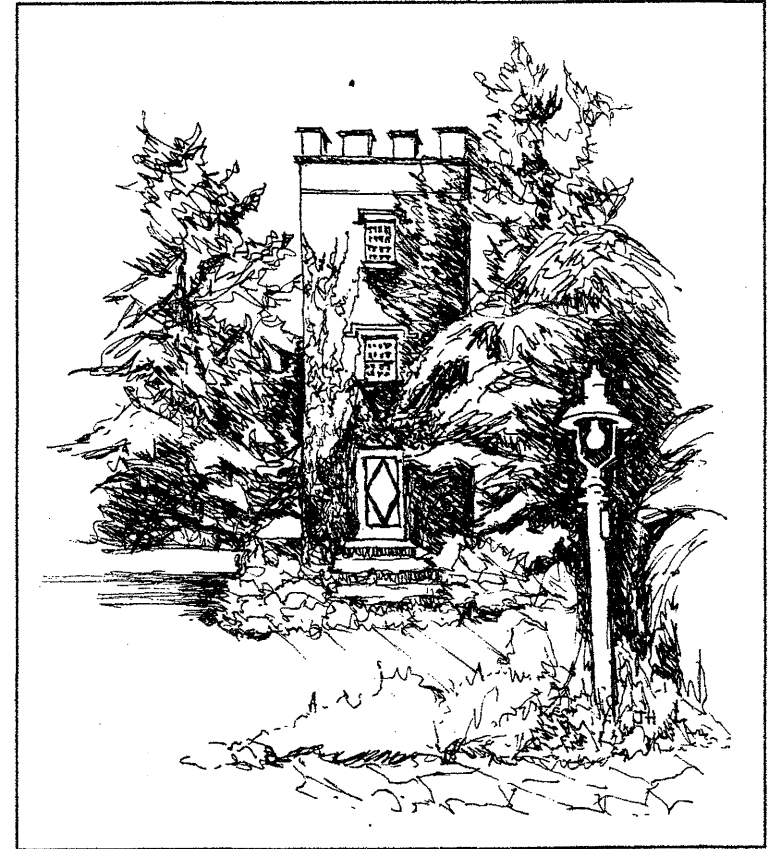


The Gaskell Society



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NEWSLETTER

FEBRUARY 2000

NO.29

Editor's Letter

I do hope you have enjoyed basking in the reflected glory of being a Gaskell aficionado when so many, according to the media, had not discovered or appreciated Elizabeth Gaskell until BBC introduced them. Those of us who were enlisted to take part in the Omnibus programme shown on 29th November 1999 felt very conscious of our responsibilities in representing the Society. You can read about our adventures in the diary written by Jean Hockenhull, whose drawings captured the scenes, and Sheila Stephenson.

The BBC four-part adaptation of *Wives and Daughters* was well received and inspired people to read the book as Penguin/BBC books sold more than 35,000 copies during the showing. In this Newsletter you can read how Andrew Davies set about his work as an adapter from page to screen. All this media attention kept us busy in many ways: taking part in local radio and TV programmes, supplying journalists with information - which can be a thankless task as seven or eight of us gave up most of one day to a Daily Mail writer but no apology or explanation was made for the article not appearing. We have been requested to supply speakers and have enrolled new members, who we hope will enjoy sharing our various activities.

Regular meetings are held in Knutsford, Manchester (Cross Street Chapel), London (Francis Holland School, Chelsea) and Bath (Royal Literary and Scientific Institute, Queen Square). Details of meetings can be found elsewhere in this issue, with contact addresses. If you are unable to attend at these venues you might think of forming a branch in your area; we could assist in various ways.

The Gaskell/ Fergusson Letters have now been deposited in John Rylands Library, Deansgate, Manchester. You can read how member Dr. Jean Lindsay has discovered some details about Barbara Fergusson's later life. On 2nd February the Brunel University at Uxbridge will have an official opening of their new Arts Faculty which they have named The Gaskell Building. As part of the ceremony there will be the unveiling of a new portrait of Elizabeth Gaskell by Alan Bennett. The Society will be represented by our Chairwoman, Janet Allan. We hope to have postcards of the portrait.

Adapting Wives and Daughters

by Andrew Davies

It was a few years ago, after the successful BBC adaptations of *Middlemarch* and *Pride and Prejudice*, that Joan Leach wrote to me from the Gaskell Society, gently suggesting that there were other authors besides Jane Austen that might well deserve a television outing, and she asked if I had ever read *Wives and Daughters*. I hadn't; and I didn't rush to read it, not immediately, that is.

I had read bits of *Cranford* at School, and heard bits of it on the radio (in the sixties, I think) and while I liked the gentle humour and the sharp little insights, it didn't seem quite meaty enough for prime-time viewing, and it didn't seem quite me, either, somehow. I had also read and indeed taught *North and South*, and while I admired it for its vigour and originality, I had never cared for it all that much. A bit too meaty in some way, unsubtle, "on the nose", plot-driven rather than character-driven, that's what I felt, wrongly no doubt, there it was.

So *Wives and Daughters* came as a complete revelation – it reminded me of George Eliot at her very best, and least tendentious. And like most other readers of the book, I fell in love with Molly pretty well straight away. Very difficult to stand back and see Molly as a literary artefact – I felt about her as a real person, cared about her, wanted to protect her, longed for her happiness in a thoroughly soppy way. And this kind of passionate identification with a leading character is a reliable indicator that the book will work as a television serial – the audience will feel passionately involved and engaged as well (so long as you get the right actress in the part!)

Various BBC executives were becoming aware of *Wives and Daughters* (though I'm pretty sure none of them went to the length of actually reading it). One, who shall be nameless, asked Sue Birtwistle if she thought it could be "done" in two hours. She passed this enquiry on to me; and we agreed that the shortest screen version we could imagine would be four hours long, and even that might not be enough to do anything like justice to Gaskell. (And so it turned out.)

People often ask me how I start one of these big adaptations. The first thing I do is find out if Cover to Cover have taped the complete work – it

has to be unabridged, of course. I much prefer being read to than reading the book myself, especially when Prunella Scales is doing the reading. I loaded up the cassettes, and went for some really long drives in the car, playing the book over and over until I had learnt not only the story but Gaskell's rhythms and speech habits. Then, back home, I went through the book clinically and made a rough decision on where to end each episode. Then I wrote a first draft of Episode One. My first attempt tried to get to the revelation of Osborne's secret marriage in fifty minutes, using it as the denouement of Episode One. It didn't work. The story was all there and it fairly zipped along – but it didn't feel like *Wives and Daughters*, somehow. Together we decided (Sue Birtwistle, Susie Conklin the script editor, and I) that we needed more time to let the characters develop gradually. At one stage Episode One looked like being 90 minutes, but we finally settled on 75, and the BBC agreed. And after three or four drafts, we had something we all felt pretty happy about (it was to go through four or five more drafts in fact) and I went on to write the other three episodes.

We all felt enormously engaged and gripped by the project all the time, and all of us felt that the book spoke directly to us and informed our own experience. We had endless conversations about Mrs Hamley, for example. Sue Birtwistle saw her a moving example of a woman who has sacrificed herself through her love for her husband, subduing her own interests, "killing herself" as Molly so memorably refuses to do. I found myself reacting very strongly against this, seeing a lot of my own mother in her: a woman who has not enough to do, and who puts too heavy an emotional load on to her sons. "Osborne is Mrs Hamley's piece of work" as my own wife grimly remarked.

Osborne, too, engaged a lot of our attention, largely because we all felt he didn't quite work as a character in the book. On first encountering him, I thought "My God, this is the first honest portrait of a gay character in C19 fiction!" – and I was most disappointed (and never wholly convinced) to discover that he was not only "straight", but a husband and father. Was his marriage an act of conscious or unconscious rebellion against his mother, or had she so weakened his sense of his own manhood that he could only contemplate sexual relations with a social inferior (as in *She Stoops to Conquer*)? It could hardly be an expression of the Romantic spirit pure and simple, or he would have taken pleasure in confronting his father with it, I felt. His quarrels with his father are upsetting, vivid, moving, but frustrating at the same time because he never comes out with the truth. We

soon realised that our arguments about the characters were as often as not arguments about ourselves as sons and daughters, as fathers and mothers, as family members who at different times have sought or evaded confrontation. The thing about Gaskell is that again and again she makes you feel, or remember, what it really means to be alive in the world, to be part of the family, to struggle to live the life that is in us.

Whatever our private thoughts about Osborne, we determined to go for the Romantic interpretation. Whether his poetry was good or bad, our Osborne followed his heart in life. He loved his father and couldn't bear to upset him – and to make this easier to understand, I strengthened the Squire's abhorrence of the French: "French maid? I'd sooner keep snakes in the house!" and so on. But the best thing we did was to include some scenes not in the book, showing Osborne with his young wife – there were hardly any lines in them, but there was no doubt about the passion, tenderness and maturity of their love for each other, and any lingering doubts about Osborne's sexual preferences were banished. Tom Hollander's intense, deeply felt performance was one of the best things in the production for me.

Another area that provoked a lot of discussion and difference was (for me) the most important relationship in the book, Molly's relationship with her father. I tended to take a pretty simple view of this: Molly had been deeply and properly loved by both parents as an infant, thus making her a healthy character who feels worthy of love, even when she doesn't seem to be getting much of it. Her father is strict, can be crusty, and sometimes makes bad decisions, but there's never any doubt in her mind about how much he loves her and values her – fundamentally it's a relationship without problems. (Obviously there's an element of rose-coloured specs in this interpretation, possibly related to my view of my relationship with my own daughter.) All the women involved in the production, including Justine Waddell, I believe, saw the relationship as much more problematic, the age-old struggle of the girl/woman to break free of the father who loves but constricts, and who uses the weapon of withholding his love in order to secure desired behaviours. (I never felt myself that Mr Gibson does that.) Here again, we were bringing all of ourselves to the book, and learning not only from Gaskell but from our arguments. And as draft followed draft, with input from Nick Renton the director, Jenny Uglow the literary and historical adviser, and Jane Tranter the executive producer, we came to something like an agreed view of Molly and her Dad.

But we did very little tinkering with the book – there was no need to. Gaskell's dialogue plays beautifully, sounding in period and modern at the same time – the Observer reviewer picked out some examples of "too-modern" dialogue that made her "blanch" – they happened to be taken directly from the book.

Cynthia is an extraordinarily modern character, with her wry insouciance, and self-knowledge. And what I think is so remarkable is that Gaskell treats her with such insight and sympathy – one can readily imagine how George Eliot would deal with such a character – poor Cynthia would get a fearful drubbing. Yet Gaskell makes us feel her charm, and more than that, feel her inner desperation, her vulnerability and neediness ... this was the part that most actresses wanted to play, rather than Molly. Goodness is far more difficult, of course, in performance as in life.

Preston, too, could have been a jolly good stage villain, but again Gaskell chose to do something far more interesting create a fully rounded character. He has great ability, and a keen sense of how social inferiority makes him a servant to genial but stupid Lord Cumnor, and makes him suffer the contempt of his intellectual equal Lady Harriet. She makes us feel his sexual power – like Cynthia, he can have almost anyone he wants. But his love for Cynthia turns into sexual obsession, and he becomes a stalker – how modern that seems! But he is a stalker with a conscience, in the end, and whether through Molly's goodness, or through her threat to tell Lady Harriet, or through his own better nature, he is unable to follow through his unworthy intentions towards Cynthia. What will become of him, as he rides away, straight-backed but desperately wounded in his heart? I imagine that he will have other women, will in the end marry another woman, and make her life hell because she isn't Cynthia.

I hope that Gaskell Society members found the ending acceptable. The proposal scene – two lovers six feet apart in the pouring rain – was one of the few bits that was all mine. And before you ask – the African trousers weren't my idea.

Who was Miss Fergusson?

by Jean Lindsay

The editor's letter in *Newsletter No 28*, August 1999, gave the important information that the Gaskell Society had bought a collection of letters written by Elizabeth Gaskell, found in Scotland, by chance, by Robert Craig of Knutsford, and that six of them were written to Miss Fergusson, nurse and later governess to the Gaskell family, between 1845 and 1848. The letters are to be deposited in John Rylands Library, Manchester, but meanwhile questions, such as the one in my title, have arisen.

Joan Leach, the editor of *Newsletter*, wrote to me asking, as I live near Edinburgh, whether I could find out any more details about Miss Fergusson. Joan provided me with the fact that Miss Fergusson had married the Rev Walter Ross Macleod, a minister of the Free Church of Scotland, and that they had lived at 4 Eyre Place, Edinburgh, from about 1855 to 1862, when he might have died. Later, his widow lived at 3 Dundonald Street, Edinburgh, probably about 1891.

Members of the Gaskell Society know, of course, that in July 1845 Miss Fergusson went with Elizabeth and William Gaskell to Ffestiniog in Merioneth as nurse to the two children, Marianne, 10 years old and Willie, 9 months old. After Marianne had recovered from scarlet fever, the household moved to Portmadoc with its sea breezes, but baby Willie caught scarlet fever and died there on 10 August.¹ This tragedy propelled Elizabeth Gaskell to write *Mary Barton* (1848), but despite immersing herself in her writing, she always cared intensely about the welfare of her children. By 1847, two of the four daughters, Marianne, 13 years old and Meta, 10 years old, were receiving lessons from Miss Fergusson, promoted from nurse to governess, but Elizabeth Gaskell concluded that the governess, her 'dear household friend', could not teach and discipline them properly. Miss Fergusson and Elizabeth Gaskell therefore parted amicably and more specialist teachers were brought in for the young girls.²

Elizabeth Gaskell was still in touch with Miss Fergusson in 1848 by letter, but what then? The Edinburgh Room in Central Library, Edinburgh, provided access to the annual *Edinburgh and Leith Post Office Directory* for the years 1854 to 1863. The Rev Walter Ross Macleod was listed only in the year 1861 to 1862, in the street directory, with the address 4 Eyre Place. He was described as a minister of the Free Church but was not

included in any of the lists of ministers and their churches for the years mentioned.

The Annals of the Free Church of Scotland 1843-1900 Vol 1, edited by the Rev William Ewing (1914) gives brief biographies of ministers and missionaries, but there was no record of the Rev Walter Ross Macleod. In the Census of 1861, the Macleods were living at 4 Eyre Place. Walter was head of the household, married, aged 35, and a minister of the Free Church of Scotland. He was born in Coupar, Angus. Barbara, his wife, aged 38, was born in Edinburgh. The household included 10 boarders, of which there were 3 pairs of brothers, all with Scottish surnames, all young scholars and unmarried. They were from a wide geographical area, namely:

Gampbell Mackinnon, 18, born in Clarendon, Jamaica
Dugald Gilchrist, 17, born in Sutherland
John R Gilchrist, 15, born in Sutherland
James W Brodie, 16, born in East Lothian
Philip Fraser, 15, born in Culcutta, India
James Rossack, 16, born in St Georges, Jamaica
David Rossack, 15, born in St Georges, Jamaica
James Kennedy, 10, born in Manchester, England
Thomas Mackintosh, 13, born in Dutch Guyana
Louis Mackintosh, 12, born in Dutch Guyana

The 3 Scottish domestic servants were unmarried and were:

Eliza Donaldson, 23, cook, born in Wick, Caithness
Ann Galloway, 21, housemaid, born in Fordell, Fife
Julia Fraser, 17, tablemaid, born in Edinburgh

There were no children of the Macleods.

The boarders were perhaps the sons of ministers or missionaries who wished their sons to be educated in one of the numerous private day schools in Edinburgh.

The Macleods were not at 4 Eyre Place in the 1871 Census, but New Register House, Edinburgh, provided information about the death of Walter Ross Macleod which occurred on 20 October 1865, when he was 38 years old. He was described as a minister of the Free Church and was married to Barbara Macleod whose maiden surname was Fergusson. His father was Alexander Macleod, deceased, and his mother was Catherine Macleod, maiden surname Rose. The cause of death was phthisis

pulmalis, or pulmonary tuberculosis, of 'several years, certainly 6'. Helen Macleod, his sister-in-law, gave this information.

There was no notice or record of his death in the two daily newspapers, the *Scotsman* and the *Edinburgh Evening Courant*. The fact that Walter had been ill for so long from a wasting disease, probably explains why he was not attached to any church. The boarders might have provided their main income and Barbara must have had a difficult task to organise the large boarding establishment.

The Census of 1891 revealed that Barbara Macleod was then living at 3 Dundonald Street. She was head of the household and was a widow, aged 68. She was described as an annuitant, ie in receipt of an annuity. Her twin brother, Charles Fergusson, aged 68, was unmarried and was living with her. He was described as an agent for a slate quarry. They had one unmarried servant, aged 17, Margaret Harker, who was born in Glen Shee, Perthshire.

Miss Fergusson must have been 22 years old when she was the children's nurse in 1845. We don't know how the death of Willie affected her; but her life seems to have been one of gentility and respectability, living as she did in tenements in Eyre Place and in Dundonald Street, in the Northern New Town of Edinburgh, the 'largest single scheme in the development of Georgian Edinburgh'.³ However, there are large gaps in this account, so her life might well have been always one of struggle against adversity.

Notes

1 Jenny Uglow, *Elizabeth Gaskell*, (1994), p 152

2 *Ibid*, p 157

3 John Gifford, Colin McWilliam and David Walker (editors), *The Buildings of Scotland. Edinburgh* (1984), p. 45

The newly discovered letters are to be included in a supplementary volume to *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (1966), edited by Arthur Pollard and J A V Chapple, which is to be edited by J A V Chapple and Alan Shelston

Editor's Note: Other letters found with the Gaskell/Fergusson collection show that Mrs Macleod lived at 2 Osborne Terrace, Oxton (on the Wirral) probably from c1875-1885. Unfortunately she does not seem to have been at home on the night of the 1881 census so we cannot add more details. Her brother, Charles seems to have had quarrying interests at Red Wharf Bay, Pentreath, on Anglesey.

Omnibus – A Diary of our Days on Location

by Jean Hockenhull and Sheila Stephenson

Our adventures began at 7.30 am on a Wednesday morning in July. We boarded our coach wondering what was in store for us. We were soon to find out. We arrived outside John Rylands Library in Manchester to be greeted by Tim Dunn our producer, his assistant Debbie Lee, a camera crew, sound engineer and a battery of equipment and cables. We were to be filmed arriving at the library and were requested to proceed through the doors and up the stairs in single file, a request that was to become an all too familiar call "Can you do that again please, remember your places in the line".

The interior of the library with its high Victorian architecture and furnishings provided an appropriate and very impressive setting in which to begin the film. We were joined here by Alan Shelston who shared with us the special privilege of being able to examine Mrs Gaskell's notebooks and letters, and of course we were particularly interested in the *Wives and Daughters* notebooks. After filming some of our discussions we left the library and made our way to Cross Street Chapel and lunch from the nearby Pret-a-Manger. And here a word of praise for Debbie, whose job it was to make sure that we were all in the right place at the right time and that things were running smoothly, a difficult job that she did with unfailing cheerfulness. Added to this she was always on hand to revive flagging spirits by seeming to conjure trays of coffee and cakes out of thin air while we waited for the crew to plan and discuss the filming.

At Chapel Street we were filmed admiring the splendid portrait of William Gaskell and listening to Rev John Midgeley the present minister talking about Mr Gaskell's long involvement with the Chapel. This was one of the scenes that, sadly, had to be left out of the final film.

Next it was on to Plymouth Grove, an important place in the Gaskell Story, as the family lived here from 1849 until it was sold in 1913 after Meta's death. Here, Janet Allen and those members who are interested in promoting and protecting the interests of the Gaskell Society in the property were filmed guiding us round the house and grounds. Hopefully, the screening of *Wives and Daughters* will generate the interest and funding to secure its future.

The last location of the day was a far cry from the elegance of the John Rylands Library and the drawing room of Plymouth Grove. We arrived in the centre of Manchester to be joined by Terry Wyke who was to guide us on our *Mary Barton* location. Terry is an old friend of the Gaskell Society and an expert in both the industrial archaeology of Victorian Manchester and Mrs Gaskell's Manchester novels. We were led along the towpath of the Rochdale Canal, which at one point disappears beneath the main roads around Piccadilly Station. This was an experience not to be forgotten as these very seedy underground towpaths and crofts are the haunt for all sorts of unsavoury characters and goings on that the "prim and provincial ladies of the Gaskell Society" (Reviewer, Times) would not wish to know about. But, unheeding of one or two amusing but unprintable remarks from onlookers we made our way, still in our lines, through the tunnel. Not many photo opportunities here, but we eventually emerged into the late evening sunshine and carefully filed across the lock gates to a landing stage where Terry pointed out some of the remaining features of Manchester's industrial past and we were able to appreciate the cost in human terms of the city's economic growth with the expansion of the cotton industry in the time of *Mary Barton* and *North and South*, and to understand the effect of the depression on the unemployed Davenport family as they turned to radicalism in their plight.

We had much to reflect upon as we made our way back to Knutsford, feeling in Mrs Gaskell's words "Quite knocked up by it all" after our first day's filming.

Not quite such an early start next day as we began filming at the 300 year-old Brook Street Chapel. Tim, Debbie and the crew had been hard at work for several hours, and the peace and quiet of the lovely old chapel was temporarily disrupted by the cameras, cables and lighting equipment that invariably accompanied us all. Alan Shelston joined us again as we climbed up to the gallery to survey the church, hardly altered since Mrs Gaskell described it in *Ruth* and talked about the importance of the Unitarian faith to her and its influence on her writing. We finished the session with a visit to the family grave where Joan read a moving letter from Charles Eliot Norton that the family had received after Elizabeth's death. Here again, most of the scene had to be left out except for the shot of the grave which ends the film.

It was 3 o'clock by this time and after lunch we gathered at the Royal George in Knutsford, another building that would have been very familiar to Elizabeth and one that was depicted in several of her novels. The *Cranford* ladies met here and Roger Hamley set off on his travels by the stagecoach which stopped here. Mary Higginson, who is one of our founder members, and whom many of you will know, joined us in the assembly room, largely unchanged since Gaskell days, and reminisced about the dinner and ball that was held here in 1960 to commemorate the 150th anniversary of Elizabeth Gaskell's birth. Sadly, this was not included in the programme except for a small shot showing us walking past the Gaskell Memorial heading for the George. Walking in single file was the only option here, which made us aware of the problems of filming along a very busy thoroughfare as the cameraman tried to film from the other side of the road.

The filming in Knutsford finished with a walk down Gaskell Avenue past the house where Elizabeth was brought up by Aunt Hannah Lumb and of which she had such fond memories.

Unbelievably, it was 9 pm by now and we were all more than ready to call it a day and enjoy a short rest before our next assignment.

On Friday 16th July, we travelled by coach to North Wales. It was a lovely summer morning and the Welsh countryside looked at its best. We



From the terrace at Plas
Pannhyn towards Portmeau

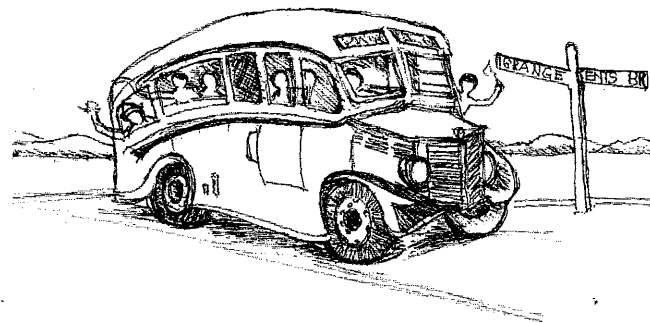
stopped for coffee in Caernarvon alongside the magnificent castle and from there proceeded to Port Madoc and Plas Penrhyn, the former home of Samuel Holland, Elizabeth's cousin, which stands on a hillside not far from the town. The view from the terrace across the estuary to the distant mountains was breathtaking and one could understand why Elizabeth had loved this area so deeply. As a young woman she had spent many happy holidays with the Holland family at Plas Penrhyn and it was no surprise when she chose to go there for part of her honeymoon.

After a good deal of walking in 'Indian file' along the terrace and being filmed by the crew from the garden below the house, we returned to the coach which took us to the railway station in Port Madoc where we boarded the train which would take us to Blaenau Ffestiniog. A carriage had been reserved for us and as we settled in our Victorian style surroundings Debbie, the team member who looked after all our needs, distributed the carriers containing our packed lunch. Silence reigned as we munched our way through sandwiches, crisps and cake, washed down with a carton of cordial. Then a shrill whistle pierced the air, doors were slammed and we were off, chugging along at a civilised pace towards the wooded hillside. The producer and the film crew joined us at the first stop and after that some of us were quite busy being interviewed. As the train climbed higher we looked down on the area where Samuel Holland had some of his works which dealt with the slate blasted from the nearby quarries. Eventually we alighted from the train at the terminus in Blaenau Ffestiniog, but did not stay long in this grim, blue-grey town before boarding our coach, which had travelled by road to meet us, for the journey back to Port Madoc.

After refreshments in the station, more acceptable than a walk around the town in the persistent drizzle which had set in, cars took us up to Garth Terrace where we were met by Dewi Williams, a local historian, and taken to the house where Willy Gaskell, Elizabeth and William's beloved infant son died on 10th August 1845, succumbing to an attack of scarlet fever. The present occupant, Mr Jones, had only learnt a week prior to our visit of the connection with Mrs Gaskell and the likelihood of his being interviewed for the BBC, but he received us with equanimity and chatted pleasantly about the past event, seemingly not at all put out by the scene having to be repeated and filmed four times. Our little group was well used to the procedure by that time!

Back in the town centre we boarded our coach, thankful to be able to rest for an hour or two. Driving along with the countryside on our right and the sea on our left, some of us thought about the strong emotional ties Mrs Gaskell had had with this part of Wales, how its wild beauty, its folklore, had aroused strong passions within her which gained expression in her short stories.

During the afternoon of 18th July, our group assembled in Knutsford, refreshed after a day and a half's break from filming. We were taken by coach to Grange-over-Sands where rooms had been reserved for us at the Cumbria Grand Hotel. We were re-united with Tim our producer, Debbie and the film crew during the evening. The following morning a cream and maroon charabanc rolled up to the main door of the hotel, causing much excitement among ourselves and the other guests. We learnt that Tim had hired this from a firm in Shropshire to transport us during the day and take us back to Knutsford at the end of the evening.



After many photographs had been taken, we set off in grand style to Kents Bank Station where we were met by Cedric Robinson, the Queen's Guide

across the Sands of Morecambe Bay. A "conveyance" drawn by tractor took most of us out into the middle of the bay whilst the hardier and more active members of the group made the journey on foot. Under magnificent skies and surrounded by a vast expanse of sand we listened to Geoffrey Sharps reading from *The Sexton's Hero*. Standing there with your feet gradually sinking in the sand and pools of water welling up around your ankles, the wind tearing at your clothes and blowing through your hair, watching the clouds scudding across the sky to mass in great banks pregnant with rain, wondering if that silver line in the distance was the first sign of the incoming tide, it was easy to imagine the scene in the story being related to us. It was good to clamber up on our vehicle and, as we neared the store, watch Cedric gathering a bunch of samphire which he

would later cook for his lunch. He explained how to prepare it and it sounded delicious.

We returned to the bus and our sandwiches and crisps. During the afternoon we drove to Silverdale, a place much loved by the Gaskell family. As we arrived at Tower House it started to rain and turn much colder. The tea and biscuits offered by Mrs Sharp who owned the house were very welcome. We were interested in Lindeth Tower (our cover picture), situated in the garden. This three-storey building was erected for Hesketh Fleetwood early in the 19th century. Mrs Gaskell was a regular visitor and wrote much of her work in the rooms there whilst the rest of her family were enjoying holiday pursuits. The group climbed up to the castellated roof from which there is a magnificent view. They spent an hour or so filming and discussing the Tower and its place in Elizabeth Gaskell's life. There was more filming in the beautiful garden, and finally a group photograph was taken.

Our programme had overrun its time, the rain had started again, we were cold and hungry as we boarded the bus. When we got on the M6 we discovered a corner of the roof at the rear of the bus was leaking, steady drips going down one's neck! What bliss it was to stop for a meal (albeit a hurried one) before completing our journey. The bus caused quite a stir on the motorway, people waved and honked their horns. It quite cheered us all up.

We didn't meet up with our producer and his team again until 26th July, when we completed our filming in England. This final spell of work was done in the village of Holybourne in Hampshire to which we travelled by coach. A year or two before her death, Elizabeth Gaskell had purchased a property in the village with the hope that she would be able to persuade her husband to retire from what she considered his very hard and demanding work in Manchester in order to enjoy a more leisurely lifestyle in his later years. Her daughters were aware of the scheme and had helped their mother prepare the house.

We had coffee in an old inn in the village before walking to the house, which is known as "The Lawn" and is now a very well appointed home for the elderly. One of the residents, 91 years old Miss Lewis, had interested herself in Mrs Gaskell with relation to her time as owner of the property and had indeed written an account of this. She was pleased to join in the

filming and told us how Mrs Gaskell, having attended afternoon service at the local church, came home and died suddenly whilst drinking a cup of tea. Miss Lewis was very concerned about the consequences of collapsing whilst drinking a cup of tea and the ensuing damage to persons and property. Before leaving Holybourne the group visited the church, a pleasant grey stone structure in the Victorian style.



The highlight of our journeys was the visit to Rome in September. We descended from the plane at Rome airport into the warm September sunshine (wearing the same clothes we had worn to explore the underground canal in Manchester, for reasons of continuity, we were told!). We were met by James Walker, the BBC's 'fixer' in Rome, who was to escort us in his minibus around the city. Our hotel was on the outskirts of Rome and overlooked the River Tiber. After settling in, we had a short walk to a nearby trattoria and, judging by the crowded tables, obviously a very popular place. However, a table had been booked for us and we were joined by Professor Marroni and Maria Concetta Constantini from Pescara University who were to accompany us the next day.

Next morning, refreshed and keen to make the most of our brief visit, we had an early breakfast in the rooftop café with its panoramic views of Rome in the early morning light, and we all felt something of the pleasure and excitement that Elizabeth felt when she spoke so feelingly of "Those charming Roman days". She was far away from cold and grimy Manchester and the stress of finishing the biography of her friend

Charlotte Brontë, and as yet unaware of the gathering storm that was to follow the publication of the book.

As this was our only full day in Rome, we had a busy schedule and were quickly on our way to the area where the Gaskells stayed with their friends the Wetmore Storys who had rented a balcony on the Via Corso to watch the Mardi Gras procession. The Goethe Museum was such a house, and we all in turn went out onto the small balcony to try to visualise the moment when Elizabeth caught sight of Charles Eliot Norton and dangled a stick of confetti over the balcony to attract his attention – a scene that she was to recall so vividly and talk about in such emotional terms. Joan was filmed (several times) coming in from the balcony and joining the rest of us as we speculated about Elizabeth and Eliot Norton's friendship, and how important their days in Rome were to them both.

Later, we were treated to an excellent lunch at a pavement café in the shadow of the Pantheon, no less, and were to be filmed sitting at our tables chatting about Rome, Elizabeth Gaskell and romance whilst eating delicious Italian ice creams. There was much curiosity from the other diners (you're making a film about Mrs who?) and amusement as they watched our ice creams slowly melting in the sunshine as we waited for the camera crew to get round to our table.

Lunch over and a brief pause for postcard buying and photography, and we were on our way through the crowded Sunday afternoon streets, pausing briefly for a quick look at Trajan's Column, but moving swiftly on as it played no part in our story. And then, rounding a corner, we were suddenly in the small square dominated by the famous Trevi fountain. It isn't recorded that Elizabeth ever visited the fountain, but we thought that maybe she did and threw her coin in, in the hope that she would return one day. However, we were taking no chances and, as you can see from the film, we were all eager to toss in our coins (sorry! The BBC's coins, supplied by Debbie) and make our wish that perhaps, maybe ... But no time to linger as we had to be on our way to the last location.

Charles Eliot Norton had lodgings in the district around the Piazza del Spagna which was a favourite haunt of poets, sculptors and painters, who gathered on the Spanish steps to socialise. The Story's house was also in this area, and it was the view from their window that was to become such a treasured memory to Elizabeth for the rest of her life. It seemed

appropriate that we should end our visit by resting on the steps surrounded by such beautiful architecture and reflecting on how much the experience of Rome meant to Elizabeth and Eliot Norton.

As a final unscheduled and unfilmed treat, we were driven to the Coliseum and had the opportunity to wander round this incredible monument just as the moon was rising.

But it was not quite the end. We gathered in the evening to enjoy a final meal at the Trattoria with lots of Italian dishes, bottles of wine and photograph taking, before taking our leave of the omnibus team and falling into bed around midnight ready for an early start back to cold rainy Manchester on Monday morning.

The final film shows only a small amount of the actual footage. It would be lovely if we were able to share more of it with you all, but we hope you enjoyed the brief glimpses that you had of a most enjoyable and memorable experience.

Marianne North

by Barbara Brill

A footnote to my article (NL 28 pages 15-18) on the connections of Elizabeth Gaskell with Marianne North in which I speculated on the possibility of their meeting at Gawthorp or Capesthorne. I have now found confirmation that they did meet, but in Pontresina in 1864.

In Marianne North's book *Recollections of a Happy Life* (published by the University Press of Virginia in 1993) she writes of travelling to Pontresina in the summer of 1864 with her father and sister where they stayed in "that paradise for Alpine climbers 'the Old Crown Inn'".

She continues "Mrs Gaskell was also at Pontresina at that time, and had taken a quiet room outside the village to work peacefully. There she finished a great part of her last story *Wives and Daughters*. "She was very beautiful and gentle with a sweet-toned voice and a particularly well-formed hand."

Book Notes

by Christine Lingard

Elizabeth Gaskell's use of color in her industrial novels and short stories by Katherine Ann Wildt (Saint Louis University). University Press of America

Ostensibly a very specialised subject, this book provides us with a detailed and useful analysis of Elizabeth Gaskell's descriptive technique and a fresh approach to the study of her early industrial writings. It also brings out her debt to John Ruskin and, in particular, his book *Modern painters* providing ample evidence that she made a thorough study of the book. Most gratifying is an analysis of several of the short stories showing the development of her technique – *Libbie Marsh's three eras*, *Lizzie Leigh*, *Heart of John Middleton*, *Sexton's hero*, *Christmas storms and sunshine*, *Hand and heart*, *The Moorland cottage* and *Cumberland sheep shearers*. The novels dealt with are *Mary Barton*, *North and south* and *Ruth*. There are extensive notes possibly hindering the flow of the narrative and bibliographical references.

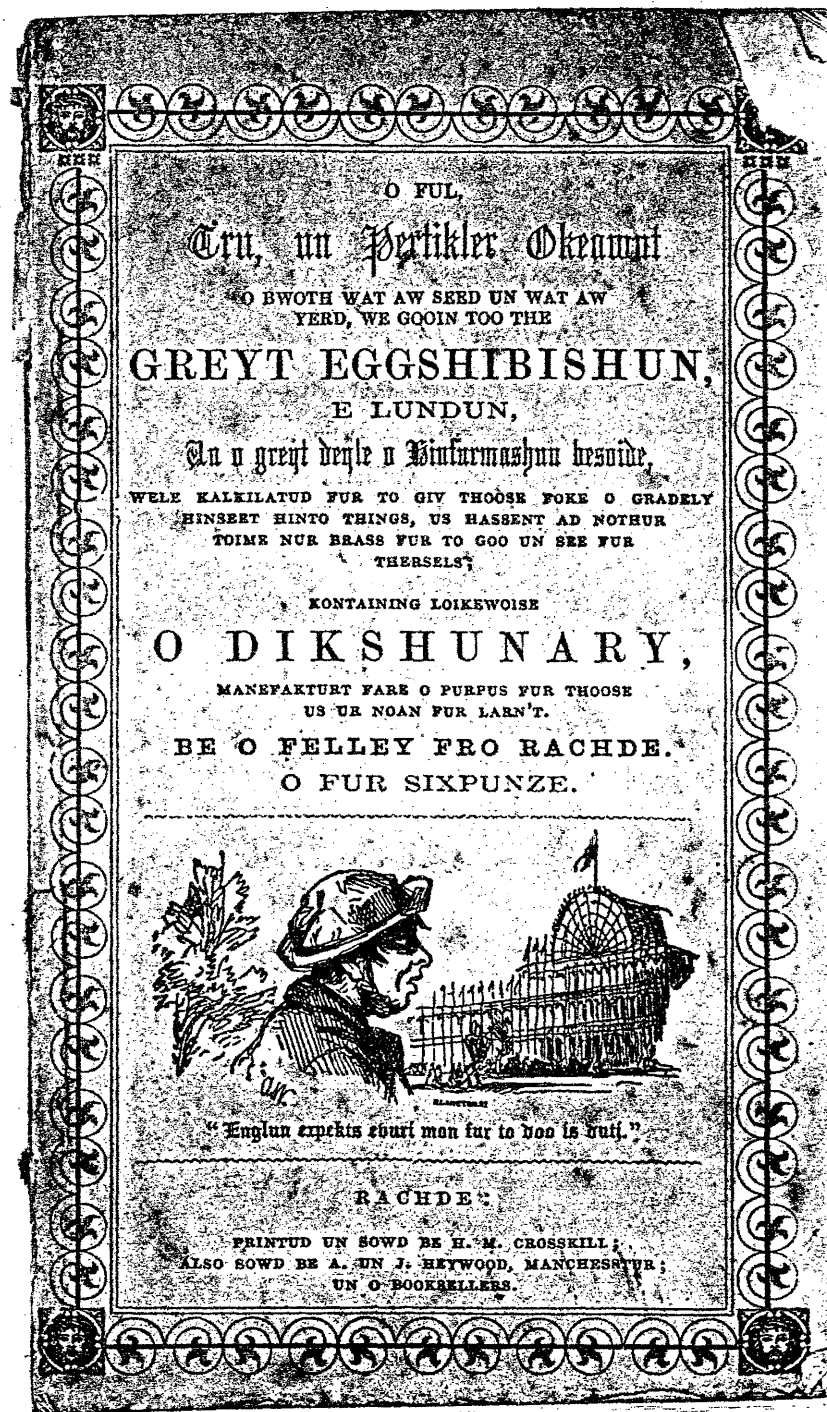
Elizabeth Gaskell: *Mary Barton*; *North and south*, edited by Alison Chapman. Icon Critical Guides. Icon books, £7.99

This book fills the gap in Gaskell studies between the academic monograph of which there are now several able and the exam crib. Useful for the student, it deals with the topic in more depth than most books at this level – 192 pages with a detailed bibliography and a summary of the critical response of the novel over the years.

Lancashire Dialect and the Greyt Eggshibishun

by John Chapple

In 1855 Elizabeth Gaskell told Parthenope Nightingale that she was looking for the *Ratchda' Men's Visit to th' Great Exhibition*, which had been mentioned by William in his lectures on the Lancashire Dialect the year before. (Reprinted in *Mary Barton*, ed. Angus Easson, Ryburn Publishing, Halifax, 1993.) It is also known that she gave William Whewell a copy at Glasgow in 1855 (Mrs Stairs Douglas, *William Whewell*, 1881, pp. 442-3). We are able to reproduce the title page of this rare work, courtesy of Pam Godman of Rochdale Local Studies Library.



A Dark Night's Work at Inverary Jail

One of our members, Valerie Robertson, visited Inverary Jail in 1999 and noticed that the list of library books in 1875 included *A Dark Night's Work* as its only fiction reading (unless *Now or Never* was also fiction? Does anyone know?) Perhaps it was considered as an object lesson. 'Even if the truth about your crime dies not come out in your lifetime, it will surely blight your life, and that of those closest to you'.

Does any member know more about Frederick and Mrs Hill's connection with Mrs Gaskell?

Chief guide to the prison, J G Parkes, sent this information to Valerie in answer to her query, and also a photocopy of the book list which is too dark to be reproduced but we will transcribe it for our home page.

"The new prison regime that was introduced by an Act of Parliament in 1839 placed a lot of emphasis on reform; change the prisoner's attitude and habits and wean him or her away from crime. Apart from discipline and industrious work, religion and the Bible were made an integral part of the system. A chaplain was appointed for every prison, one of his duties being 'the general management of the prison library'.

In 1883 the Chaplain at Barlinnie reported that books were appreciated by the prisoners, 'but some of them, I am sorry to say, prefer books that treat on secular subjects, rather than those works which discuss religious topics'.

"Books stood alone like bright redeeming angels, between the prisoner and his dreary thoughts and insane impulses. (Unknown prisoner)

The Victorian journalist, Henry Mayhew, visited Pentonville Prison in 1856 as part of a general investigation into the Criminal Prisons of London. The book that was subsequently published gives an enormous amount of detail about life in prison at that time. In Pentonville he recorded:

[From 7 o'clock in the evening] till 9 o'clock, the prisoners are allowed to read such books as they may have obtained from the library. To show us that the men were generally so occupied, the officer who had attended us throughout the day led us now from cell to cell, and drew aside the small metal screen that hung down before the little peep-hole in each door; on looking through it we

found almost every prisoner ... seated close to the gas-light, busily engaged in perusing either some book or periodical that was spread out before him.

The Chaplain at Perth General Prison reported that all the books in the library were in constant use, with Biographies, Anecdotes and Travels etc. being the most popular and best remembered. There had been some abuse of the books – writing messages in the flyleaf or end pages was a frequent occurrence in all prisons, including Inveraray – but he had made arrangements to prevent it happening without detection.

Frederic Hill, the first Inspector of Scottish Prisons and the man mainly responsible for setting up the system, was later involved in petitioning for the Married Women's Property Bill with the Law Amendment Society. His wife, Martha, enlisted many women for the cause, amongst them Mrs Gaskell.

Early in 1875 the committee responsible for running Argyll's prisons requested a list of all the books held in Campbeltown, Tobermory and Inveraray. On 3rd February of that year, John McLeod, Governor at Inveraray, listed all of the books 'under my charge ... the greater part of them are not complete through being long in use'. *A Dark Night's Work* was reported as 'in good order'.

What are four bare walls to the man who has access to the princely minds of all ages? ... If anything reconciled me to prison life it was access to standard works on every conceivable subject and the leisure to study them.

(Stuart Wood: *Shades of the Prison House*, 1932)

Membership Update

The recent media attention, provided by the BBC and some newspapers, has promoted a level of enquiry into the Gaskell Society that is well above normal. Many, but not all, of these enquiries have developed into enrolments, with thirty-two new members being welcomed into our Society throughout November and December. On the final day of 1999 my database consisted of three hundred and sixty members in the United Kingdom and one hundred and twenty two overseas members.

Irene Wiltshire
Membership Secretary

South-West Group Meetings

by Rosemary Marshall

On Saturday 20th November the group found Kay Millard's talk on *Mrs Gaskell and Religion* informative and very interesting. The Question and Answer session afterwards showed how carefully people had listened and how keen they were to learn even more. Kay felt that the Unitarian principles of the value of every human being and toleration of other points of view were most apparent in *Ruth*. On the following day members went to a service at the Unitarian chapel which celebrated the life of Elizabeth Gaskell in prayers, hymns and readings. We were made very welcome by the congregation and felt it a privilege to be there.

On January 18th at an informal supper the adaptation of *Wives and Daughters* was discussed.

The next meeting, on 15th April will be on the Gaskells' friends, William Ewart and George Eliot. Held at The Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institute, 17 Queen Square.

On 7th May there will be an outing to the home of William Ewart: Broadleas near Devizes. A beautiful garden is open to the public. Some members of this group hope to attend the next AGM and Knutsford Literature Festival on 30th September.

For information contact: Mrs Rosemary Marshall, 138 Fairfield Park Road, Bath BA1 6JT. Tel: 01225 426732

Meetings at Cross Street Chapel

These begin with coffee at 10.30 am and are usually held on the second Monday of each month but because February is so short it will be earlier:

7th Feb - Elizabeth Williams: The first three issues of Household Words

13th March - Irene Wiltshire: Elizabeth Gaskell and Witchcraft: A

Reconsideration

8th April - Spring Meeting

8th May - Joan Leach: Mrs Gaskell and Spring Customs and

Dr Eddie Cass on: Lancashire Peace-Egg Chapbooks (illustrated)

Manchester Spring Meeting at Cross Street Chapel

Saturday 8th April

We hope you will be able to join us for this popular meeting at Cross Street Chapel. We will meet for coffee at 10.30.

At 11.00 am Dr Margaret Lesser will speak about Mme Mohl: Mary Clarke. Dr Lesser is the author of *Clarkey: A portrait in letters of Mary Clarke Mohl*. OUP 1984

Buffet lunch will be served between 12.15 and 2.00pm

At 2.15 Patsy Stoneman from Hull University Department of English will speak on: Taking liberties with the Classics: Adaptation as Opportunity and Responsibility

Booking forms will be sent at the beginning of March together with summer outing details.

We plan to visit the Trough of Bowland area, Stoneyhurst College and Salmsbury Hall in search of the Lancashire setting for Gaskell's short story *The Poor Clare*. Part of this story is set in Antwerp which some of us will see on our Belgium trip in May.

On 30th July we hope to visit an exhibition on the Potter family and attend a commemorative service at Stalybridge Unitarian Chapel.

Knutsford Meetings

Our meetings are on the last Wednesday of the month in St John's Church Hall. A buffet lunch will be served between 12.15 and 12.30 followed by the talk and meetings should finish at about 3 pm. The cost will be £5 per meeting.

23rd February, 29th March, 26th April – Discussion on the television adaptation of *Wives and Daughters* and the Omnibus programme about Elizabeth Gaskell

31st May – Members' miscellany

Further information from Elizabeth Williams Tel: 01925 764271

Internet News

Our Society has been well served by Mitsuharu Matsuoka who has organised our internet pages so that students can download Journal articles and Gaskell texts and find all sorts of information –

The Gaskell Society:

<http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/EG-Society.html>

The Gaskell Society Journal:

<http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/EG-Journal-Contents.html>

Gaskell works in E-text:

<http://lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/EG-etexts.html>

Now we also have a UK homepage managed for us by member Jane Thomson at -

<http://www.gaskellsociety.cwc.net/>

Most libraries now have internet facilities so you will be able to consult our homepage for dates of meetings and latest information; it will also be useful for anyone who seeks information about The Society. We can also show you pictures in colour, which cannot usually be done in the Journal or Newsletters.

Knutsford Literature Festival 2000

23rd September-1st October

This is not a Society event but will interest members with its varied programme.

Saturday 30th September will be our AGM. In the morning Andrew Davies will speak about his adaptation of *Wives and Daughters*, showing video clips, followed by a buffet lunch; both of these will be at The Civic Centre.

In the afternoon we will transfer to the Royal George when Jenny Uglow and Margaret M Smith (editor of *Brontë Letters*) will discuss *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Tea will be served before we hold the AGM. We will be voting on taking charity status, which will involve some changes to our constitution.

In the evening there will be an entertainment: Men and Women of Letters, probably preceded by dinner. Members of the public may also attend most of these events, and we realise that Gaskell members may not be able to support such a full programme.

Friday 29th September will be a biography day, and there will be events and a finale on Sunday 1st October. Visiting writers include Nina Bawden, Margaret Drabble, Alan Garner, Michael Holroyd, Angela Huth, Joanna Trollope and Jenny Uglow.

We hope to involve local inns etc in accommodation offers, so watch out for more news. Many of you have become Friends of The Festival (£10 cheque to Joan Leach made out to Knutsford Literature Festival) and will have news and an early copy of the programme, booking concessions etc.

London and South East Group

The group usually meets at The Francis Holland School, Chelsea, a few minutes walk from Sloane Square underground station. Some of the group meet there at 12 noon to have lunch at The Royal Court Tavern. Meetings begin at 2.0 pm

6th May – Wives and Daughters: From Book to Film by Jenny Uglow.
Jenny is Vice-President of the Society and advised BBC on the adaptation

16th September – to be arranged

16th November – Annual Meeting – The Thomson Family and the Young Elizabeth Stevenson by Dr Ian Glenn

If any further details are required, please send SAE to Hon Secretary:
Dudley Barlow, 44 Seymour Road, London SW18 5JA (Tel: 0181 874 7727 – after April: 020 8874 7727)

THE GASKELL SOCIETY HOME PAGE has all the latest information on meetings:

<http://www.gaskellsociety.cwc.net/indepth.html>