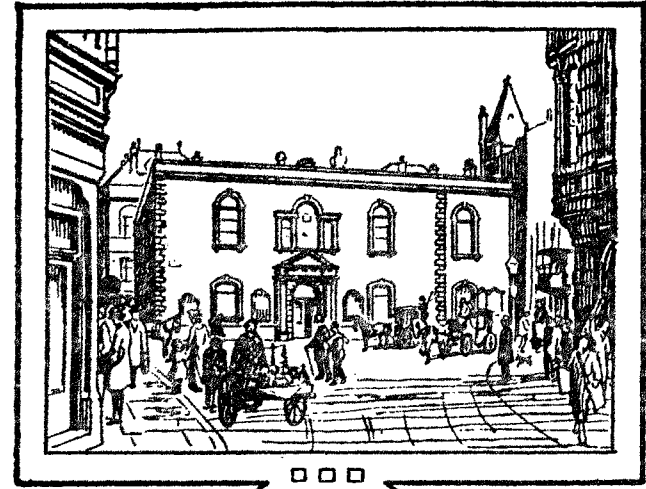


# The Gaskell Society



CROSS STREET CHAPEL

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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NO. 15

EDITOR'S LETTER

As there is very little space to spare in this newsletter and with pressures mounting as Christmas rushes on me, I am not in a cool, collected state, so I will be brief.

We manage to keep our membership fees down by economising on printing, which is a major expense and postage costs rise steadily. It is a great help if membership dues are paid promptly.

We hope to surprise you with a special publication during the year but it is too soon to reveal our plans. Our meetings in 1992 were well attended and it is good to meet friends; you will always find a welcome. We are very much looking forward to 1993.

Our thanks are due to Arthur Pollard for his sterling service as our President in our first seven years. Also retiring is our librarian, Mrs Mary Thwaite. Both become honorary life members. We welcome Geoffrey Sharps as our President.

Joan Leach

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EDINBURGH WEEKEND CONFERENCE

This is proving very popular and WE MUST HAVE YOUR BOOKINGS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE OR THERE IS LIKELY TO BE DISAPPOINTMENT.

We have put together a most attractive and varied programme and allowed time for exploring Edinburgh. There is also the option of extra days, eg B&B at £18.65.

There are some flats, 3 bedrooms at £265, and 4 at £330 a week, but this does not include conference charges. There is a very convenient bus service into town. The College has spacious grounds and a swimming pool etc.

Some of use hope to travel by train from Cheshire on Thursday 19 August, benefiting from group travel rates. If you need more information or a copy of the programme, please write to the Hon Secretary.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

New Year Lunch in Knutsford on 4 January at The Methodist Rooms, Princess Street, 12.45 for 1.00 pm. This is an informal lunch, to mark the retirement of Mrs Mary Thwaite from our committee. We are having the services of the caterer we had for our AGM meeting in 1991. Cost £5. Please book with Secretary, Joan Leach. Pay on the day

Spring Meeting at Cross Street Chapel  
20 March at 2 pm. George Eliot and Elizabeth Gaskell from the Biographer's Point of View by Jenny Uglow. We hope to have copies of Jenny Uglow's new book on sale. This meeting is earlier in the year than usual for various reasons; firstly The Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society are holding a seminar on The Literature of Manchester on Saturday 17 April, which we think some of our members will wish to attend and, secondly, the Alliance of Literary Societies has its AGM in Birmingham on 24 April.

Annual Outing

As it is several years since we went to The Lake District, we hope to go to Morecambe Bay, Silverdale and Cartmel, on Sunday 23 May (to be confirmed)

Further details of our year's events will be sent out with the Journal which will be ready for distribution at the Spring Meeting.

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THE BRONTE SOCIETY

Christine Sumner was elected Chairman of The Brontë Society at the last AGM in June. Sadly she died suddenly and will be greatly missed for her total commitment and tireless work for the Society.

J G Sharps represented us at the funeral on 4 November and offered our condolence.

AGM WEEKEND  
2-4 October 1992

by Muriel Easter and  
 Alice Reddihough

Since joining the Gaskell Society two years ago, we have had it in mind to visit Knutsford; the programme for the AGM weekend seemed to be a good opportunity.

In spite of heavy rain, Society members and Knutsfordians gathered on Friday evening for Mrs Joan Leach's talk, with slides, on "Mrs Gaskell's Knutsford and Cheshire". This was a fascinating account of the community which Mrs Gaskell would have known, and the town as it is today. As we walked round Knutsford next morning, the slides and interesting anecdotes fell into place.

On Saturday, about seventy Members gathered for a very good lunch at the Royal George. This was a suitable venue as the eighteenth-century assembly rooms, referred to in Mrs Gaskell's fiction, are still in use here.

At the AGM, we all regretted Professor Pollard's announcement that he had decided not to stand again for the position of president. The Society is considering registration as a charity, which will involve some changes in the constitution. Some points were raised immediately, and there will be much discussion to come.

Mrs Akiko Aikawa then gave a talk, "Nursery Rhymes in 'Wives and Daughters'". To us, apart from the opening of the book, these had gone unnoticed. Perhaps because nursery rhymes are not part of the Japanese tradition, their use struck her more forcefully, and this will shed new light on our re-reading of the novel. The talk was delivered in excellent English, and Mrs Aikawa participated enthusiastically in the whole programme.

As the Australian speaker was unable to be present, Professor John Chapple then gave an address, "Place and People in Elizabeth Gaskell's Work". He had recently

been researching German records of Mrs Gaskell's visits to Heidelberg and the surroundings. On their first visit in 1841, she and her husband were welcomed into a wealthy and artistic circle. He emphasised the contrast between Manchester in 1841 and Heidelberg, a medieval town in a romantic setting. He illustrated this with evocative slides of contemporary paintings and lithographs. He also commented on Mrs Gaskell's use of German customs in her story, Six weeks at Heppenheim. She showed an accurate knowledge of the neighbourhood, but was ready to depart from actual scenes to suit her fictional needs. In his inimitable way, Professor Chapple shared with us his erudition and enthusiasm.

On Saturday evening, we visited Tabley House. Mrs Gaskell remembered the old hall, and picnicking in the park. We were shown a series of rooms with interesting family portraits and other paintings from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. This was complemented by "An Evening with the Victorians at Tabley House". Joan arranged and presented readings, including extracts from privately published diaries, giving a picture of the family living in the house, and of outstanding Victorians such as Tennyson and Gladstone. We were privileged to have the extracts read by Delia Corry, who evoked such varied characters; and we were grateful to the museum staff for sharing their enthusiasm with us. It was a memorable evening.

On Sunday morning, the sun shone. We were invited to share in the service held at the Brook Street Unitarian Chapel, an interesting building erected in 1689, where Mrs Gaskell worshipped as a girl. The readings and hymns were carefully chosen, the words of one hymn being by William Gaskell, and one of the readings from "Ruth". The address stressed the divergences of Christian thought, and the importance of works to Unitarians. This was exemplified by the Gaskells, and is as relevant for us today.

After the service, Joan laid flowers on the grave in which Mr & Mrs Gaskell and their two unmarried daughters

are buried. It was fitting that just then a skein of calling geese flew overhead.

On Sunday afternoon, Joan led a "Cranford" walk, starting from Aunt Lumb's house, which was surprisingly large. Although the owners were absent, we were allowed to explore the garden, dominated by an unusual Himalayan cedar.

Knutsford is celebrating the 700th anniversary of the granting of its charter. It is a friendly town, and we were grateful to the ladies who offered refreshments on every occasion. Our warmest thanks go to all those who contributed to the success of the weekend, especially to Joan, who was involved in every activity, but still had time for us individually. We spent a happy and stimulating weekend, meeting old friends and making new ones. We look forward to visiting Knutsford again.

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#### SE GROUP PROGRAMME FOR 1993

6 February at Francis Holland School, 39 Graham Terrace, SW1W 8JF (a few minutes walk from Sloane Square underground station). 2 pm Gaskellians of a Past Generation by J G Sharps, President of the Gaskell Society

8 May at 15 Lincoln Street, SW3 2TP (also close to Sloane Square). 2 pm Cousin Phillis introduced by Brenda Colloms

17 July at Francis Holland School. Ruth introduced by Howard Gregg

The Annual London Meeting to which members of the Dickens Fellowship will be invited will be on 6 November at Francis Holland School at 2.15 pm. Edward Preston, Secretary of The Dickens Fellowship, will speak on Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Dickens.

If you have any queries about the meetings in London, please contact: Dudley Barlow, 44 Seymour Road, London SW18 5JA (081 874 7727)

Another letter from William Gaskell, traced by J A V Chapple, printed with the kind permission of Rutgers University Library:

Plymouth Grove  
April 15, 1857

My dear Miss Nussey,

Among a huge heap of letters awaiting me on my arrival from Newcastle last night (where I had been since Thursday) was the enclosed. As you may suppose, it was any thing but agreeable to think what you must have been setting me down as - an unlettered, unmannered, ungrateful, good-for-nothing sort of brute. I send the envelope by way of exculpation, though perhaps it leaves me open to the charge of defect - but I was obliged to write in a hurry, and was not sure whether to put on Halifax or Leeds. I hope your copy of the Life, and the one for Miss Wooler came safe.

All the notices that I have seen have been favourable, and some of the best exceedingly so. I have had a considerable number of letters too from distinguished men expressing high approval. Mr Brontë too, I am happy to say, is pleased, and I can only hope that Mr Nicholls will (as Sir J.K. Shuttleworth says) 'learn to rejoice that his wife will be known as a Christian heroine, who could bear her cross with the firmness of a martyr saint.'

I have not time to give you any long account of the travellers. They were to leave Rome for Florence yesterday, after going through all the crushing, and excitement of the Holy Week. I only hope they won't be kilt and spilt entirely. They intend to go as far as Venice, and then, I suppose, will turn their steps homeward. My two chickens here are very well, and if they were not gone to School would send their love.

Hoping your weather is better, I am, my dear Miss Nussey,

Yours very hastily, but sincerely  
Wm Gaskell

Ed. Mrs Gaskell, with her two elder daughters, Marianne and Meta, left Manchester on 13 February 1857. In a letter dated 8 February she was still sending 'copy' (presumably proofs) of The Life of Charlotte Brontë to her publisher, George Smith.

THE CHARM OF BARBARA BODICHON

by Barbara Brill

In recent months I have fallen under the spell of Barbara Bodichon, whose name I first met with when reading Mrs Gaskell's letters. In July 1850 (GL 73) she wrote to Eliza Fox, "Do you know I've a great fancy for asking Barbara Smith" (Mme Bodichon was born Barbara Leigh-Smith) "to come and pay us a visit. Do you think she'd come?" I think Mrs Gaskell had got wind through mutual friends of Barbara Smith's charm.

Perhaps it was because I share Barbara Bodichon's initials that the name penetrated my memory, as it proved to be a name that constantly was thrusting itself out at me from the pages of books on varying subjects. I seemed to be haunted by her as I pored over books on late nineteenth century celebrities whose paths seemed so often to cross hers: Gertrude Jekyll, famous woman gardener; the novelists Trollope, George Eliot and 20th century Virginia Woolf; the Pre-Raphaelite painters - all seemed to be impressed by Barbara. I became charmed by her and felt I had fallen under her spell, and I hope when I tell you a little about her you will feel the same attraction.

Her claim to fame is in her work for women's rights, founder of Girton College and instigator of the Married Women's Property Act. She was a pre-cursor of the Suffragettes but never actively joined them, preferring to wage a solitary and earnest battle for the equality of the sexes with her pen, her paintbrush, her power of oratory, her personality and presence, and her purse.

She was born in 1827 and was able to date her earliest meeting with one of her feminist friends, Bessie Parkes, to the day of Queen Victoria's coronation, when as children they both attended a family party to celebrate the occasion.

Barbara's family background hardly conformed to accepted Victorian middle-class standards. She was the eldest of

five illegitimate children of an unmarried member of Parliament, Benjamin Smith. Mrs Gaskell referred to the circumstances of her birth in a letter to Charles Norton (GL 461) written on April 5th 1860, when she referred to her as "an illegitimate cousin of Hilary Carter, F. Nightingale, - and has their nature in her; through some of the legitimates don't acknowledge her. She is - I think in consequence of her birth, a strong fighter against the established opinions of the world, - which always goes against my - what shall I call it? - taste - (that is not the word) but I can't help admiring her noble bravery, and respecting - while I don't personally like her."

Barbara inherited her father's fighting spirit. He was an active anti-Corn Law campaigner and dedicated Unitarian, holding strong views on the importance of education particularly with regard to equal educational opportunities for both sexes. He had all his children taught at home and in addition had a large carriage, like an omnibus, in which he took his children with tutors and servants on long journeys throughout the British Isles and later on the Continent, as part of their education. When Barbara came of age, as with all his sons and daughters, he made her an allowance of £300 a year which Barbara used to found a school, open to both sexes, to all classes and all religious creeds. In addition she started evening classes for ladies to learn drawing with the exceptional opportunity provided of an undraped nude model. The Royal Academy Schools were not at the time open to women, so Barbara got up a petition to campaign for women's acceptance and was successful, though she had to wait until 1894 before the first painting by a woman was accepted at the Royal Academy Exhibition, and even this was due to an error, the artist's sex not having been revealed.

Barbara herself attended life-drawing classes at Bedford College and soon displayed an exceptional talent as an artist. Her paintings were bold and vivid and her water colours particularly showed a touch of genius. Mrs Gaskell was attracted by her paintings of the American

scene and referred to them in her letter to Charles Norton (GL 461) previously quoted. "What gave me the best idea of America, or a piece of it, was an oil painting of Mme Bodichon (née Barbara Leigh Smith) ... She married two or three years ago a Dr Bodichon, of Algiers, a Breton by birth - and they went for their honey-year to America, - and in some wild luxuriant terrific part of Virginia? in a gorge full of rich rank tropical vegetation, - her husband keeping watch over her with loaded pistols because of the alligators infesting the stream. - Well! that picture did look like my idea of America."

Barbara married Eugène Bodichon in 1857 at the Unitarian Chapel in Little Portland Street, London. They met in Algiers where Barbara spent several winters on account of her health, Algiers being at that time a favourite centre where the sick ladies of Europe retreated to recuperate. Barbara found much to appeal to her artistic tastes in this new French colony, painting the scenery, collecting the pottery, studying the wild flowers and wearing the native Moorish costume. Most important of all was her meeting with Dr Bodichon, a resident there for many years. He was skilled at the treatment of patients wounded by wild animals during hunting expeditions and made a special study of the treatment of malaria, then rife in the colony, tracing the cause of the illness to the lack of trees. He was a keen anthropologist, studying the habits of Arab tribes.

With their mutual concern for their underprivileged brothers and sisters and desire to reform the world, Eugène and Barbara were drawn to each other as fellow idealists and eccentrics. Their respect ripened into love. Barbara described him to a friend at the age of 46 as "being very young for his age; has black hair and eyes, the brownest skin you ever saw and a magnificent head. I think him the handsomest man ever created. He is tall, grave, almost sombre in aspect and very eccentric in dress. He never wears a hat and has black hair as thick as a Newfoundland dog's coat. Some people think the docteur ugly and terrific." Bessie Parkes

believed the marriage was made in heaven and said, "I have never regarded her marriage to that singular man with any regret".

They must have made a striking couple. Barbara was robust and healthy and was described by Rossetti as being "blessed with a large portion of tin, fat, enthusiasm and golden hair. She thinks nothing of climbing up mountains in breeches and wading through streams in none." Barbara rebelled against the tightly corseted fashions of the day and always went uncorseted in simple free-flowing clothes. Her golden hair was her crowning glory and it captivated George Eliot, who chose to base the character of Romola in her novel of that name on Barbara. Romola is introduced in chapter V of the novel in these words:

"The only spot of bright colour in the room was made by the hair of a tall maiden of seventeen or eighteen who was standing before a reading desk. The hair was of a reddish gold colour enriched by an unbroken small ripple, such as may be seen in sunset days on grandest autumnal evenings. It was confined by a black fillet above her small ears, from which it rippled forward again, and made a natural veil for her neck above her square cut gown of black serge. Her eyes were bent on a large volume placed before her, one long white hand rested on the reading desk and the other clasped the back of her father's chair."

What a charmer!

For further details of Barbara Bodichon, refer to BARBARA BODICHON 1827-91 by Hester Burton, published by John Murray 1949.

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AN INTRODUCTION TO  
ELIZABETH GASKELL'S SHORT STORIES

by Sylvia Burch

Talk given to South of England Branch  
of the Gaskell Society - 25 April 1992

This talk was given in two parts, the first consisting of a general Introduction to the Short Stories for which I am indebted to Angus Easson's chapter in his biography Elizabeth Gaskell (1979) and to Geoffrey Sharps' Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention (1970). The second part was a reading and discussion by the group of one of the stories - Half a Lifetime Ago (Ed: There is only space for the first part)

Mrs Gaskell's reputation with modern readers rests securely on the foundation of her full-length novels, and it is for these that she is most appreciated. But, if we are to realise the true wealth of her creativity we have also to consider her short stories. These come to us in great variety of form and subject matter and the best of them hold the reader's attention in much the same way as they did over a century ago. Elizabeth Gaskell delighted in story telling; her friend, Susanna Winkworth, said:

"No one ever came near her in the gift of telling a story. In her hands the simplest incident - a meeting in the street, a talk with a factory-girl, a country walk, an old family history - became picturesque and vivid and interesting."

(Quoted by A Easson in "Introduction to Cousin Phillis")

There are about thirty short stories in all, and it was not for nothing that Dickens dubbed their author "Scheherazade". She, herself, wrote vividly about her story-telling experiences while visiting Heidelberg in 1841 -

"We all told the most frightening and wild stories we had ever heard - some such fearful

ones - all true - "  
 (Letter to Eliza Holland, August 1841)

Certainly 'frightening and wild' are apt descriptions of her ghost stories - especially The Old Nurse's Story and The Poor Clare with its supernatural curse! Although we use the term "short stories" it quickly becomes obvious that some of them are really novellas. With the exception of The Moorland Cottage (published as a separate Christmas Book) they all appeared first in periodicals.

In his Introduction to the Knutsford Edition (London 1906) of My Lady Ludlow and Other Stories, A W Ward skilfully made the connection between Mrs Gaskell's home and family life and her stories. He noted that she was as well able to date her stories "from my own apartment" as Steele had been for "The Tatler" and also that she used Round the Sofa as the title to her own Introduction. Speaking of the Stories, he observed that the all -

"remain instinct with the human kindness and sympathy which were part of herself, and of the atmosphere breathed by her in her home life."

The frontispiece of the Knutsford Lady Ludlow volume has a picture of the Gaskell drawing room at 84 Plymouth Grove and Ward elaborates on this room -

"Where more than one of her stories ... may have found their earliest readers, and where their writer may have first welcomed the clear-sighted criticisms of a watchful affection."

Although the range of theme and material covered by the short stories is enormous, the closeness between the work and the writer's life and experience can never be overlooked. Mrs Gaskell's own thoughts and beliefs permeate her writing, and her humanity and moral code are always clearly shown. Her first published short story was Libbie Marsh's Three Eras (1847) and it soon

became apparent that this type of writing was a useful money-maker and a great help to the family finances. The stories paid well and could be sold twice - once to a magazine and then again to a publisher in volume form. By April 1850, she is writing to Eliza Fox -

"Do you know they sent me £20 for Lizzie Leigh? I stared, and wondered if I was swindling them but I suppose I am not; and Wm. has composedly buttoned it up in his pocket. He has promised I may have some for the Refuge."

Holidays could be paid for in this way; in July 1858 she wrote from Silverdale asking C E Norton -

"Given £105 and 2 months (I am republishing my HW stories under the title of "Round the Sofa" - to get this money -) and 3 people, and where can they go at the middle or end of October? Now do try and answer this."

And, later in May 1862, she again proves she has her feet firmly on the ground when she writes to Marianne -

"My dearest Polly, my story is found! And is going to bring me in a good price! £150. Only don't tell anyone."

The stories - on the whole - show great variety but there is some unevenness of quality. Also, some themes were repeatedly used or there was a re-working of the same material under a different title. The beginnings of Cranford, for example, can be traced in a piece entitled The Last Generation in England (1849) and also in Mr Harrison's Confessions (1851). Mrs Gaskell's plots were often loosely constructed and proper names bore a great deal of repetition. the brother and sister motif was one which went through much of her work - we can observe it in The Moorland Cottage (1850) and later in North and South (1854-55). However, this seems generally to have been a favourite topic in Victorian literature and was used by George Eliot in The Mill on the Floss, Dickens in Hard Times, etc. In all these tales, the main woman character (or the sister) shows great inner growth and spiritual development, in



contrast to the more worldly aims of the man (either brother or lover, as the case may be). The Crooked Branch is another example, where the son of the elderly couple is shown totally lacking in any moral scruple while the adopted niece displays true virtue and Christian compassion.

All Mrs Gaskell's stories demonstrate the same splendid evocations of time and place and detailed observation of life and feeling as we find in the novels. Throughout, she makes us aware of her belief in a guiding power greater than that of her individual characters. We sense her own firm religious beliefs forming her guidelines for the way life should be lived. Based on love, kindness and tolerance, such guidelines still have validity for us today. But, she also builds on the Romantic as well as the Christian tradition. Wordsworth was always an inspiration for her, from the earliest days when writing of The Poets and Poetry of Humble Life she quoted (or slightly misquoted) from "The Old Cumberland Beggar" -

"We have all of us one human heart"

(Letter to Mary Howitt, August 1838)

And it is this feeling of the "oneness" of the human race that provides so much of her writing, from the novels like Mary Barton and North and South right through the finest of the short stories and sketches such as Half a Lifetime Ago and An Accursed Race.

Five collections of stories appeared in Mrs Gaskell's lifetime; these were:

Lizzie Leigh and Other Tales - 1855

Round the Sofa - 1859

Right at Last and Other Tales - 1860

Cousin Phillis and Other Tales - 1865

and in 1861, the Tauchnitz edition of "Lois the Witch and Other Tales". Many stories were set in the recent past, while others entailed quite a lot of historical research (eg "Lois the Witch") on the author's part. Holiday experiences helped with foreign backgrounds ("Six Weeks at Heppenheim") and nearer to home the Welsh setting of The Doom of the Griffiths.

That selections of the short stories are still being published and read today (eg The Manchester Marriage and Other Stories 1985, reprinted 1990, and A Dark Night's Work 1992) is surely proof of the enduring quality of this part of Mrs Gaskell's work.

Angus Easson (see his "Elizabeth Gaskell" 1979, for a fuller elaboration) has surveyed the stories in three main groups and has usefully divided them into:

- 1 The earliest tales: these were published in a variety of magazines from about 1847-48 and include the first published story Libby Marsh's Three Eras and some "Sunday School" stories, eg Bessy's Troubles at Home which Mrs Gaskell wrote of later as "complete rubbish"!
- 2 The second and most important group of stories were those written for Dickens - for "Household Words" and "All the Year Round". This was Mrs Gaskell's main market and most of her stories (twenty) went here, although she was later to speak slightly of it, referring to a story as "not good enough for the Cornhill Magazine - but might be good enough for Household Words" (letter to G Smith, Dec. 1859) and also to worry when Dickens became unpopular after his separation from his wife. However, from the very first issue of "Household Words" (March-April 1850) when Lizzie Leigh appeared, Dickens and his periodicals were the chief means of publication for her stories. Some of these were for Dickens' Christmas Number and he envisaged them being told to listeners around the Christmas fireside. The Old Nurse's Story came out in the 1852 Number and we can easily imagine the warmth and companionship of the hearth, forming a strong contrast to the chill and horror of that ghostly tale!
- 3 The third group of stories were those published in The Cornhill Magazine (founded 1860) and of these the greatest was Cousin Phillis, more a novella

than a short story - and almost perfect. This was published from November 1863 to February 1864, and has been called an idyll by countless readers and critics alike. It may deserve this title, however - if it does - it is an idyll firmly rooted in the reality of everyday rural life but which - at the same time - is pervaded by a sense of quiet calm and tranquillity. On the surface at least! Perhaps, as strong feelings and passions lie underneath Cousin Phillis as any that thread their way through the Brontës' stormy sagas!

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#### OBITUARY

We are sorry to report the death of John T M Nussey, who was a loyal and supportive founder member of our Society; he attended the commemorative lunch at The Royal George in Knutsford for the 175th Anniversary of Elizabeth Gaskell's birth held on 30 September 1985, and was at the inaugural meeting of our Society three weeks later.

John, the great great nephew of Ellen Nussey, was a staunch supporter of The Brontë Society and an invaluable link between our two Societies. He reported, in The Brontë Society Transactions on the formation of The Gaskell Society and personally introduced me to Council members at Haworth Parsonage.

He had an encyclopaedic knowledge of South Yorkshire and Birstall in particular, generously sharing his genealogical knowledge which was the result of careful recording and research in family and Yorkshire archives over many years. He had an infectious enthusiasm which was much appreciated by fellow researchers and Brontë scholars.

With the quiet, unobtrusive courtesy, a gentlemen of the old school, John had a ready twinkle in his eye and a wry sense of humour. He will be sadly missed at our meetings, but remembered with affection.

Joan Leach