant discoveries.

Chapter Five: The Lost Hamlet

Retain the account of the abandoned settlement, but connect it more directly to the father's opposition to modern development. Reduce the general archaeological history.

Chapter Nine: The Letter

This is one of the manuscript's strongest chapters. The letter written by the father but never sent changes the reader's interpretation without resolving the relationship. Resist adding further explanation after the letter. The chapter should end closer to the document itself.

Chapter Twelve: Winter Work

The restoration detail becomes technically dense. Retain the decisions that involve risk, money or disagreement. Condense descriptions of routine work unless the physical process carries emotional or narrative importance.

Final chapter: The Gate

The current ending describes the completed house and the view across the fell. It is visually clear but avoids the decision the manuscript has prepared the reader to expect. The ending should turn on whether the narrator stays, sells or establishes another relationship with the property.

11. PRIORITIES FOR REVISION

First priority: define the governing purpose

Revise with inheritance as the book's central enquiry. Do not begin by rewriting individual sentences.

Second priority: rebuild the structure

Redistribute the long historical sequence and restore continuity to the personal narrative.

Third priority: preserve uncertainty around the father

Remove explanations that settle questions the evidence leaves open.

Fourth priority: address the missing material

Develop the narrator's departure, the mother's position, the economics of the inheritance and the final decision.

Fifth priority: reduce research that lacks narrative consequence

The manuscript will benefit from becoming shorter if the removed material is not serving the book's purpose.

Only after these structural decisions should the author undertake a detailed line edit or commission a copy-edit.

12. CONCLUSION

The Fell Road does not require reinvention. Its strongest book is already present within the manuscript, but it is competing with a broader and less selective account of the valley.

The author's principal task is to decide what every part of the manuscript is for.

A successful revision would retain the particularity of the Cumbrian setting while placing the unresolved relationship between father, son and property at the centre of the book. The house should remain more than a setting: it is the physical evidence through which the narrator tests what he believed about his father and what he is prepared to carry forwards.

The manuscript is not yet ready for submission or publication. It could become ready after a substantial structural revision followed by a separate line-level editorial stage.

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