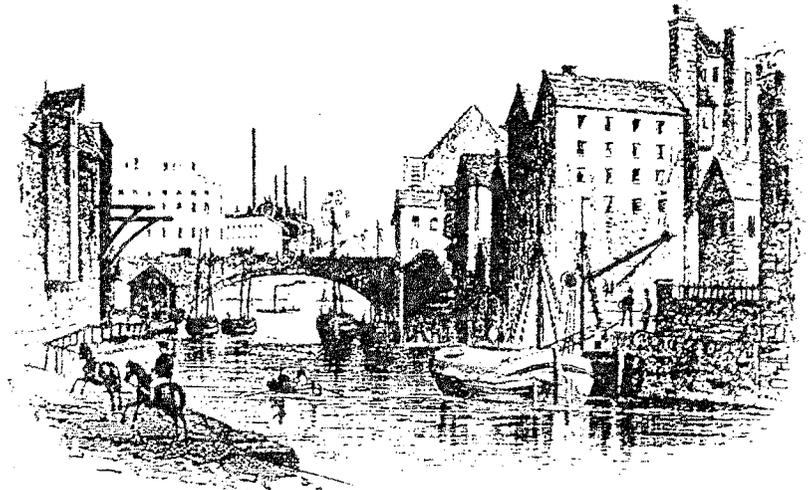


The Gaskell Society



The River Irwell & Albert Bridge, Manchester

NEWSLETTER

If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs Joan Leach, Far Yew Tree House, Over Tabley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0HN (Tel: 0565 634668)

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AUGUST 1991

NO. 12

EDITOR'S LETTER

'A trouble shared is a trouble halved', so it is said, but surely it should follow that a pleasure shared is a pleasure doubled?

In the last six months members of our Society have shared several most enjoyable and instructive events which usually end with my regretting that more members were not able to join us in person. We hope you are able to share them through the pages of our publications.

Some literary societies exist by and for their journals and publications, and as 'reading maketh a full man' and members are all readers that is, perhaps, as it should be, but there is much pleasure in gathering together socially to share our interests and exchange ideas.

The AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies which was held in Birmingham in April enabled this exchange and we acted as hosts with The Brontë Society, taking our 1990 Ambleside Weekend as our theme and residential conference organisation in general. The Chairman of The Brontë Society, who is also a member of our Society, rounded off a full programme with a talk about Haworth and the tourist, which might well have been entitled 'A literary shrine for the masses'. You will have heard, no doubt, about the problems this is causing for The Brontë Society and we hope they will be able to resolve them.

I did wonder whether we could relieve some of the pressure by developing Knutsford's literary potential. Heathwaite, the house in which Elizabeth Stevenson grew up, is for sale and we wondered if some benefactor might buy it for us, or even if we should start a trust to acquire it, but it is beyond our means. All we can hope for, I think, is that the new owners will be Gaskell fans, as Mr & Mrs Roberts have been, kindly allowing us to see the charming garden with its wonderful Himalayan cedar which must have been there in Elizabeth's day.

Finance prevents us from other less ambitious ventures, too. We had hoped to follow up our Sylvia's Lovers and Others Conference with a published report, but have abandoned the plan, mainly because of cost. You will be able to read some of the talks in future Journals and newsletters.

Another project for the future is publication of Gaskell Letters as a supplement to the 1966 edition of The Letters of Mrs Gaskell edited by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard (M.U.P.), currently our Chairman and President respectively. (If you find copies of this for sale, please let us know as they are scarce and in demand).

We have discussed, in committee, raising annual subscriptions but this might deter would-be members which we would regret; instead we feel it would be advisable to start a PUBLICATIONS FUND. We invite members to contribute to this, perhaps when paying annual dues.

Our conference at Scarborough was much enjoyed and we learnt more about organising such events. Leading up to the weekend, I had a few sleepless nights and my husband wondered if I would be so rash as to take on anything like it again; I told him I would let him know after it was over!

Well, the answer was 'Yes', as members were so enthusiastic as to start making requests, like Oliver Twist, for more of the same. We are giving advance notice that EDINBURGH JULY 1993 is under consideration (see item p.5).

Our next event will be the AGM IN KNUTSFORD ON 28TH SEPTEMBER and we hope to see many of you then.

JOAN LEACH

AGM WEEKEND
28th-29th September in Knutsford

Our venue will be KNUTSFORD CIVIC CENTRE, close to the railway station and easily accessible.

Our speaker is Professor Philip Yarrow on Mrs Gaskell and France. This promises to be a most interesting talk, with slides.

An outside caterer will provide a buffet lunch - 12 noon for 12.30. Cost £7.50 to include a glass of wine.

After lunch it is hoped that we may pay a visit to The Sessions House, built 1819, and just across the road. This depends on the court sittings so cannot be confirmed. If we go it will be about 1.45 to 2.15, allowing the AGM to commence at 2.30 pm.

SUNDAY 29TH SEPTEMBER

We will have an outing to Alderley Edge and vicinity. You may remember in Libbie Marsh's Three Eras, Mr Slater saying about a day out: "Why what an old fashioned chap thou be'st. Thy grandad afore thee went to Dunham; but then thou wert always a slow coach. I'm off to Alderley, me and my missus."

Getting to Dunham was cheap via the Bridgewater Canal, but the railway had made Alderley Edge accessible, much to the displeasure of the Stanley family who owned the land; however the Cottontots were not to be deterred and we shall follow their footsteps. It is a charming area with a story to tell. We hope you will join us.

ERRATA

I take it so much for granted that items about Gaskell Letters, in the newsletters, are contributed by our Chairman, Professor John Chapple, that I neglected to append his name to contributions on two occasions. Perhaps you will amend your copies?

NL 10 'An Unpublished Gaskell Letter' p.4-8 by J A V Chapple

NL 11 'Elizabeth Gaskell's Amanuensis', also by J A V Chapple, and the letters to LUDLOW were reproduced by permission of the Syndics of Cambridge University Library.

JOAN LEACH

MANSFIELD PARK AND WIVES AND DAUGHTERS

by Dorothy F Yarrow

Although the influence of Jane Austen on Wives and Daughters has been detected (and, in particular, the resemblance between Mr & Mrs Bennet and Dr & Mrs Gibson pointed out)*, Mrs Gaskell's debt to Mansfield Park seems to have escaped notice.

The relationship between Edmund Bertram and Fanny Price is remarkably like that between Roger Hamley and Molly Gibson. Edmund and Roger are the mentors and consolers of Fanny and Molly respectively. Both Fanny and Molly have high moral principles, higher principles than those about them. In Molly's case, this is understandable: her principles are those of her father's, the wise, beneficent, affectionate and dearly-loved Dr Gibson. The virtue of Fanny, the daughter of slovenly parents, is more surprising; but may, perhaps, owe something to the respected, though awe-inspiring, Sir Thomas Bertram. Edmund and Roger are, alike, for a time, fascinated by lively and attractive women with looser principles - Miss Crawford and Cynthia, respectively, rather similar characters. Both realise in the end that the girls they have been brought up with or long known are their real mates.

Fanny and Molly are both lonely girls, isolated within the family, and attached to one man in the family - Fanny to William, and Molly to her father. Both have a bugbear to put up with, in the shape of an older, selfish, officious, and hypocritical woman: Mrs Norris and Mrs Gibson.

The basic plot of the two novels is the same. Edmund marries Fanny, and Roger Molly; and in both cases, the young man's father overcomes his original disapproval of the unequal match. There are, of course, differences: Roger and Molly are not related, as Fanny and Edmund are; Molly's home is not squalid like Fanny's in Portsmouth; and Molly, unlike Fanny, has no brother - though Cynthia, her dearly loved sister and rival, might

be considered to combine the roles of both William and Miss Crawford.

Wives and Daughters is a complex novel, bringing together elements from its author's experience - Knutsford, contacts with France, her own family life (her father's remarriage and the life of her distant relative, Charles Darwin); but it is also coloured by her reading of the works of her great forerunner, particularly Pride and Prejudice and Mansfield Park.

*See, for instance, A B Hopkins, Elizabeth Gaskell. Her Life and Work, 1952, pp 278-79, 283; and Edgar Wright, Mrs Gaskell. The Basis for Reassessment, 1965, pp 215-16

EDINBURGH 1993

Although this is a long way ahead we need to know NOW what support this plan would receive, and our overseas members, especially, have to plan well ahead; also reservations must be made. Letting us know that you like the idea will not commit you in any way.

Edinburgh: Life, Letters and Literature is our proposed theme, with a wide scope to cover items such as The Edinburgh Review and publishers, Scott and his circle as well as Gaskell, Carlyle and possibly Stevenson. At this stage it is too early to draw up a programme and we would welcome suggestions.

1992 WEEKEND?

Some members, after the weekend conference at Scarborough, stayed on at Cober Hill, a conference and holiday centre between Scarborough and Whitby. It was very pleasant and good value, with a weekend costing about £60 inclusive.

A SHORT STORY WEEKEND some time next summer? This would be an informal weekend with talk and discussion in the evenings but daytime free to explore the area. It has so much to offer and public transport is good.

If you are interested please send s.a.e. - suitable dates not yet fixed

GASKELL SOCIETY: SOUTH OF ENGLAND BRANCH

by Howard F Gregg

A letter from Richard J Beckley to members of the Society in the South of England brought ten members to an exploratory meeting at Francis Holland School, London, on 9th March. Here the idea of a branch for the South of England became a definite possibility. The generous offers of two members, Jane Wilson and Olive Bridge, have given the branch two venues near Sloane Square. Members hope to meet once per school term (three times a year) at the Francis Holland School, SW1. These meetings will be held on a Saturday and will begin at 2 pm. Other meetings will be held at the home of Olive Bridge, Lincoln Street, SW3, on a similar arrangement. Those attending are asked to give 50p per meeting towards the costs of refreshments.

It was agreed that the branch should be a reading and study group to discuss the life, works and times of Elizabeth Gaskell, and that this should be interpreted in the broadest possible way, so that any member may feel free to propose any subject that he or she is interested in. It is hoped that this will offer something for everyone, whatever their level of interest or degree of involvement.

Two meetings have so far taken place. On 11th May at Francis Holland School there was a wide-ranging discussion of different aspects of Sylvia's Lovers in preparation for the Scarborough Conference. These included the structure of the novel, characterisation, the historical and regional setting and moral and religious themes in the story. Members were also able to look at copies of George du Maurier's illustrations for the second edition.

The meeting at Lincoln Street on 22nd June made arrangements for a summer outing on 2nd August, and then went on to discuss themes and the use of time and place in Anne Brontë's The Tenant of Wildfell Hall and A S Byatt's Possession.

A postal chain has also been created by which relevant material on topics of interest can be circulated for reading and further discussion.

Future meetings arranged so far will take place on:

16TH NOVEMBER at Lincoln Street when MRS GASKELL'S LIFE IN THE LIGHT OF HER LETTERS will be explored. The suggested reading is J A V Chapple's Elizabeth Gaskell, A Portrait in Letters.

1ST FEBRUARY 1992 at Francis Holland School, when the topic will be MRS GASKELL AS BIOGRAPHER, "THE LIFE OF CHARLOTTE BRONTE"

Branch members are grateful to Richard J Beckley for facilitating its activities to date and to Jane Wilson and Olive Bridge for enabling us to have such a firm base for our meetings.

Meetings have proved both friendly and stimulating and we hope more members will feel able to join us. For further details of branch activities and venues, please send s.a.e. to Dudley J Barlow, 44 Seymour Road, London SW18 5JA (tel: 081-874-7727).

LONDON MEETING

We plan to have our THIRD LONDON MEETING in Chelsea on 2ND NOVEMBER at the FRANCIS HOLLAND SCHOOL, only ten minutes' walk from Sloane Square underground station.

ED. PLEASE WILL MEMBERS WHO HOPE TO COME SEND S.A.E. FOR DETAILS which are not finalised at time of going to press. We would also like to draw up a mailing list for members who would like to go on a London/S.E. mailing list to receive information of London group meetings, etc. Please write to Dudley Barlow or me.

THE LAWN, HOLYBOURNE

by Barbara Brill

"Mrs Gaskell had planned to have her own pony carriage in order to enjoy the drives around to such places as Selbourne, the birthplace of Gilbert White, and to Chawton, associated with Jane Austen. "So wrote Mrs Chadwick, recounting Mrs Gaskell's last days in chapter XX of her book Homes and Haunts.

It was by car, not pony carriage, that I visited Selbourne, Chawton and Alton, on my way back to London, after a holiday in Dorset, last spring. During our holiday my friend had driven me and my sister to many places of literary interest. These included Thomas Hardy's home, Max Gate, Dorchester; the Dorchester Museum with its replica of Hardy's study; the church at Bemerton where George Herbert, poet and hymn writer, had been vicar; Lyme Regis and its Cob, where Jane Austen's Louisa fell, in Persuasion, and John Fowles' hero, Charles, met The French Lieutenant's Woman; the Laurence Whistler glass engravings on memorial windows in St Nicholas Church, Moreton; the effigy of Lawrence of Arabia in St Martin's Church, Wareham. But the day most packed with delights was the day of our return journey through Hampshire.

The first stop was the Gilbert White Museum and garden at his home, The Wakes, where I bought as a memento some sweet pea seedlings of Gilbert White's own cultivation, a particularly sweet-smelling strain. In July I picked in my Bramhall garden some sprays of these deliciously fragrant pink and white flowers and was reminded of that day at The Wakes.

The next call was at Jane Austen's home at Chawton, open to the public, but happily free of a museum atmosphere and retaining a domestic aura as though Jane had just walked through these rooms, looked through the windows, sat at this table to write or to stitch this patchwork quilt.



The Lawn, Holybourne, from Homes & Haunts of Mrs Gaskell by Ellis Chadwick, 1913

Then we were bound for Alton and The Lawn. The house is now a home for the elderly and we found it without difficulty, being directed to a pedestrian crossing with sign to drive carefully. On the way we passed several roads with Gaskellian names and knew we were in the right vicinity. We were not expected by the Warden at The Lawn, so I had armed myself with a copy of the Gaskell Journal as a proof of my trustworthiness. We could not have received a warmer welcome. We were ushered into the entrance hall where the open door of a sitting room showed a gathering of residents, relaxing, reading and talking in comfortable spacious surroundings and on the wall was hanging a portrait of Mrs Gaskell. Then we were ushered into the drawing room where Mrs Gaskell had sat, taking tea on that last day. This was a beautiful room of stately proportions, white-walled, with a pretty fireplace with tiled surround, a white corner-cupboard with ornaments displayed and cretonne covered easy chairs all angled to face the long windows

for a view of the smooth sloping lawn, the feature of the garden that gave the house its name.

How happy Elizabeth and William would have been if they had known that this, their retirement home, in which they never lived, is now being enjoyed by retired folk in the twentieth century. The Lawn is the property of the organisation known as Friends of the Elderly and Gentlefolk's Help, who own eleven houses in the South of England, in all providing accommodation for 450 residents, its aim being to enable the elderly to pass their declining years in peaceful and dignified surrounds, providing everyone with a bed-sitting room furnished with his or her own possessions. The Lawn has 30 residents each with a private room, and among the communal rooms is one for crafts with facilities for pottery, painting, weaving, sewing and some indoor gardening. It is a pleasing thought that the Gaskells' other home in Plymouth Grove, Manchester, is also being put to good use for the younger generation, as the headquarters of the International Society for Manchester's Overseas Students.

The Lawn became Mrs Gaskell's property in 1865, purchased from the existing occupant, Mr White, who became its owner shortly after its conversion to a private residence from an inn known as the White Hart, once a coaching inn. Mrs Chadwick tells of a footpath once running through the grounds of The Lawn which the owner of the property closed and then gave a party for the villagers to appease them.

The circumstances of Mrs Gaskell's purchase of the property after the offer of £1,600 from Smith, Elder, for the novel and serialisation of Wives and Daughters is too well known by Gaskellians to give details here, as is her decision to keep the purchase a secret from William who disapproved of mortgages. It was not until I re-read Elizabeth's letters after I had visited The Lawn and followed in detail the whole story of the house-hunting, the purchase, the furniture-buying and the search for a tenant that I was aware of the immense strain that she was under during those months. How was she able to cope with the writing of 24 Cornhill pages for each instalment of Wives and Daughters at the same

time as travelling back and forth between Alton and Manchester by train, stopping off in London to buy curtains, carpets and furniture? She had a low opinion of Mr White's furniture which she pronounced 'hideous'! There was always the unsuspecting William's welfare to be considered as he remained at home in Manchester, so it must have been an immense relief when he went off on his annual holiday in Scotland at the same time as Mr White announced the date for vacating The Lawn, as September 29th. So Elizabeth was able to get away with an easy mind to stay at The Lawn to supervise the final furnishing in readiness for the tenant she had found, a Mrs Moray. How appropriate that on the day that the new owners took over, Elizabeth's birthday, the Alton Church bells were rung in welcome.

The sound of the church bells should have helped to dispel Mrs Gaskell's doubts about the wisdom of buying the house. She had written to Marianne on August 22nd (G.L.575a) "it's an unlucky house and I believe I was a fool to set my heart on the place at all". As it proved, this presentiment was not without substance for after her death The Lawn was labelled by the residents of Alton 'the haunted house'. Mr C W Hawkins, a local historian of Alton, wrote in his private papers "Mrs Gaskell died suddenly, after which "things" began to happen. But this is true and must not be discounted, it was a house of ill omen. To every family who lived there came some trouble, death or sickness or financial disaster, until in the 1920s people by the name of Stokes bought The Lawn. Mrs Stokes' health began to fail, and Mrs Stokes learned the story. They packed up and went. No girl in the village would ever go there and work. The house was sold again, and this time the house was rebuilt with complete internal alterations, and from that time all went well."

What a story Mrs Gaskell might have woven about "these happenings", perhaps entitled "Footsteps on The Lawn"? But all traces of the haunting surely vanished after The Lawn was officially opened as a home for the elderly by Princess Margaret in 1959.

THE FRENCH MASTER

by Joan Leach

A fascination for France may well have been imparted to the young Elizabeth Stevenson by her French master at Knutsford; though he is just as likely to have taught her to dance a minuet as he had done to the young William Pitt, finding it puzzling that there was nothing in his dancing to indicate the great man he was to become.

It must be admitted that there is no direct evidence that Monsieur Rogier played any part in Elizabeth's education, but he was a colourful character in the Knutsford society of her youth. His father claimed descent from a Parisian Count of the Roman Empire and had been a figurante dancer in Garrick's company, so it was that Charles Rogier also took to the stage as a dancer until the age of twenty one.

In Knutsford he "had the honour of instructing respectable families and scholars in the science of dancing, so as to promote a genteel, personal address; and likewise a useful bodily exercise, which may be innocently attained to be a health exercise".*

A genteel personal address was certainly one of the characteristics of M. de Chalabre of My French Master (Knutsford Edition Vol II p.509)

'Another little ceremony which we had to get accustomed to, was his habit of taking off his hat as we approached, and walking by us holding it in his hand. To be sure, he wore a wig, delicately powdered, frizzed, and tied in a queue behind; but we always had a feeling that he would catch cold, and that he was doing us too great an honour, and that he did not know how old or rather how young we were, until one day we saw him far away from our house hand a countrywoman over a stile with the same kind of dainty, courteous politeness. lifting her basket of eggs over first; and then taking up the silk-lined lapel of his

coat, he spread it on the palm of his hand for her to rest her fingers upon ...'

Such detailed, graphic description and the Knutsford type setting seem evidence of the writer's personal experience so it is tempting to think of M. Rogier as the model for M. de Chalabre. And would not the dancing master have been light on his feet?

The narrator in the story is taught French, with her sister, by M. de Chalabre. They are allowed to go and meet him, being warned by their mother, '... give him the cleanest part of the path, for you know he does not like to dirty his boots ... This was all very well in theory; but, like many theories, the difficulty was to put it into practice ... when we got home, his polished boots would be without a speck, while our shoes were covered with mud'.

Henry Green, the Unitarian minister of Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford (from 1827-73) wrote in his History and Traditions of Knutsford that Charles X of France, then 'the Count D'Artois, for he was not yet a king, had a rage for rare plants, and his floral passion was known to a French Dancing Master, then resident in Knutsford, Rogier was his name. The Professor waited on the Count ...' who told him about the rare marsh saxifrage which grew on the Moor, 'together they set out exploring, -ditch after ditch they successfully cross, -when, lo! one wide and deep with peculiarly unctuous mire of the locality, arrested their eager progress; Rogier being light and a dancing master pirouetted across the abyss; but the Count being heavy and not a dancing master, floundered in ...'

Green related that when he first took up his post in Knutsford he knew Rogier who 'was in truth an original of the purest water. He was one who delighted in obtaining introductions to persons high in authority, or in writing long letters to them upon most extravagant projects ...'

A WORD
For my King and Country.

A TREATISE
ON THE UTILITY OF A
Rocket Armament,

ASSISTED BY BALLOONS,

Where Ships of War cannot be accessible ;

BOTH

DEFENSIVE AND OFFENSIVE,

TO THE

ANNOYING OF THE ENEMY'S HARBOUR.

That are stubborn and delight in War.

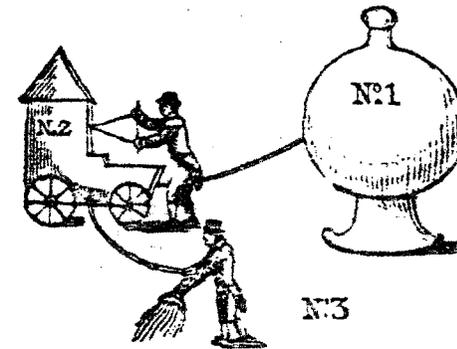
By CHARLES ROGIER, SEN., PROJECTOR,
KNUTSFORD, CHESHIRE.

SECOND EDITION.

MACCLESFIELD:
PRINTED BY J. WILSON, AT THE COURIER OFFICE.

1818.

A new Plan of defence for Gibraltar.



Happy be that escapeth me.

EXPLANATION.

No. 1 is the reservoir of boiling water, to supply the engine, No. 2; the sentinel or engineer, No. 3, is to play from the port hole in the rock, to prevent the enemy from scaling the rock. Sea water may be easily communicated to any part of the rock. The Author's motive for proposing so cruel a plan was to prevent their being scalded; for the enemy knowing such a defence to be at Gibraltar Rock, they would not attempt it. As the Rock may be seen from the Spanish lines, the engineer might rehearse, now and then, the engine from the port hole, to deter them from their own destruction.

According to Green (Knutsford: It's Traditions and History, 1859), Rogier approached the Prime Minister, Earl Grey, who "in a spirit of waggery or whiggery referred him to the War Office", but his novel schemes were never tried!

Unlike M. de Chalabre whose loyalties remained in France, Rogier schemed to defend England in the Napoleonic wars with fantastic and entirely impractical ideas which he published in a pamphlet*. Perhaps he held these opinions from a revulsion at the treatment of the French royal family which he shared with M. de Chalabre.

They were both inventive though the Monsieur showed talent and practicality: 'He turned silk-winders for my mother, made a set of chessmen for my father, carved an elegant watch-case out of a rough beef-bone, dressed up little cork dolls for us ...' (Knutsford Edition Vol.II p.515) Captain Brown's invention of a wooden fire-shovel to please Miss Jenkins because 'the grating of an iron one annoyed her' is more akin to Rogier's impractical ideas.

History affords us one more glimpse of Rogier through the memoirs of Reverend Harry Gray, Vicar of Knutsford (1809-24), who found him 'weak in secular matters and so improvident that I was at length obliged to raise an annual subscription, a little scanty income sufficient for himself and his wife, and dole it out to him by periodical payments'. 'A Cranfordian solution; Rogier's teaching days must have been over by then and Rev Gray warmed to him because he had been converted by hearing Whitfield preach and was 'wise and understanding in Scripture truth and experience and remarkably apt in illustrating Scripture truths by Old Testament history. His political vagaries wearied me ...'

Monsieur Rogier was almost larger than life and what part, if any, he played in the young Elizabeth Stevenson's life or awakening her interest in France cannot be known, but I hope you will pardon me for introducing him.

*A Word for My King and Country 1818