

# At Hawkshead

by [Carol Gilbertson](#) in the [April 6, 2010](#) issue

*Wee Agnes Sawrey widdow & Dorothy Tyson Spinster do severally make oath yt ye Corps of Margaret Tyson of Gryzedale in the Parish above s'd beeing buryed the first of Aprill 1696 was not put in wrapt wound up or buryed in any shirt sheet shift or shroud mad or mingled with Flax Hemp or any Coffin lined wth cloth or any materiall but what is made of sheep wooll only according to a Late Act of Parliamt made for Burying in Woollen. In witness herof wee the saide Agnes Sawrey & Dorothy Tyson have sett our Hands & Seals. Aprilis, Ano Di 1696.*

—Parish document in St. Michael and All Angels Church,  
Hawkshead, Cumbria

In Norway when you die,  
they clothe you in a gown  
of purest white. Egyptians  
sucked out organs, layered  
presoaked linen strips  
around each desiccated limb.  
It matters what you wrap a body in.

I am one of the few that walk  
the footpaths on the fell today  
who put on wool against the sharp October air.  
The scattered sheep are unimpressed.  
Warming these hills with active tongues,  
they are unaware that Parliament,  
to buoy the trade, once ruled  
that only wool could be the spun  
and woven garment of the dead.

Agnes and Dorothy held to the law,  
picking softest weave of shift  
or sheet or shroud to lay against

the body of their Margaret—  
like the Marys in the story,  
who laid his body out,  
washed and oiled, and put,  
wrapt, wound up, and buryèd  
each limb in swaddling clothes  
to match the ones his little body  
wore in Bethlehem—the cloth  
he wore to meet with life  
and fight with death—  
he who newborn slept  
among the shepherds  
and their silent, woolly sheep.