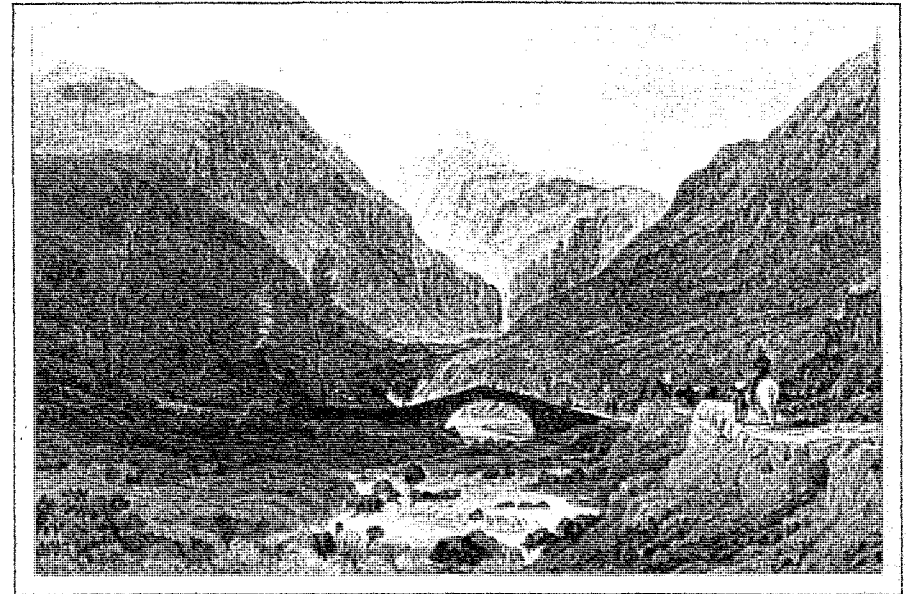


The Gaskell Society



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NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 1998

NO. 26

EDITOR'S LETTER

Firstly we must congratulate our Joint Vice-President, Jenny Uglow on being made a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature and our other Vice-President, Professor Francesco Marroni on being made Dean of the Faculty of Literature and Languages of Pescara University. We hope that our Journal and Newsletters make you feel in touch with our various activities, even if you cannot attend them in person.

Most recently we enjoyed a visit to the Brontë birthplace at Thornton, and Haworth, of which our member Bernard Mayston tells you more in this issue.

Some of us went book-hunting at Hay-on-Wye, enjoying the lovely scenery in Shropshire and being entertained to lunch by member Veronica Thackeray in her charming thatched cottage at Hopton Castle. After an overnight stop in historic Hereford we paused at Clyro to pay tribute to Rev. Francis Kilvert, the lyric diarist.

Members in the North West gather for regular meetings, and there is a report of our monthly meetings in this issue; our London and South East group enjoys four or five meetings a year. We would be pleased to see you at any of these meetings and, of course, our AGM on 10th October, when we will celebrate the 150th anniversary of the publication of *Mary Barton*.

Please make a note in your diary of the dates for our LONDON CONFERENCE, 24th-27th July 1999. The theme will be *Victorian Publishers and Publishing*. See the enclosed form for more details.

Wish us well as some fifty of us make our way to Paris in September to follow Gaskell footsteps, so you may look forward to hearing about this. Au revoir!

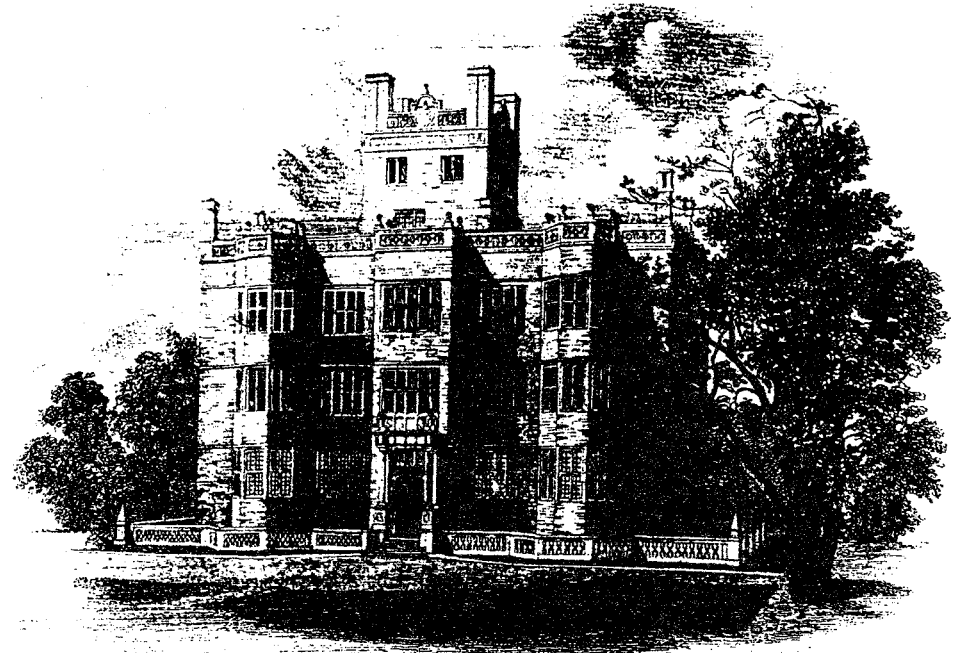
GAWTHORPE HALL AND THE GASKELL CONNECTION

by Heather Sharps

Gaskell Society members may have visited Gawthorpe Hall between April and October 1997 for its Exhibition – ‘A Novel Acquaintance’ – and/or for the associated lectures which linked Sir James and Lady Kay-Shuttleworth and Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell, it being through the Kay-Shuttleworths that Miss Brontë met her future biographer. Prominent members of the Brontë and the Gaskell Societies gave well-received talks on aspects of these relationships: in ‘batting order’ came Mr Dudley Green, Professor John Chapple, Mrs Heather Sharps, Dr Robert Barnard and Mrs Joan Leach. During the Exhibition guided tours occurred every Sunday, supplemented by improvisations in which ‘Charlotte Brontë’, ‘Mrs Gaskell’, and the Kay-Shuttleworths’ took part. Those who enjoyed it will also recall the Society’s successful September 1996 excursion to Gawthorpe.

For putting together the Exhibition at the Hall, thanks are due to Mr David Chadwick (Curator), to Mr Martin Dowland-Robinson (who assisted him), to Mr Mike Hill (Director, Brontë Parsonage Museum), and to his staff, Ms Kathryn White (Librarian) and Mrs Ann Dinsdale (Assistant Librarian). General advice came from representatives of the Brontë and the Gaskell Societies, especially from Mrs Audrey Hall and also from myself. On display were a picture (owned by Lord Shuttleworth) of – as she became – Lady Janet Kay-Shuttleworth and the (National Portrait Gallery) drawings by George Richmond of Charlotte Brontë and of Elizabeth Gaskell; other items included (from the Brontë Parsonage) Charlotte’s hats, shoes, gloves and dresses; and (from the Manchester Museum) Elizabeth Gaskell’s escritoire; and (from my own collection) books by Sir James, notably his novels, Scarsdale and Ribblesdale.

Gawthorpe Hall, with its pleasant grounds and walks, was in 1970 given by the fourth Lord Shuttleworth – whose son, the present Baron, opened the Exhibition – to the National Trust, with a



GAWTHORPE HALL.

long-term maintenance lease to Lancashire County Council. This recently-renovated fine Elizabethan building, which had undergone a major restoration by Sir James Barry in the mid-nineteenth century, has attracted many visitors from home and abroad; it is a powerful reminder of the wealthy and aristocratic environment into which Dr James Kay entered on his marriage to the heiress, Janet Shuttleworth (whose surname was then added to his), and from which he sought to influence the educational, social and political issues of his age. Gaskell and Brontë enthusiasts can see the drawing room where the Kay-Shuttleworths and Charlotte could engage in literary discussion and view other parts (like the newly-renovated kitchen) of a stately home still strongly evocative of

Victorian times and of the lifestyles depicted in Jane Eyre and in various Gaskell fiction.

An impressive exhibition room contains the needlework of, and that collected by, the Hon Rachel Kay-Shuttleworth (a grand-daughter of Sir James), a distinguished and altruistic lady who realised the therapeutic benefits for all classes to be gained from such an art. Displayed, too, are examples of handicrafts from all parts of the world. Surely Elizabeth Gaskell would have admired her independence of mind and spirit as well as her altruism. In addition, one finds a welcome restaurant and shop, situated in the old stable-block. Here may be purchased such publications as the current National Trust Guide (1996), Michael Conroy's updated Backcloth to Gawthorpe (1996) and booklets on Rachel and on her cousin, Angela – women of whom their grandfather would have been proud and of whom Charlotte Brontë and Elizabeth Gaskell would have approved.

For those unfamiliar with the locality, a visit to the Hall will be an event to remember: the house and grounds are open every afternoon (except Mondays and Fridays) 1 pm to 5 pm, from April until the end of September. Gawthorpe, moreover, provides a cultural centre for the area, with its exhibitions of paintings, its musical concerts and its performances of plays (especially Shakespeare's).

* * * * *

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL

Please do not forget that the renewal date for subscriptions is now the first working day of the New Year and NOT 1st SEPTEMBER. At £8.00 per annum or £12.00 (\$20) for overseas and corporate members, this is excellent value.

Reminders will be sent out in early December by our membership secretary.

THOUGHTS ABOUT THE BRONTES

by Bernard C Mayston

I should be interested to know whether Mrs Gaskell ever visited Thornton. It is certainly mentioned in her Life of Charlotte Brontë, where she writes: "altogether not so pleasant a place as Hartshead" ... (and adds) ... "In 1815 he (Patrick Brontë removed to Thornton near Bradford, where his younger children, Charlotte, Patrick, Branwell, Emily, Jane and Anne were born."

In 1817, Patrick wrote in a terrier¹ a description of their birthplace "... this chapel is endowed with a parsonage, consisting of six rooms, three on the ground floor, and three bedchambers, having a stand for a cow and a horse at one end, and a cottage at the other ..."

By 1820 he was the perpetual curate of Howarth.

Barbara Whitehead and I went together to see the Brontë birthplace at Thornton for the first time on Tuesday 29 April 1997 and by Thursday 1 May I was making all sorts of notes about it which I have kept in a file opened on Friday 9 May 1997. I hope the file grows and grows to tell a happy story.

Thornton is a West Yorkshire village perched on a hillside amidst attractive countryside yet but four miles from the centre of Bradford. I had never been to Bradford, so we drove in a huge complicated circle from York to get to our destination. I did not get my first sight of Bradford until we departed Thornton in possession of a detailed route mapped out for us by an obliging butcher from whom we had purchased some sausages. I had thought to ask him what was wrong with Thornton. I wondered whether there was something awful about the house, but fearing we might be warned off, I did not say much.

¹ 'terrier' is a document enumerating boundaries, acreage and the conditions of tenure

Anyway, I wrote after seeing the Brontë birthplace from outside that I could not live there myself but I would love to visit the area for a while. I did add that seeing the inside of the house might make a difference. I even wrote that I had some capital to invest so why not in this? National Savings Bonds are all very cosy and safe but where's the adventure?

Later, I was reading a book containing the poems of the Brontë sisters, one by Charlotte (Stanzas) I quite adored. However, it was a remark about Howarth that really got to me – the dreariness of it etc, the drabness that people sometimes feel in the countryside of North and West Yorkshire, but the utter joy that can be found in heather-clad moors when August arrives and the wondrous colours of late summer are beheld!

Could this be the key to the mystery? It is the contrast between joy and sorrow, the dread mix of it all that alarms and attracts us so! The Brontë story grabs at our heartstrings because of the sheer desperation of it: the flat gravestones, the persistent illnesses, the constant lack of money, the ultimate fear for Patrick that he may die and leave his poor weak children destitute. How does the spark of genius ignite? Ability often lies dormant. It can be argued that we all have it, if only something or someone would set us on fire! Yet it is in truth a golden commodity like the double rainbow that rarely adorns the sky and never in threes. Yet it did happen and it started in Market Street in Thornton.

My dear wife, Kate, had a spark of genius which was ignited by Elizabeth Gaskell about whom she knew so much. Kate had that rare quality of serious scholarship blended with humour. It is revealed in an entertaining talk that she gave to the Gaskell Society in 1991. They did not know that it was the only lecture that she ever gave to anyone, barring the several that she gave to me; and I deserved them all!

When I was asked to write an article for the Newsletter I felt quite flattered since I have never been asked to contribute to a literary magazine. Although determined to produce something, I have to confess to the egoistic sense it produced - I suppose a short of selfishness.

When we get on in years we start to analyse what we have done in life and it sometimes seems not to add up to much. Then, if we count our blessings, it turns out to be a great deal. I suppose I had two achievements in the work sense. One was remarkably easy and the other almost painfully hard. It took me less than a year to become a Sergeant RE (1945/46) and a quarter of a century to become one of HM Inspectors of Taxes (1943/68). If the dates are puzzling I would explain that on leaving school, at sixteen, I started work in the Inland Revenue as a Temporary Clerk Grade III, was called up whilst the war was still on (3 April 1945), whereupon Hitler committed suicide. I was then trained to fight the Japanese who surrendered as I prepared to embark for the Pacific!

Instead I was sent to Egypt, where the most significant thing to happen, undoubtedly the most magical thing in my life, was that I met Kate, later to be my wife, at the Pyramids at Giza just outside Cairo. Believe it or not there was, that night, an eclipse of the moon. Some forty years later we became members of the Gaskell Society, following Kate's 'on location' research of Sylvia's Lovers and some correspondence and meetings with Joan Leach. Since, in the interim, I had, to Kate's delight, been transferred from Bromley in Kent to Middlesbrough in Cleveland, we were by then living in Danby on the North Yorkshire Moors not far from Whitby, the location of the Gaskell novel. We had visited Howarth several times staying once, on a wedding anniversary, at the Black Bull.

Kate was a very methodical person. She was a Sergeant in ATS Signals when 21 and later worked as a Secretary/PA to several successful professional men over the years. If the boss had died she could have done the work herself in half the time.

On our visits to Howarth Kate, as many people do, purchased books and postcards, using the latter as bookmarks in appropriate volumes. She often wrote C Mayston in a book and the date, and sometimes the place of purchase on a postcard. So it is hardly remarkable that I have five postcards purchased at Howarth and dated June 1978.

Three are portraits of the Brontë sisters – Charlotte (by J M Thompson), Emily (by Branwell Brontë) and Anne (by Charlotte Brontë) – also two depicting the Brontë Country, perhaps best described as illustrated maps of the Brontë world. At the very centre is Thornton with a sketch of the house where all four of the famous Brontë children were born. I am pretty sure that we both thought of the map as an easy guide since I have recollections of going round some of the places and passing the house at Thronton, with its butcher's shop-front. It struck me that it would be fun to stay at the house for a week and visit all the Brontë sites depicted on the postcard. Well, wouldn't you like to?

Kate died in April 1995 and I could hear her saying "Go for it!" when the opportunity of buying the Brontë birthplace was drawn to my attention by novelist Barbara Whitehead in 1997.

According to Elizabeth Gaskell, self-development is "unholy" if it is only selfish, but if we can "find out what we are sent into the world to do, and define it and make it clear to ourselves (that's the difficult part)", then it becomes a duty to "forget ourselves in our work".

Whatever am I getting at? Well, at a recent meeting of the Brontë Birthplace Trust with some invited guests Barbara Whitehead gave a little talk about our purchase of the Brontë birthplace. The Trust had tried hard (albeit in vain) to acquire this property after enlisting the aid of MPs (both National and European), Councillors, museums, libraries, foundations and even the National Lottery! Suddenly, because Barbara mentioned that without my help and encouragement her involvement would not have been possible, all eyes were turned toward me. All I could think to say was "'Tis a far better thing I do now than I have ever done!"

Perhaps it is true because by buying these properties we are preserving part of the national heritage. The danger of its being sold in two parts was that it might never be put together again as one house. It is our intention to get back much of the flavour of the Regency days when it was the birthplace of genius, and we are taking the necessary steps in Codicils to our Wills to ensure, as best we can, that our wishes are respected and it always remains as one house.

I started by posing the question as to whether Elizabeth Gaskell visited the parsonage at Thornton. I hope someone will tell me. Perhaps another question can be answered. When was Charlotte Brontë born? Gaskell says 21 April 1816, but this is not always the date given. In a copy of the diary kept by Elizabeth Firth (one of the ladies Patrick Brontë proposed to after the death of his wife) the date is given as Sunday 12 April 1816. I now think this is a misprint. But we do know WHERE she was born – here in Thornton at our house!



(All that remains now is the ornamental top of the tower standing in the old graveyard opposite the present church)

**'CURIOUS, IF TRUE': LE PETIT POUCKET
AND TOM THUMB. A case of mistaken identity?**

by Irene Wiltshire

The Gaskell Society Journal, volume 12, 1998, contains two articles on *Curious, If True* in *Cousin Phillis and Other Tales*, ed A Easson, World's Classics, Oxford, 1981. By chance, I have recently studied this text in preparation for a lecture which I gave in Knutsford as part of the Society's 1997 to 1998 series of Literature and Lunch events. The explanatory notes on page 361 of *Cousin Phillis and Other Tales* include a reference to Iona and Peter Opie, *The Classic Fairy Tales*, 1974.

This book gives interesting and detailed background to the tales and characters represented in *Curious, If True*. One of the most interesting facts to emerge is the clear distinction between *Le petit Poucet* and *Tom Thumb*. *Le petit Poucet* was translated from Perrault's text into English by Robert Samber appearing as *Little Poucet* in 1729. The tale became known as *Little Thumb* in 1764. It was not until the 19th century that it was known as *Hop o' My Thumb*, a title provided by William Godwin. There is no evidence in *The Classic Fairy Tales* to suggest that *Le petit Poucet* ever acquired the title of *Tom Thumb*. In fact Opie states that Little Poucet's story "is not really analogous to that of the British Tom Thumb".

The tale of *Tom Thumb* has quite different origins. Opie states that *Tom Thumb* was first recorded in print in 1621; by a Londoner of the name Richard Johnson. Although *Tom Thumb* has European counterparts, such as *Hop o' My Thumb*, the cultural background and adventures of the two characters are quite different. Tom Thumb lived in the age of King Arthur and was conceived after his mother, at that time barren, had visited Merlin. His very small size led him into a series of adventures that included being swallowed by a red cow, a raven, an ogre and a fish. When the fish was presented to King Arthur's table Tom Thumb was rescued and became a courtier.

The Little Poucet is the youngest of seven children in a poor woodcutter's family. His greater wisdom compensates for his smallness of size. After the children are abandoned by their parents, he finds a variety of means to save his life and the lives of his brothers. After being threatened and pursued by an ogre, Poucet steals the magic "boots of seven leagues" from the sleeping giant.

In his article in *The Gaskell Society Journal*, Dr Stiles says, "Cinderella, Sleeping Beauty, Puss in Boots, Tom Thumb and Beauty and the Beast are there, to name but a few". On page 18 he goes on to say, "So many of the characters in this story are troubled by and unable to escape from the events of their former lives as depicted in the respective fairytales from which they have been taken". Poucet is undoubtedly haunted by events in his former life; he continually touches his throat that was threatened by the ogre and retraces his footsteps as he did when trying to return to the family home in the original tale. But these are the experiences of Poucet and not Tom Thumb.

Dr Kirkland, in her article on page 21 in *The Gaskell Society Journal*, quotes Coral Lansbury who wrote in 1981, referring to *Curious, If True*, that 'a figure of fairy tale himself, dreams of, or perhaps actually attends, a ball where Blue Beard matches wit with Tom Thumb'. But quoting directly from *Curious, If True*, Dr Kirkland writes, on page 22 of *The Gaskell Society Journal*, "Near her is a tiny fellow, 'the least little man I had ever seen' with an elfin look and much-mended boots whom others call Monsieur Poucet". In her following paragraph, top of page 23 in *The Gaskell Society Journal*, Dr Kirkland states that Cinderella, Tom Thumb, and Puss in Boots are the English translations of *Cendrillon*, *Petit Poucet* and *Le Chat Botte*. In *The Classic Fairy Tales*, however, Poucet is not Tom Thumb and in Gaskell's *Curious, If True* the little man, or dwarf, is referred to as Poucet.

In the third paragraph of Dr Kirkland's article, on page 21 of *The Gaskell Society Journal*, quoting from Patsy Stoneman (1987) she

reminds us that Elizabeth Gaskell was familiar with all the standard fairy tale collections. Would "Mistress Gaskell" herself have been aware of the distinction between Tom Thumb and Monsieur Poucet? Given her knowledge of fairy tales, and her customary attention to detail, it is almost certain that she would have been acquainted with the personal history of each of these two characters. Furthermore, it is clear that she chose Poucet and not Tom Thumb for *Curious, If True*.

NOTES

1. *Calvin's Encounter with Cinderella: vital antinomies in Elizabeth Gaskell's 'Curious, If True' (1860)* PETER STILES, in The Gaskell Society Journal, Volume 12, 1998.
2. *'Curious, If True': suggesting more* JANICE KIRKLAND, in The Gaskell Society Journal, Volume 12, 1998.
3. *Curious, If True* in Cousin Phillis and Other Tales, ed A Easson, World's Classics, Oxford 1981.
4. *The Classic Fairy Tales*, Iona and Peter Opie, O.U.P., 1974 and 1992.

* * * * *

THE GASKELL SOCIETY OF JAPAN

The AGM of the Gaskell Society of Japan is on 10th October, the same date as ours in the UK. They are celebrating their 10th anniversary.

Professor Tatsuhiro Ohno will read a paper on Mary Barton, with Mitsuhiro Matsuoka being moderator.

Mitsu is our technical expert, now busy putting Gaskell on to CD-ROM.

BOOK NOTES

by Christine Lingard

Victorian Renovations of the Novel: narrative annexes and the boundaries of representation, by Suzanne Keen, Department of English, Washington and Lee University, Lexington, Virginia. Cambridge University Press. £35
In this extensive study of the social problem novel dealing principally with among others Brontë, Disraeli and Kingsley, there is surprisingly only occasional references to Gaskell, but it does offer a detailed study of the contemporary literary scene and its treatment of various social issues which concerned Gaskell. It deals in particular with contemporary reaction to these works.

The Life of Charlotte Brontë in the Penguin edition continues this publisher's programme of updating its list of Gaskell editions as noted by Shirley Foster in the 1997 volume of *The Gaskell Society Journal*. It is now edited by Elisabeth Jay and replaces the Alan Shelston edition of 1975. In her substantial introduction she makes references to recent biographies by Jenny Uglow, Rebecca Fraser and Lyndall Gordon, and challenges Juliet Barker's understanding of the nature of myth in her controversial biography of Charlotte Brontë. The text is that of the first edition with a few typographical corrections. Changes made for the third edition are included in an appendix.

Some other books to look out for:

Dissembling fictions: Elizabeth Gaskell and the Victorian Social Text by Deirdre D'Albertis. Macmillan, £30.

Metaphors of Change in the Language of Nineteenth Century Fiction by Megan Perigoe Stitt. Scott, £35.

And of historical interest, two biographies of Gaskell friends and contemporaries:

Reverend William Turner: Dissent and Reform in Georgian Newcastle-upon-Tyne by Stephen Harbottle. Northern Universities Press, £20.

(Biography of the Unitarian minister of Newcastle, the close family friend who is described in Ruth)

Barbara Bodichon: a Life by Pamela Hirsch. Chatto, £20. (The nineteenth century feminist and friend of George Eliot whom Gaskell admired but didn't like)

FRENCH TRANSLATIONS OF GASKELL

by Christine Lingard

Two small volumes in the Manchester Central Library show her interest in things French and help put us in the mood for our trip to Paris.

First a tiny volume entitled *Pierre et Pierrette* by Louise Swanton Belloc. The volume is inscribed "humble homage a Madame Gaskell, ou plutot a ses enfants, Louise Sw Belloc".

Louise was an Irish woman married to a French man, and a friend of Maria Edgeworth who had read Mary Barton but was unaware that the author was the cousin of her friend Mary Holland, and encouraged Louise to translate it into French. They evidently struck up a friendship and she presented one of her own books to Mrs Gaskell.

It also includes a French translation of the poem *Casa Bianca!* Much later Louise's son was to marry another friend of Mrs Gaskell, the feminist Bessie Rayner Parkes. Her son was Hilaire Belloc. A second item is Meta's Christmas present to her mother for 1849 a copy in translation of George Sand's *Little Fadette*.¹

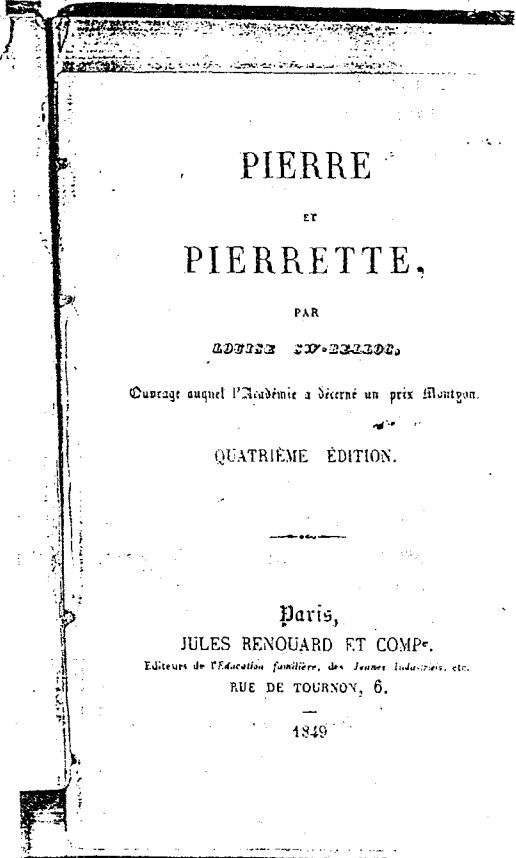
Editor's Note: In November 1855 Mme Mohl wrote to Elizabeth Gaskell:

'I saw Mme Belloc two days ago. She has finished 'Cranford' and is correcting proofs. I wonder whether you will be able to judge which of your works will suit the French. I should think well. They are a queer people and as unlike the English as if they lived at the Antipodes.'¹

Louise Swanton Belloc also translated Maria Edgeworth's works, many of Dickens' novels and *Uncle Tom's Cabin*.

¹ *Letters and Recollections of Julius and Mary Mohl* edited by M C M Simpson 1887

humble hommage à Madame
Gaskell, ou plutôt à ses
enfants.
Louise Sw Belloc.



CROSS STREET CHAPEL

by Joan Leach

Grim and grey Manchester certainly was on the night of Friday 6th March, though not smoky, for a steady rain fell as I made my way to Cross Street Chapel to attend the re-dedication ceremony. However all was bright inside.

Janet Allan and myself, representing the Society, were honoured to be among the invited guests and representatives of other denominations: including the Bishop and Dean of Manchester; the Rev Clifford Reed, President of the General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches; Dr David Wykes, tutor at Harris Manchester College, Oxford and the Rev Leonard Smith, principal of the Unitarian College. The Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Manchester were resplendent in their regalia, and the representative ministers in their various clerical robes added dignity and a fine sense of occasion. I recalled Elizabeth Gaskell's meeting and opinion on the Bishop of her day and felt I was representing her, too, at this occasion, though I would not be admitted to the present Bishop's study to judge him by his pictures! (GL.70)

The Chapel's minister, the Rev John Midgley, welcomed the congregation. Dr Geoffrey Head, Chairman of the Trustees, accepting a symbolic presentation key, spoke of the historic traditions of this city centre chapel, damaged by a Jacobite attack in 1745 and by the 1940 blitz, rebuilt in 1959, and now this latest rebuilding linked the past with the future.

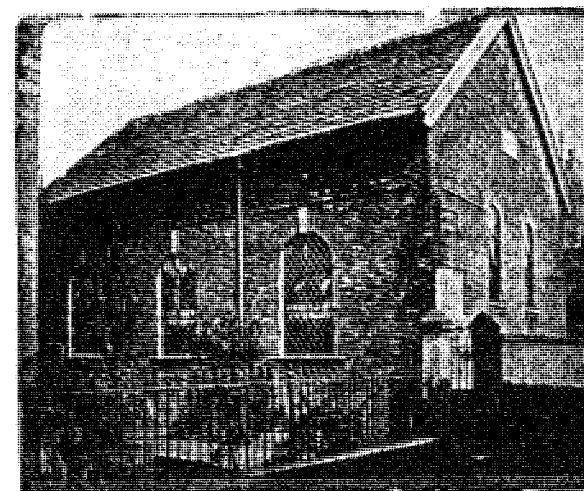
The Rev. Arthur Long in his address reminded the congregation of the celebrated institutions which owed their origin to Cross Street Chapel: Manchester College, Oxford, Unitarian College, the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society and The Manchester Guardian. He spoke of the progress of the congregation through five homes, quoting from Oliver Wendell Holmes' *The Chambered Nautilus*:

*Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll
Leave thy low vaulted past!
Let each new Temple, nobler than the last
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thy outgrown shell by life's unresting sea.*

The Chapel treasures its links with the Gaskells and has included a Gaskell Room in its design, incorporated an earlier memorial in the walls of the vestibule and a plaque on the outside wall.

The whole building is light and airy, with rooms for various uses on two floors. Rents from the offices on floors above will provide an income for the Chapel.

The circular Chapel, with its light woodwork, has excellent acoustics and an air of peace. By ringing the bell outside, visitors will be welcomed during usual office hours to be shown the building or just to enjoy the oasis of calm. There is a half-hour service on Wednesdays at 1 pm.



I thought I had discovered an unknown photograph of a previous Cross Street Chapel, but Geoffrey Head tells me it is almost certainly that of Chapel Road, Sale, which was previously known as Cross Street. He adds: 'The old chapel was built in 1739 and was the place of worship for the Presbyterian/Unitarian congregation until 1876, when a splendid new church was built by Rev J Relly Beard, the friend and contemporary of William Gaskell'; when the former died in the late 1870's his funeral address was given by William Gaskell.

Geoffrey Head adds that he saw the Chapel in the 1960's just before demolition. The site is occupied by three town houses, with the young saplings in this photograph now grown to massive, mature trees.

CIRCULAR NOTES

by Muriel Smith

I came upon the phrase "circular notes" in the new 1997 Mandolin edition by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard of The Letters of Mrs Gaskell. The definition in the OED reads: "a letter of credit addressed by a banker (eg in London) to several bankers in other countries in favour of a certain person named therein, usually a person on a tour". The supporting quotation, dated 1850, is from Thackeray's Kicklebury's: "My lady K. walked over to the money changers, where she changed a couple of circular notes".

In her letter to her publisher George Smith of 4 February 1857 (No.338) Mrs Gaskell says that she is going to Rome and asks him for an advance payment on The Life of Charlotte Brontë: "It would be a very great convenience if you would kindly let me have 250£. It would also be an additional favour if you would obtain 150£ of this for me in Coutts Circular Notes ... The notes I believe can be had of 5£ each, and if so, I should be glad to have them all of that amount." Then on 8 February (No.341) she tells him that Mr Gaskell thinks he can get Circular Notes through his own bank, and next day (No.343) that he is not to worry about the Circular Notes, which can definitely be had locally through Mr Gaskell's bankers, Sir Benjamin Heywood & Co of Manchester.

The OED definition gives the impression of a letter carefully written out by the originating bankers for an individual, but this is clearly misleading. Both Thackeray and Mrs Gaskell made it plain that you obtained a bunch of printed forms in the general style of modern travellers' cheques, and, in proportion to the number of travellers, they would seem to have been in equally general use.

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ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES AGM

by Kenn Oultram

Your committee members, Doreen Pleydell and Christine Lingard, represented the Society at the AGM of the Alliance of Literary Societies in Birmingham on 25th April. Representatives of twenty-three of the seventy-seven affiliated literary societies attended.

There was much discussion on the subject of Public Liability Insurance and the ALS legal adviser, David Leigh-Hunt, said Norwich Union had been approached and their block policy scheme for an overall premium of £2,600 could be managed by Medical Money Management (Manchester), thus releasing the ALS from administrative responsibilities. Working on the assumption that every society participated, the resultant premium would be approximately £35 per annum. The feeling of the meeting was that the scheme should be accepted in principle and that an Extraordinary General Meeting could confirm the arrangement in the near future.

The retiring secretary, Bill Adams (George Eliot Fellowship), became one of five new members to serve on the committee, the others being Linda Hart (Friends of the Dymock Poets), Margaret McCarthy (Edith Nesbit Society), Stephen Loftus (Brontë Society) and Ms M Ayres (Francis Brett Young Society). The new secretary of the ALS is Rosemary Culley, 22 Belmont Grove, Havant, Hampshire PO9 3PU (Tel: 01705 475855) who is membership secretary of the Jane Austen Society.

It is likely that the 1999 AGM will present speakers from the Thomas Lovell Beddoes and the H G Wells Societies, and the fixed date is Saturday 24th April.

Kenn Oultram, who introduced speakers from the Daresbury and London-based Lewis Carroll Societies in this centenary year of Carroll's death, again produced and edited the ALS fanzine 'Chapter One' and this was circulated at the above meeting. In it he carries news of a new literary society to Adrian Bell (1901-1980), the father of the Tatton Member of Parliament Mr Martin Bell, who commented: "After the last war my father received letters from soldiers who had read his books while waiting for battle to say they had been comforted by his word-pictures of a world at peace. I have addressed the Suffolk Book League about his work and was

astonished to see an audience of more than two hundred!". The MP did, of course, address members of our own Society in Knutsford on 17th January. Finally: Congratulations to our member, Olive Ambrose, whose dedicated work for the Romany Society has resulted in her becoming the Society's first Member of the Year. She received a sculpture of the head of Comma, the horse which faithfully drew the caravan of the celebrated nature writer and broadcaster ... and so called because it rarely came to a full stop!

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THE GASKELL SOCIETY'S MONTHLY MEETINGS

For those members living within a travelling distance of Knutsford (we have people travelling from as far as Clitheroe and Liverpool) we recommend our monthly Monday meetings held between October and May inclusive. Attendances are regularly between thirty and forty people, all of whom have a desire to extend their knowledge of Gaskell writings. At these meetings friendships are strengthened and newcomers are warmly welcomed.

After a very pleasant lunch we are treated by Irene Wiltshire MA to a detailed and well-researched paper which raises points for discussion. This season we have studied the World's Classics edition of Cousin Phillis and Other Tales. We have enjoyed being led by Irene in the discussion of themes, characters, narrative style and the use of language and setting in such a diverse selection of short stories.

Next season we will be looking at The Letters of Mrs Gaskell edited by J A V Chapple and Arthur Pollard. Join us if you can for what should be quite a challenging and wide ranging theme.

Irene Hassall (Bolton)
Hilda Holmes (Hazel Grove)

LONDON AND SOUTH EAST GROUP

Members living within reach of London continue to meet four times each year in central London. So far during 1998, two meetings have been held at the Francis Holland School, near Sloane Square, where Jane Wilson was previously deputy head. At the first Howard F Gregg spoke about 'Lois the Witch' and at the second Siv Jansson spoke on 'Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot: Re-evaluating the Victorian Mother'.

Professor Andrew Sanders will address the next meeting which is to be held on Saturday, 12th September, in room 10 at Friends House, Euston Road, London NW1 2BJ commencing at 2 pm. His subject is "Gaskell's Serials – Working with Dickens". Friends House is immediately opposite Euston Station. Please enter through the garden at the side of the building.

The final meeting for 1998 will be held at 2 pm on Saturday, 7th November, at the Francis Holland School with Muriel Easter and Alice Reddihough as speakers on the subject "Writing the Life of a Friend: Mrs Gaskell's Life of Charlotte Brontë.

All are welcome and further details may be obtained from Dudley J Barlow, 44 Seymour Road, London SW18 5JA (tel: 0181 874 7727).