

The Gaskell Society



If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs Joan Leach, Far Yew Tree House, Over Tabley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 OHN (Tel: 01565 634668)

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NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 1997

NO. 24

Editor's Letter

We have had such a busy year so there is scarcely room in this newsletter to bring you up to date. Major events were the trip to Germany in May, a most enjoyable experience, which will be fully reported in the next Journal, and the weekend conference at Chester in August.

By the time members in the UK read this they may have forgotten the August heat wave in which I am now writing, but delegates found North Wales sweltering and only found relief in Samuel Holland's slate mine! Again you will find more on this event and some of the papers read at Chester in the 1998 Journal.

Alan Shelston has done sterling service in editing our Journal since its launch and he feels it is time to step aside, especially as he will be busy working with John Chapple in editing Gaskell letters. Jo Pryke, having served as associate editor will now take over from Alan as editor.

We will be working on a collection of items from Newsletters which we hope to publish in 1998.

Did you miss early volumes of Journals and Newsletters?

We have reprinted Journals 1-3 (£4 each) and Newsletters 1-7 (£1 each).

Subscriptions

In future our Society year will begin on 1 January. You will receive a reminder in December. Fees are now £8 per annum, or £12 for joint, overseas and corporate membership. We are encouraging members to pay by banker's order where possible, as it makes less work for all concerned. Our account is at TSB Princess Street, Knutsford (sort code 77-48-04), the account number being 07633660.

I can now be reached on e-mail at
JoanLeach@aol.com
 and will soon be au fait with the internet, I hope!

Our Treasurer, Brian Williams, is at
BDandEMW@aol.com

Lucy Magruder our US hon. sec. is at
lagruder@aol.com

If you have an e-mail number and would like to be on our mailing list, please send details.

The Society is deeply indebted to Mitsuohara Matsuoka for all the work he has done in establishing our home page on the internet

<http://lang.nagoya-ac.jp/~matsuoka/Gaskell.html>

I hope to manage this soon. He has also entered E-texts of Gaskell novels and most short stories. Mitsu has been over here in Manchester studying but has now returned to Japan, an ambassador between our Societies.

Future Plans

A four or five day trip to Paris is being planned for 1998, most likely for the second or third weekend in September, but possible between about 20 and 25 May. Any ideas on travel or accommodation welcome.

Our next conference will be in LONDON in 1999. Suggestions for venue will be welcome. Although our experience of college accommodation is mixed, it still seems the most reasonable in cost, especially as most of our members need single rooms. Our lecturers and teacher members are free in the summer vacation, but we will consider other options for dates if members make their wishes known.

2000 Millennium Year

Plans are afoot to celebrate this in Knutsford with a LITERARY AND ARTS FESTIVAL. This would be during the last week in September to coincide with our AGM and Elizabeth Gaskell's birthday on 29 September.

The Well of Penmorfa by Dewi Williams

Sometime during 1917, a translation of this tale by Elizabeth Gaskell was published in "Yr Herald Gymraeg" (Welsh Herald) a Caernarfon based weekly with a wide local circulation. The translator was Edward Davies, the postmaster of Penmorfa between 1904-20, best known for his "Janes Porthmadog" (History of Porthmadog) 1913, which is still highly regarded by local historians and very well written.

I came across Edward Davies' fair copy of his translation amongst his papers in the possession of one of the family. He had seen the "Household Words" version and had no idea as to the identity of the author. Ironically, his local history contains a biography of Samuel Holland; little did he suspect that Holland's cousin was the mystery author. Edward Davies died, aged 82, in 1959.

A further item of interest among the papers is the response of another local historian to the tale which Edward Davies drew his attention to. Robert Isaac Jones was the Tremadog-based pharmacist and printer and a well-known minor literary figure. He also published an important volume on local history in 1892, entitled "Gestiana" (Gleanings from the Gêst area). Robert Isaac died in 1905, therefore Edward Davies must have long mulled over the identity of the author before the publication of his translation.

R I Jones states that he has no idea about the identity of the principal characters, namely *Eleanor Gwynn*, *Nest* her daughter and *Edward Williams* of Penamser farm (The End of Time). A possible explanation, he suggests, might lie in the testimony of the Reverend Jeffrey Holland (no relation of Samuel) as written on the flyleaf of the 1799 Penmorfa register:

"There has been a most shameful neglect for 20 years in this parish without any account of burials, marriages and christenings owing to a drunken curate, Mr Davies, lately dead."

Robert Isaac Jones identifies the following minor characters in the story:

1 John Griffith of Tu hwnt i'r bwlch - alive during the second half of the 17th century. *Edward Williams* suggests that only such a man of means could marry the crippled *Nest*. John Griffith pre-dates the other characters.

2 John Griffith, who first cared for the lunatic Mary Williams. A person of this name was alive in 1761 and was the landlord of Ty Mawr, one of the inns in the village.

3 *Rowland Roberts*, the doctor who treated *Nest Gwynn* after her fall. A Rowland Jones, late 18th century, acted as the village apothecary.

4 *Mrs Thomas*, the innkeeper - a Robert Thomas kept Bwlch y Fedwen, the principal inn of the village at this time. In the "Doom of the Griffiths", Martha Thomas is the name of the landlady of the "Goat" inn at Penmorfa.

5 *David Hughes*, the Wesleyan travelling preacher - could have accompanied Wesley when he visited Penmorfa in 1797. Not known to R I Jones.

R I Jones also identifies *Eleanor* and *Nest's* cottage, with its south-facing visage, 'by the roadside on the left hand as you go from Tre-Madoc to Pen Morfa'. He names it as "Pwll goleulas" (Light blue pool) by which name the terraced houses on the spot are still called. Unfortunately, the Tithe map of 1843 places the cottage (of which not a stone remains) on the right of the road rather than the left.

How much credence should be attached to this tale as recounted by Elizabeth Gaskell? It certainly has not survived in folk memory. She might well have known of such a folk tale in Cheshire perhaps and decided to place it in a Welsh context with which she certainly was well acquainted. The preponderance of John Griffiths and Thomases in the area would also make it easy to "identify" characters who could be either fictitious or based on contemporary figures in the Penrhyndeudraeth area whom she knew.

Lastly, what of the well, the focal point of the tragedy? J C Sharps, in a footnote¹, acknowledges the information he received in 1960 from Colonel M I Williams-Ellis, that it was the well of Saint Beuno. Subsequent research has uncovered a more likely identification. Saint Beuno's well can be found on the side of the lane leading to Penmorfa church, much higher than the "Dôl Fawr" location. Robert Isaac Jones locates the well at Ty Cerrig, "sharp down under the rocks" (Mrs Gaskell) and refers to the "slippery stones on the time worn path leading to it". It has long disappeared as has the cottage whose name it bears, a field's length away from the reputed home of Eleanor and Nest. The present owner of the land assures me that the ground suggests the presence of water. A divining rod could well pin-point the site of the well so fateful in the life of *Nest Gwynn* "many, many years back - a lifetime ago".

¹Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention, J G Sharps (Linden Press 1970), p.99

Editor's Note: We are very grateful to Dewi for guiding us to the Well of Penmorfa across the fields on our outing on 10 August. This is now more a spring than a well. Nobody slipped on any stones!

Notes on The Moorland Cottage and Other Stories
 World's Classics p/b edn 1995
 by Muriel Smith

There is an item in the Winter & Spring 1997 joint Newsletter of the Ancient Monuments Society and Friends of Friendless Churches, about two redundant Welsh churches which it is hoped will this year be vested in the Friends, and one of them has something of a Gaskell connection.

"These are St Beuno, Penmorfa, Gwynedd, and St Ellyw, Llanellieu, in Powys. Both are delightful buildings, two-cell in plan form, Medieval in origin and, for the most part, in fabric."

St Beuno is not mentioned in *The Well of Penmorfa*, but Mrs Gaskell was presumably acquainted with it.

Another story in the volume, *My French Master*, concerns the French emigrant, M de Chalabre:

"He had a genius for using his fingers. After our lessons were over, he relaxed into the familiar house friend, the merry play-fellow. We lived far from any carpenter or joiner: if a lock was out of order, M de Chalabre made it right for us. If any box was wanted, his ingenious fingers had made it before our lesson day. He turned silk-winders for my mother, made a set of chessmen for my father, carved an elegant watchcase out of a rough beef-bone, dressed up little cork dolls for us - in short, as he said, his heart would have been broken but for his joiner's tools."

That these were typical emigrant activities is confirmed by *Nez de Cuir* (Leathernose), Jean de la Varende's 1937 novel dealing with Normandy of the immediately post-Napoleonic period, and based on his own family traditions:

"Chess was all the rage in Normandy after the return from emigration and it was from Normandy that the taste invaded Paris and all France. Norman châteaux still possess an astounding number of sets of chessmen. Exile and its dispiriting lack of occupation had something to do with it, but also there was the odd mania among the gentry of the time: turnery. Jean-Jacques Rousseau had advocated craft work, but surely he never envisaged such a craze. Every house had its turnery room, its glory-hole ... And chessmen were the perfect product for this buzzing activity: useful, reasonably difficult to make and suitable as gifts ... Just the job for emigrants, for the impoverished gentleman with his borrowed lathes who, holding his breath and bowed over the object between the centres, tries to forget it all."

84 Plymouth Grove

The University now plans to move the International Society from Mrs Gaskell's house during 1998. In conjunction with the Manchester Civic Society we are setting up a steering group to study options for the future of the house - possibly a combination of exhibition space and residential units. When plans are a little further advanced, we hope to set up a charity and The Friends of Plymouth Grove.

Meanwhile we are anxious to trace the original contents of the house, both those sold at auction after Meta's death and other items which were moved from the house before 1914. Any leads will be gratefully received! Please get in touch with Janet Allen, 10 Dale Road, New Mills, High Peak SK22 4NW (phone/fax 01663 744233).

The Recording of Mrs Gaskell's North & South
BBC Radio 4
 by Delia Corrie

In April, I went to BBC Manchester to record Elizabeth Gaskell's *North & South* for Radio 4. I was playing Mrs Hale and Aunt Shaw, not to mention various other very minor rôles in crowd scenes, and it proved a most enjoyable job.

The book had been adapted for radio most beautifully by Charlotte Keatley, and with Emily Mortimer cast as Margaret and David Threlfall as Mr Thornton, I felt it really couldn't fail.

The actors' part of it took six days in all. The book had been divided into three hour-long episodes, so we spent two days on each episode. On the first day, the whole cast met and read through the script before going into the studio. This is obviously a very important stage, seeing how the whole story comes together in radio terms and hearing everyone's character, but it is also great fun and breaks the ice.

Once in the studio, we 'rehearse/record', which means that each scene is read through in front of the microphone before actually recording. Modern microphones are so sensitive that the actors don't just stand in front of them as they used to a few years ago. We move around, sit down, lie in bed - I did quite a lot of that as Mrs Hale! - and whatever else the director wants us to do. In some cases you even wear long skirts to give a period feel and sound. Sometimes you feel you could do with another pair of hands to hold the script and, for example, drink from a cup.

This particular production had a very happy team of actors. I had worked with several of them before so there

was a lot of social catching-up to do in the Green Room. Some knew Elizabeth Gaskell already, as I did, but several didn't and went out to buy copies of the book. All of them loved it.

When the actors' work is done, it is over to the director, in this case Michael Fox, and the technicians. They spend several more days editing it all down and adding the music and sound effects which give so much of the atmosphere in radio plays.

I thought the finished result was wonderful. Even knowing how it all happens, I was still transported with Margaret and the other characters, bringing to life Elizabeth Gaskell's words. What a great book it is.



Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, in 1856

Cross Street Chapel

by Geoffrey Head

Chairman of Trustees

The building on the historic Plungen's Meadow site of "The Observatory", of which the new Cross Street Chapel will form the ground and mezzanine floors, proceeds apace. The Chapel premises is scheduled to be delivered to its Trustees in late September this year and, after internal fitting out, should be ready to open in November.

Provision has been made for a concourse surrounding a circular Chapel seating about 180, an office, a resources centre, a choir vestry and a divisible community suite with associated kitchen facilities. This community facility will seat up to 100 for meetings and will be named the "Percival" suite after Thomas Percival FRS (1740-1804), a Chapel Trustee, largely responsible for the founding of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and the Manchester Academy. The mezzanine floor provides for a high quality panelled board room (the Gaskell Room), the Minister's Vestry, a congregational room, a plant room and a Chapelkeeper's flat.

There will be provision for disabled access (including lift and toilet accommodation), a loop hearing system in the Chapel, audio visual and information technology equipment.

The Elizabeth Gaskell memorial tablet, salvaged from the 1694 building after the World War II bombing, will be located in the concourse, and the red circular plaque from the exterior of the 1959 building will be reinstated. Chapel archives will be housed in bookcases in the Gaskell Room. It is hoped that the Gaskell Society will feel able to make use of the premises from time to time for committee or general meetings: it will have a warm welcome.

Book Notes

by Christine Lingard

The Victorian social-problem novel; the market, the individual and the communal, by Josephine Guy, 1996. £45 (paperback available)

A comprehensive study of a sub-genre consisting of *Hard Times*, *Mary Barton*, *North and South*, *Felix Holt*, *Alton Locke*, and *Sybil* which is designed to redress the large body of literary criticism produced over the last forty years deemed by the author to be 'negative'. It aims to provide new insights into literary history and gives a survey of literary critics as well as an understanding of the novels. It challenges Gaskell's assertion that 'I knowing nothing of Political Economy' and argues to the contrary that her knowledge becomes almost an obsession.

The Letters of Matthew Arnold, edited by Cecil Y Lang; vol 1 1829-1859. Charlottesville and London: The University of Virginia Press, 1996. £53.50

- contains one letter of Elizabeth Gaskell complimenting him on his '*Haworth Churchyard*' and two of his in reply. Arnold was not an intimate acquaintance but Mrs Gaskell knew him in Oxford and was friendly with his mother and her circle of friends in Ambleside and Grasmere which included Mrs Eliza Fletcher, her daughter Mrs Davy and Harriet Martineau.

The English Novel in History 1840-1895, by Elizabeth Deedes Ermarth. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1997. £40

One of three books discussing in detail the role of the novel in the treatment of history and its use in highlighting social problems. (There are companion volumes for the twentieth century.) Gaskell is treated in passing in the discussion of the economic and social order.

Elizabeth Gaskell: the early years, by John Chapple, Manchester University Press 1997, pp. xviii+492, £25.00
Alan Shelston writes: Like many members of the Gaskell

Society I am currently enjoying our chairman's masterly account of Elizabeth Gaskell's early life, *Elizabeth Gaskell: the early years*. As Professor Chapple will willingly concede, this is as much a study in detail of the contexts, social, cultural and intellectual, that shaped the novelist's formative experience as it is of the life itself: indeed, four chapters pass before the infant Elizabeth appears upon the scene. But what riches are here revealed to us by such dedicated and affectionate research. Every conceivable source that might have a bearing upon Elizabeth Gaskell's upbringing is investigated: her father's origins and wayward career, the Unitarian and family networks of north-west England, the cultural and intellectual resources of Knutsford, the ever-flourishing Holland connections, education at Stratford, the loss of a brother and the winning of a husband. George Eliot, in a famous passage in *Middlemarch*, refers to 'the subtle movement ... and also those less marked vicissitudes which are constantly shifting the boundaries of social intercourse' that took place 'in old provincial society' at exactly this point in time. Rarely can these have been so expertly exemplified as in this remarkable book.

Editor's note: there will be a full review of this book in the next Journal. We can supply copies to UK members, also the paperback reprint of the Collected Letters, at £1 off the retail price by post, or £4 off if collected at meetings.



The Halbe Mond or Half Moon Inn c.1900

ONE DAY IN HEPPENHEIM

by Joan Leach

It was an early start for members travelling to Germany on 6th May for, by 11.30 am, from Manchester, Birmingham, London Heathrow and Gatwick, we met at Frankfurt airport where we were joined by members from Japan and USA to make a total of forty-three ready to travel in Gaskell footsteps.

Moswin Tours had arranged for us to stay at Mannheim, only a short distance from Heidelberg and provided us with the services of our tour manager, Carolyn Jack, who efficiently smoothed our way.

Our programme had been checked by Peter Skrine and Celia, who will give a more detailed report in our next Journal, and John and Kate Chapple had also checked some of our venues.

After spending a fascinating day and a half exploring Heidelberg on the third day we headed for Heppenheim, still a wine town as it had been in Elizabeth Gaskell's day. The vineyards along our route covered areas of all sizes; the rows of vines showing various states of cultivation, some well pruned and weeded, others less so. Vines and other crops, such as asparagus, seemed to belong to small family groups or small-holdings. We thought of the wine trade as Elizabeth Gaskell had observed it and later we learnt more when we visited a winery where the vintage is pressed and matured for the growers.



Town Hall and Market Place at Heppenheim

We assembled in the attractive market square of Heppenheim, with its decorative timber-framed buildings and fountain (we became connoisseurs of fountains as we saw them in almost every village, though Mannheim's at night with a display of water patterns and changing colours was the most splendid spectacle). Peter in his preliminary tour

a few weeks earlier had called at the town hall where it had been arranged that the Burgermeister would receive us. As we waited for this honour, it began to drizzle but the busy scene around us kept us amused for it was Friday, the day for civil weddings to be registered in the town hall, and groups of flower-carrying guests jumped out of cars and disappeared inside while we waited.

We became a little anxious as this was not our only appointment - we were due at Halbe Monde or Half Moon Inn, the setting for the story *Six Weeks at Heppenheim* and, though our places had been booked, we were told that the self-service lunch was so popular that the best food would be gone if we were late! Peter hurried into the Town Hall to check what the delay was and returned somewhat crestfallen; our appointment was not registered in the Burgermeister's diary and he was not there at all! The ladies in the TIC knew we were coming but not the town hall.

A little further delay before a young man presented himself to us as the town's archivist, apologising profusely for the mix-up, and escorted us to the museum and up two or three flights of stairs, a few members opting for early lunch rather than the climb. We found ourselves in an unusual painted hall but no-one seemed ready, willing or able to tell us about it or anything else.

We decided we must make our exit and find our lunch at the Half Moon, then with most of our group departed, two young ladies entered bearing trays of wine in glasses. We who were left drank gratefully and willingly but made little impression on the trays before we thanked our hostesses and followed the rest of our group to lunch.

The Half Moon was indeed popular, with a wide choice of dishes and one's own appetite set the only limit. Soon we noticed the eager young archivist had rejoined our group and was talking to Peter. In his hands he bore several copies of an attractively produced German edition of *Six Weeks in Heppenheim* which he presented to us. In return we gave him the mounted print of Elizabeth Gaskell which had been intended for the Mayor. The book also tells the history of The Half Moon Inn, the innkeeper and family of Mrs Gaskell's time and her contribution to the history of the wine trade by her careful observation woven into the

story.

The present innkeeper of The Half Moon was also pleased to welcome us, to have our signatures in his visitors' book and to accept our print of Elizabeth Gaskell.

John Chapple later exchanged further information with the archivist, Harald E Jost, and Peter received 'sincerest apologies' from Herr Obermayr, the Mayor, who had been making a long-planned visit to their twin town in the South Tyrol area of Italy 'but would certainly have appointed a deputy to represent me had I known about your visit ... Please accept my thanks for your portrait of Elizabeth Gaskell which has found a place worthy of it in my office'. And so Elizabeth Gaskell returns to Heppenheim.

SUMMER OUTINGS

by Joan Leach

Trip to Pendle and Wycoller

On Sunday 29th June we arrived at Pendle Heritage Centre in time for an excellent value lunch. Gaskell must have known Pendle as *The Heart of John Middleton* is set there, and I am sure the story of the Pendle Witches must have intrigued her. When she started writing her pseudonym was 'Cotton Mather Mills'; the New England theologian Cotton Mather had been involved in the Salem witch trails and may have turned Gaskell thoughts to the theme of *Lois the Witch*.

The Pendle Heritage Centre had exhibitions including one about the witches of c.1612. It also had a pleasant garden and a tithe barn which, among other things, housed two enormous, somnolent, pot-bellied pigs!

We spent the afternoon in Wycoller where the wardens of the country park met us and gave us an illustrated talk, then a walk around the village - a haven of rural peace with a tinkling stream crossed by packhorse and clapper bridges. The rose-covered, stone-built houses had mellow charm but the hollow shell of a large house had an air of mystery and one wondered who had sat around the wide,

open fireplace. Charlotte Brontë portrayed it as Ferndean Manor in *Jane Eyre*. We regretted not having more time to explore the Brontë way.

Trip to Rivington 16th July 1997

"Oh. Rivington is such a very, pretty place, & so thoroughly country", wrote Elizabeth Gaskell in 1838 (GL9)

On that occasion she and Marianne had travelled by train to Bolton, then were met by a gig to take them on to Rivington. 'The next morning a most charming drive, in the evening up the Pike ... Sunday to chapel in the morning, two walks in the afternoon ... Yesterday morning I sketched and Wm came; in the afternoon we both rode on horseback up and down the country - then a walk after tea'. They were visiting the Darbishire family.

On the centenary of Elizabeth's death a Bolton (?) Evening News article claimed that she wrote *Cranford* while staying at Rivington, as a guest of Charles James Darbishire of Vale Bank, who was first mayor of Bolton and brother of Samuel Dukinfield Darbishire, whose uneven relationship with the Gaskells, perhaps partly due to his wife's character, may be deciphered from Gaskell letters.

We were welcomed by the lay leader, Judith Crompton, and members of the chapel congregation to the delightfully situated chapel, built in 1703; the old box pews, the canopied Willoughby family pew and the memorials on the walls all evoked times and people long gone, but are eloquent reminders to the inheritors of the dissenting tradition. We were grateful to Martin Brownlow for preparing an exhibition for us; Judith related the chapel's history and, with her husband Dennis, who is the chapel secretary, entertained us with Gaskell readings.

We enjoyed walking in the garden of remembrance and studying the plants in the physic garden, then exploring the village and tithe barn. It was not difficult to image the Gaskell family enjoying their visits to Rivington.