



KNUTSFORD

Mrs. Gaskell would find it worth writing home about!

Mrs. Gaskell knew an interesting story when she heard one. And she could certainly write them, too, using the people of Knutsford as her models. She renamed the town, Hollingford, and Alfred McAlpine Homes are continuing the historic link at Hollingford Place. The styles, standards and methods of building are traditional. The features, reassuringly modern. Large double bedrooms, an en suite bathroom, luxury fitted kitchen, and a wealth of other details which would have kept Mrs. Gaskell's pen working feverishly. But don't take our word for it. Pay us a visit soon and watch Hollingford Place coming alive before your eyes.

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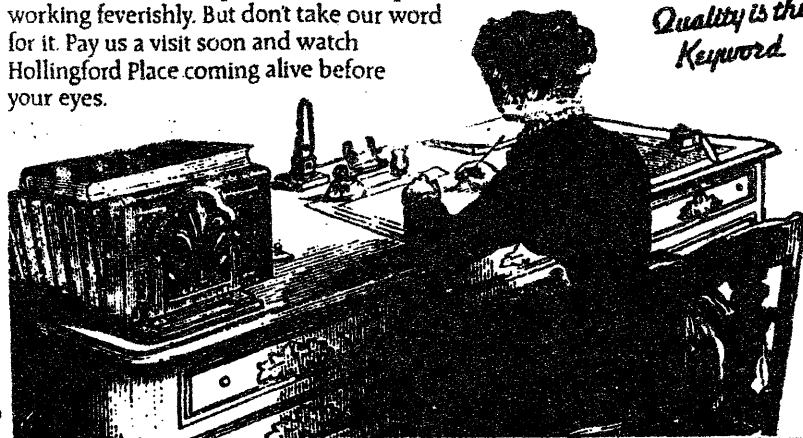
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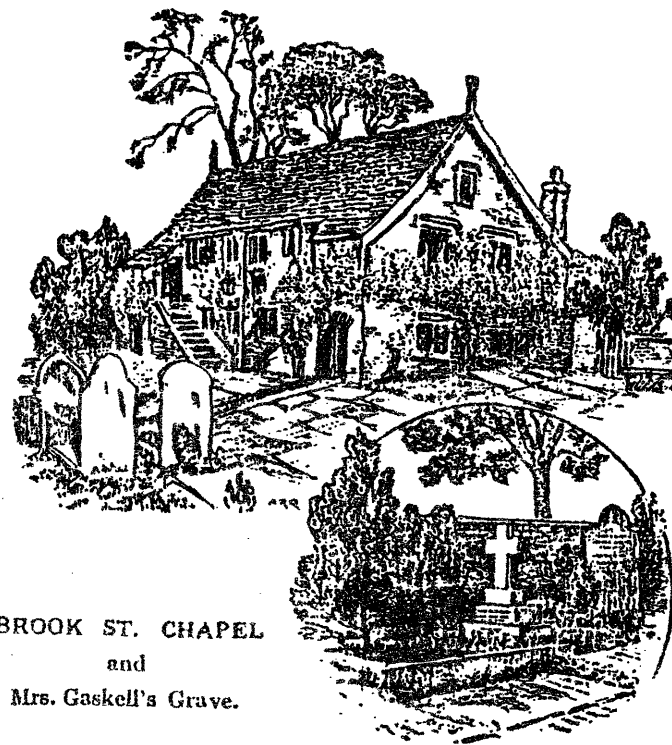


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The Gaskell Society



BROOK ST. CHAPEL
and
Mrs. Gaskell's Grave.

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 1987

NO.3

SECRETARY'S LETTER

It seems a long time since our last meeting, the AGM on September 29th at Knutsford. For those who were unable to attend I must tell you what an enjoyable occasion this was. The Gaskell Memorial Tower made a delightful venue and La Belle Epoque restaurant provided us with a splendid meal. Do keep the last weekend in September free, members who came from far afield - Edinburgh, Exeter and Kent - found Knutsford pleasant for an autumn break.

Our next meeting is on April 25th at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, 2.00 pm. Bill Ruddick of Manchester University English Department will speak on 'George Du Maurier: Illustrator and Interpreter of Mrs Gaskell', using slides from the original serialisation of 'Wives and Daughters' in The Cornhill, together with some others from illustrated editions which Du Maurier worked on in the 1860s.

We are grateful to Cross Street Chapel for allowing us to meet in this place of so many associations for Gaskell fans; they have also agreed to provide us with tea at £1.25. The Chapel is easily reached by train from Oxford Road Station or Piccadilly but parking is likely to be a problem for drivers. Note enclosed reply form.

Alan Shelston, our journal editor, reports good progress and we hope to have your first copy available to pick up at this meeting.

The collection of Gaskell books from Brook Street Chapel has recently been rehoused in Knutsford Library. This has been a great undertaking by Mrs Mary Thwaite, who has cared for the collection for many years but was concerned to find some deteriorating with damp etc. With the co-operation of Cheshire County Libraries they will be better cared for, with the added bonus of greater accessibility for study. It is hoped to have an exhibition gallery at Brook Street; we hope members will help with fund raising by coming to a coffee morning on April 8th.

No one can doubt that Mrs Gaskell's influence is still felt in Knutsford when they see Hollingford Place being

built by Alfred McAlpine. I am most grateful to them for giving me the air fare to attend the University of Kansas' two-day conference on 'Queen Victoria's Jubilees' from March 24th to 26th. I hope to have the opportunity to promote our Society too.

Manchester Central Library has bought several Gaskell letters which will be the subject of future articles. The Language and Literature Library (4th Floor - good lift which 'chats' to you) has a small display from April 6th to the end of the month: 'Elizabeth Gaskell: fundraiser, background to some recently acquired letters on the Manchester cotton famine, and the fund for Thomas Wright, prison philanthropist'.

It is a little too soon to give details of the summer outing but keep the last Sunday in June free provisionally, to go to North Wales.

Hope to see you on April 25th.

JOAN LEACH

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THE COMPLETE ENGLISH COUNTRY ESTATE

Tatton celebrates the visit by the Prince and Princess of Wales exactly one hundred years ago.

The vast cellars are providing the kitchens with food for final preparation.

Re-enactment of Victorian life in the servants rooms, work rooms and in the sumptuous state rooms touches all your senses.

The magnificent mansion contains a collection of fine antiques and furniture, many paintings and superb decor.

The glorious gardens, medieval Old Hall, deer park and farm complete Tatton's picture.

Tatton Park, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 6QN, England



CROSS STREET CHAPEL

The history of Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, dates back over three and a quarter centuries. It was founded in 1662 by supporters of the Collegiate Church of St Mary (now the Cathedral) for the Preacher, Rev Henry Newcome, M who was deprived on his living, together with over two thousand other Church of England "Ministers of Conscience" who could not take the oath and sign the Covenant at the time of "The Reformation" and were outcast as "Nonconformist".

An Act was passed to prevent them being within five miles of their churches and for ten years he continued to engage in pastoral duties, preaching in private houses, and occasionally illegally in conventicles.

He received a licence for preaching in his own house in April 1672 under an Act of Toleration, and in May one for the adjoining Barn Chapel, thought to be Thomas Stockton's Barn in Shudehill, (probably the first licences to be obtained in Lancashire) ever amongst his people and they were determined on his staying in Manchester. There is reason to believe from the "History" written by Rev H H Johnson that although services for many years in the converted "Cold House" Barn Chapel were irregular, a continuous nucleus of a congregation was maintained under Newcome's ministry and a stated income was raised for him. From July 1687 Rev John Chorlton was appointed as assistant to him and regular timed services at the same hours as the Parish Church were held.

A site near by on Plungon's Meadow, and facing Acres Field, which was then the Annual Fairground but is now St Ann's Square, was acquired by Nathaniel Gaskell (later to become the Grandfather of Clive of India) and other members of the congregation. Further Acts of Toleration were passed and in 1693 building of the Chapel on the present site commenced, being completed and opened June 24th 1694, on which occasion Henry Newcome preached the first religious service in it. He preached his last sermon there on June 13th 1695, and died in the following September.

Since then the Chapel has achieved many wonderful things and been an inspiration to many people in this country and overseas.

Until 1780 the Chapel remained Presbyterian before gradually changing to mainly free Christian and Unitarian. The Unitarians in Manchester and Warrington were in the forefront of moral education from the foundation of Cross Street Chapel until the present day. The Schoolhouse and Chapel room built in 1734 on the lines of Chetham's School, for 40 poor scholars, functioned as a school for over 80 years and is still in use today.

The first suggestion of a Mechanics Institute came from Rev Dr Thomas Barnes DD, who was appointed at Cross Street as assistant minister in 1780. This institute, built later in David Street (renamed Cooper Street), was where Rev William Gaskell took classes in Literature at a Working Men's College started in Manchester in 1858, for students of sixteen and over, able to read and write.

With William's appointment as lecturer at Owen's College, later to become Manchester University, when he took with him his large following of Working Men to increase the serious decline in student entry, the link with Cross Street and education continued.

Elizabeth and her daughters were all teachers at some time, Meta and Julia as superintendents at the large, free Day and Sunday School which stood on the site in Lower Mosley Street, now occupied by the Midland Hotel (one of my aunts was in Miss Julia's class).

Education and scientific discovery is of little use if people do not know the difference between right and wrong, and Good and Evil; Cross Street Chapel and its dedicated ministers and workers have striven to convey that moral code which is the basis of true religion and without which there can be no peace or security.

H HEWERDINE, FRSH

Editor's note: The Chapel was destroyed in the blitz of 23rd December 1940 but services continued without

a break until it was rebuilt in 1959. The Memorial Hall, built in 1864, where William worked with the Home Missionary Board, can still be seen at the corner of Albert Square.

For further reading:

Cross Street Chapel and its College 1786-1915 by Lester Burney (1983)

Cross Street Chapel Schools 1734-1942 by Lester Burney (1977)

William Gaskell 1805-84, a Portrait by Barbara Brill M/c Lit & Phil.

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GASKELL ON TAPE

A new venture for the Manchester Central Library is the provision of literature on cassette for home loan. These include two Gaskell items which have also been added to the Gaskell collection for reference use.

Prunella Scales reads from Cranford. Two cassettes, approximate duration 2 hours 27 minutes, produced by Argo Spoken Word Department, London Records Ltd, 15 St George Street, London W1. Kenneth Branagh reads Cousin Phillis, complete and unabridged, three cassettes, duration 3 hours 55 minutes. Produced by Cover to Cover Cassettes Ltd, Dene House, Lockeridge, Marlborough, Wiltshire.

These tapes may be borrowed from the Language and Literature Library, Manchester Central Library, St Peter's Square, for a charge of 10 pence per cassette per week on any public library ticket.

-oOo-

ELIZABETH GASKELL IN ITALIAN TRANSLATION

The translation into Italian of the writings of Mrs Gaskell began in 1929 with the publication of La cugina Fillide (Cousin Phillis) by the firm of Sonzogno of Milan. This was ascribed to Gastone Rossi, who may be noted especially for his over-confident attitude and, it might be added, for the excessive assurance with which he confronts the text of the story. Not only does he depart from a faithful adherence to the writer's own words, but where it seems to him that she is too long-winded, he makes drastic cuts, which are often dangerous and misleading in their effect. Yet he does not follow this practice in his epilogue - there it is quite the contrary. Perhaps not being satisfied with the novelist's conclusion, the translator tags on in arbitrary fashion some lines which end the tale in a heavy, moralistic way, pointing out to the reader that Cousin Phillis is pervaded by that "Christian spirit which encourages resignation". Apart from the fact that La cugina Fillide appeared in a series significantly labelled "Cheap Romantic", it should be said that it was perhaps not accidental that it should have been the first Gaskell title to be published in Italy. The references to Dante and Manzoni, as well as the cultural interest shown in the Italian language by the protagonists - ("I had a capital novel by Manzoni, just the thing for a beginner ..." says Holdsworth) - must have had more than a secondary influence at the time this long tale was chosen.

Above all, however, the best known and most read Gaskell book is Cranford. In the histories of English Literature most widespread in Italy (see Mario Praz and Carlo Izzo) it is presented as the summit of Elizabeth Gaskell's art. Due to this critical reputation of Cranford there have been a number of translations of it, seemingly excessive when compared with the neglect surrounding the other Gaskell novels. Apart from a first translation of Cranford in 1935, undertaken by A Gennasi (now practically unobtainable) mention must be made of the accurate version by Mario Casalino,

issued under the title of Il Paese delle Nobili Signore (Milan. Rizzoli. 1050. Collana B.U.R. 211-213). In the anonymous introduction to the volume (probably written by the translator) it is claimed that Cranford is Mrs Gaskell's masterpiece. "It is a novel where one does not look for important adventures, remarkable events, or unexpected stage effects: what animates it and makes it unforgettable is its smiling picture of the characters, simple, modest, quiet folk, a trifle eccentric, but even heroic in their submissive dignity, and exemplary in their honesty and solidarity" (p.6). Only a year separates this translation by Casalino from that by Augusta Grosso for the authoritative series, "Great Foreign Writers", directed by G V Amoretti (Turin. U.T.E.T. 1951). Here the translator seems very intent on interpreting the humorous vein of Cranford, attempting to capture and express the special gifts of Mrs Gaskell's art. In her introduction to the volume Augusta Grosso pointedly observes: "Mrs Gaskell succeeds in being neither pedantic nor tedious, even in the apparently monotonous texture of her story, thanks to her vivifying power and her very particular kind of humour ... (this) arises from a sincere and most vigilant observation of the comic aspect of the traits of her characters; but there is no exaggeration so that they remain living beings, and do not become caricatures" (pp.9-10).

It was necessary to wait exactly thirty years for another Gaskell translation. In 1981, Mary Barton, translated by Fedora Dei, with an introduction by Anna Luisa Zazo, appeared as one of the series of Oscar/Narrativa (Milan. Mondadori. 1981). Although in one respect this Italian version is precise and efficient, partly due to a textual decision which rejected the reproduction of dialect forms and used only normal Italian, from another angle it must be regretted that the beautiful poetical quotations which Mrs Gaskell used as headings for each chapter were omitted. It seems to me absurd that the translator justified such omissions by declaring that the epigraphs interfered with the "smooth flow of the narrative" in the Italian version. It must also be observed that A L Zazo in her introduction

presents a rather subdued image of our writer to the Italian reader. "Let us try to look into her face: this wise woman, good and courteous, who knows how to judge, yet allows herself to be moved. It is a face typically nineteenth century, even more typically Victorian" (p.v). It is difficult to understand exactly what A L Zazo means when she speaks of "typically nineteenth century and typically Victorian", and it is hoped that she does not intend to deny with such expressions the individuality of the artistic talent of the writer. For truly behind A L Zazo's opinion and evaluation we can discover the phantom of David Cecil, who saw Mrs Gaskell as a mild and tender dove when compared with other Victorian writers. But A L Zazo re-establishes the individuality of our writer when she declares that the vein of melodrama and false sentiment does not belong to her art: on the contrary Mrs Gaskell possesses the quality of an intense realism concentrated on a minute and close observation of the domestic universe.

FRANCESCO MARRONI

(Translated by Mary Thwaite)

-oOo-

SILVERDALE

We hope to visit this beautiful area for our summer outing in 1988, but if you are in the area and need information Miss Elizabeth Davis, 54 Michealson Avenue, Torrisholme Avenue, Lancs LA4 6SE, would help members to trace the Gaskell associations.

Elizabeth, daughter of Mrs Elsie Davis, a Society member, has devised a fascinating, scenic walk. Send a stamped addressed envelope to me (Joan Leach) for a copy if required. You can reach Silverdale by train from Lancaster.

There is also a booklet, 'In and around Silverdale', by David Peter available from Lunesdale Publishing Group Ltd, 38-42 Market Street, Carnforth, Lancs, price £1.95

-oOo-

CLEGHORN

A few months ago I was browsing through an old book of Burns' poems and letters - the print was too small to encourage close reading - when suddenly the name CLEGHORN 'jumped out' of the page. The letter, dated 31st March 1788, was addressed to Mr Robert Cleghorn.

Burns sent a verse he had written to an air, "Captain O'Kean", which he remembered was Robert Cleghorn's favourite, then added:-

'I am so harassed with care and anxiety about this farming project of mine, that my Muse has degenerated into the veriest prose-wench that ever picked cinders or followed a tinker. When I am fairly got into the routine of business, I shall trouble you with a longer epistle; perhaps with some queries respecting farming ...'

Now, here was a thought-provoking association - CLEGHORN and farming was also the Gaskell connection. Elizabeth was given her unusual middle name after James Cleghorn who had helped her father, William Stevenson, to set up in experimental, scientific farming at Laughton (according to W Gerin and the Dict. of Nat.Biog.). But this was James Cleghorn, whereas the Burns letter was to Robert.

Still, it seemed worth investigating, so I wrote to the Burns Society for information on Cleghorn, either or both, James and Robert. Back came details from the Burns Chronicle, 1962, listing 'CLEGHORN, MR ROBERT, SAUGHTON-MILLS. He was a farmer at Saughton who was made a burgess and guild-brother of Edinburgh on 21st September 1786, in the right of his father, JAMES, a brewer at Gairnshall. He was a member of the Crochallan Fencibles, a friend of Burns and the recipient of some of the poet's spiciest prose and verse.'

I am told that it was Robert Cleghorn's step-son, Dr John Allen, who introduced Byron to Burns' poetry.

I can only conjecture that this James, father of Robert, may have been the friend of William Stevenson; only

further research might reveal the facts. More relevant to Gaskell study is the mention of SAUGHTON MILLS. I went back to check Winifred Gerin's biography which gives 'Laughton', as does the D.N.B. and my copy of Ellis Chadwick's 'Mrs Gaskell's Haunts, Homes and Stories'. A Scottish member of my WEA class knew of Saughton Mills, near Edinburgh and that it should be pronounced 'SOCKTON'. I next consulted Mrs Sutherland, an Edinburgh member, who found a map showing Saughton and Saughton Mills and a description of the house which had 'at one time been a pleasant residence on the bank of the Water of Leith, about three miles west from Edinburgh'. It had a 'wheel staircase', cellars, turrets and 'King Charles' room has an ornamental plaster ceiling ... on the wall at the frieze will be seen the insignia of royalty ... over the doorway are the arms and initials of Patrick Eleis, a merchant and burgess of Edinburgh, with the date 1623 and the pious inscription on the lintel beneath:

'BLISIT BE GOD FOR ALL HIS GIFTIS'

This description dates from early this century (I think); I don't know if the house still stands.

Mrs Sutherland noted that the Water of Leith must have been where William obtained out-of-season salmon which he believed to have caused his skin complaint.

Dr John Chapple is inclined to agree with me that 'Laughton' and 'Saughton Mills' are one and the same (unless someone can find us a 'Laughton' near Edinburgh); he observed that Mrs Chadwick has 'Saughton Mills near Edinburgh'. But she didn't in my copy, which had 'Laughton'!

This mystery was solved when I realised that mine was 1910 edition. Professor Chapple's was 1913, new and revised. So I think there can be no doubt that Saughton Mills was the place where both William Stevenson and Robert Cleghorn did their farming.

JOAN LEACH

-oOo-

BOOK NOTES by Christine Lingard

Elizabeth Gaskell by Tessa Brodetsky. Berg (Leamington Spa) £3.95

Members may already be familiar with this book in Berg Women's Series which includes Gertrude Bell, Mme de Staël and Emily Dickinson. This is a short and simple book but very comprehensive and well-balanced. It makes an excellent introduction to the subject for the general student. There is one chapter of biography plus a chapter on each of the six novels, Life of Charlotte Brontë and the main stories. Each chapter contains a summary of the plot as well as general criticism backed up by quotations and bibliographical references. There are about a dozen illustrations.

We must also welcome a new edition of Mary Barton in the Oxford University Press' World's Classics series (£2.50 in paperback). This is a revision by Professor Edgar Wright of the Laurentian University, Ontario, and author of Mrs Gaskell: the basis for reassessment (1965), of the 1906 edition in the same series edited by Clement Shorter. This new edition includes an improved introduction and explanatory notes. It also provides a contrast with the only other edition currently in print, the Penguin edition which is based on the first edition of 1848. The World's Classics edition is based on the third edition of 1849. Mrs Gaskell, in her letters, expresses her displeasure at the numerous errors regarding the part written in Lancashire dialect in the first edition. The bulk of these corrections were made to the third edition so that it may be regarded as closer to Mrs Gaskell's intentions. Other differences between first and third editions are improved footnotes to the dialect terms, the addition of chapter titles and the replacement of the motto in chapter 30.

Professor Wright in his introduction puts the novel into its social and historical context. Mrs Gaskell's observation was accurate but selective. The tendency of critics to divide the book into two parts, the moving story of John Barton with its social realism and the more melodramatic treatment of the story of Mary as the novel

reaches its climax, is an over-simplification. The latter is just as important to the structure of the novel and displays her narrative skills to the full.

In addition Professor Wright has included twenty five pages of explanatory notes, an increase of fourteen over the Penguin edition. Some may argue that to be told that Cumberland is a "northern lakeland county" and that Delilah was Samson's wife is a little superfluous but it reflects an increasingly international audience with diverging cultural backgrounds. However his more detailed biographical notes on minor figures such as Madame Catalani, and Ebenezer Elliott are much appreciated.

(Editor's Note: DR EDGAR WRIGHT and TESSA BRODETSKY are members of our Society)

The following also make mention of Elizabeth Gaskell:

Victorian Idyllic Fiction: pastoral strategies by Shelagh Hunter PhD (University of Warwick) Lecturer, Yale University. Macmillan £29.50

A complex argument on the Victorian idyll, its structure and the inter-relationship with plot and character. Idyll is defined as novels describing the simple life from the traditional pastoral to the Victorian novels of social realism. At the centre of the study are Elizabeth Gaskell, Thomas Hardy and George Eliot but mention is also made of George Sand and Mary Mitford. As well as Cranford, Mary Barton and North and South the book includes a lengthy and enthusiastic discussion of Cousin Phillis. Reference and comment is made on earlier critics such as John Gross, John Lucas and Raymond Williams.

The novel in the Victorian age: a modern introduction by Robin Gilmour, Senior Lecturer in English in the University of Aberdeen. Edward Arnold £7.95 (paperback) A more general and straightforward survey of the novel with authors from the end of the century well represented eg. George Moore, Mrs Humphry Ward and Henry James. Mrs Gaskell is linked with Disraeli and Kingsley in the chapter "Sense of the present" though there is no

detailed comparison. The author praises her confidence in handling her material which came from personal experience and enabled her to develop her characters more fully than other authors. Mary Barton and North and South are noted for their realism, but he feels that Cranford needs to be defended against a decline in its prestige. Cousin Phillis is confined to a single paragraph but is also highly complimentary.

) Women in the English novel. 1800-1900 by Merryn Williams (PhD Cambridge and former Open University Lecturer) Macmillan £7.95, first published 1984.

) Though intended as a study of the treatment of women in the novel (there are chapters on Scott and Dickens), there is a preponderance of women novelists and the problems they found in pursuing their career. It deals with the whole century from Jane Austen and is stronger on the earlier part. Elizabeth Gaskell warrants a chapter of her own and is described as the novelist who writes most realistically. Her work is much more varied but is here discussed under the headings Working Women, Old Maids, Fallen Women and the Duty of Women. Sylvia's Lovers is considered to be her greatest book.

Also of note a periodical article "Dialect as 'realism': Hard Times and the industrial novel" by Patricia Ingham in Review of English Studies, November 1986. This acknowledges Dickens' debt to Mrs Gaskell in his use of dialect.

) Members may also be interested in a new book by our Vice-President, Dr Enid Duthie, The Brontës and Nature, Macmillan £27.50, which by discussing the different ways the three sisters responded to nature provides a new approach to an understanding of their work.

-oOo-

Manchester Central Library besides buying the Fletcher letter has acquired three very interesting letters addressed to Vernon Lushington and concerning the cotton famine in Manchester caused by the American Civil War. Christine Lingard, Sub-Librarian and G.S. member has arranged a small display of related material: 6th April to end of month (library closes at 5 pm on Saturdays)

LETTER ON BOUGHTON PARK

Dear Editor,

On page 10 of the Gaskell Society Newsletter No.2 you enquired to the public as to the whereabouts of Boughton House, Worcestershire, a house Mrs Gaskell stopped at in 1850. I am pleased to tell you that Boughton House still exists: it is the clubhouse on an exclusive golf course, situated in the Bransford Road, about two miles from Worcester centre.

It would be interesting to know the exact date of her stay, because if it had been Springtime, she would have good cause to "write home" about the air doing her good. In 1850 the cherry and apple orchards (of which there was an abundance in this region) would have exuded the fragrance of their blossoms. (Ed: the date was December 2nd, 1850)

Boughton House is but a few hundred yards from the River Teme, and the walk from Bransford Bridge to Powick Bridge along the river bank was a favourite of both Sir Edward Elgar and W B Leader (artist). Malvern Hills can be seen eight miles away in the distance, particularly beautiful in sunsets - when they seem to transfuse through every imaginable blue.

Mrs Gaskell would have been happy there, then! Now, alas, Worcester is a concrete extension of Birmingham.

Yours faithfully

RICHARD MOON

(Ed: We are pleased to hear from Richard Moon, 'book man' of Hay-on-Wye.

Rod Monnington (Where can I find Mrs Gaskell G.N. No.2) adds "from B rts Gazetteer - 'Boughton Village with halt station, GWR, in county, and 1½ miles SW of, Worcester. Boughton Paril is a seat. On the 1" 7th series O.S. map sheet 143 (453) Boughton village and Boughton Park are no longer named.

-oOo-

THOMAS WRIGHT, THE GOOD SAMARITAN

A few months ago a Knutsford firm of stamp dealers, Sandafayre, brought to my notice an unpublished letter of Elizabeth Gaskell's which they had for sale. I was able to tell them that it concerned not 'Mr Wight a (wrongly?) convicted ex-prisoner' but Mr Thomas Wright, the prison visitor. Manchester Central Library has bought this interesting letter.

Plymouth Grove, Manchester

February 17

(1852 postmark)

My Dear Mrs Fletcher,

The accompanying memorial will show you what has been done in accordance with your advice; but I am afraid Government has little to spare; they talk of a pension of £70 only, which is very well as a recognition of his merits, but it will be but little for him to live upon, he his wife and two children and two fatherless grand children, with his generous disposition. There is to be some public meeting in London, where I do not know. I hope it will be announced in some widely read newspaper. Meanwhile his friends here are collecting subscriptions to be invested in an annuity for him; there was a public meeting held here last week, the Mayor in the chair, and £380 subscribed there and then but little has since then come in, and that principally from poor people, convicts and prison officers, and although their mites are a beautiful testimony, yet we want the knowledge of this subscription to spread far and wide, and be as 'national' a thing as we can. There are many people who know Mr Wright at Gosport - can you my dear Mrs Fletcher interest any of them. He is very feeble and out of health. We are all well, thank God.

Yours very affect(ionate)ly

E C Gaskell

This letter is, without a doubt, one of those which Mrs Gaskell wrote 'without end, till (my) wrist actually swelled with it' (GL 116a) and she felt 'very stupid altogether with writing up and down the kingdom on behalf of our dear Mr Wright' (GL 114a). It has considerable interest for Gaskell students and many implications.

Some of the details emerge in *The Life of Thomas Wright of Manchester: 'The Prison Philanthropist'* with a preface by the Earl of Shaftesbury, written by T W McDermid, grandson of Wright, in 1876, the year after he died.

This tells how he was brought up by an aunt who had attended Cross Street Chapel in the days of Rev Dr Barnes (who was also an influence on William Stevenson). She remembered, as a girl, carrying a stool for Wesley to stand on at one of his open-air meetings in Manchester. She became a Methodist and Wright received a strict moral training under her. Perhaps too strict for when he became a foundry worker, at five shillings a week, he became mixed up with 'the most wicked men and boys ... gave up going to the house of God and ... profaned God's Sabbath'. However he returned to his faith in a 'conversion as dramatic as St Paul's'.

At the foundry he became foreman at the age of 24, rising at five in the morning and working until six. One day a recently employed workman was dismissed when it was discovered that he had spent time in prison. Wright pleaded for him to be given a chance to prove himself, offering to stand bail for him. By the time he had gained his point the man had already collected his belongings and departed. Wright followed him, found him sitting by the roadside, miserable and penniless, then brought him back. Perhaps it was as a result of this incident that Wright inaugurated the discharged prisoners aid society.

He gained the confidence of prison authorities who allowed him to visit the cells, getting to know the men so that when they were discharged he could help them to

find work and lodgings. This often meant guaranteeing their good conduct with deposits of his own money and visiting them every week to render any further assistance.

In his tenth annual report HM Inspector of Prisons (1845) commended Wright's work, noting that out of 96 of his protégés only 4 returned to prison - one of these served 28 days and was now 'following an honest occupation'; the remaining three had been transported, two from Knutsford and a third from London.

As he himself worked long hours his prison visiting was done in the evenings and on Sundays. Besides Manchester's New Bailey Prison, chaplains of other gaols would send for him to visit condemned men. Ragged schools also claimed his time and, at the invitation of Captain Frederick Holland (Mrs Gaskell's cousin) he appeared on a London platform to address an annual meeting of the Ragged School Union.

He and his work were well known to the Gaskells as Susanna Winkworth wrote: 'At the time when I began to know him (he was a frequent and always welcome visitor at the Gaskell's) about 1848, he was a beautiful, white-haired old man, full of interesting experiences, and with almost as much humour as pathos'. (*Memorials of Two Sisters* ed. M J Shaen)

The first mention of him in Mrs Gaskell's letters was in May 1849 (GL 47) when she spared time from being 'lionised' in London following the publication of 'Mary Barton', to visit 'Tot-hill Fields prison to see the silent associated system of which our dear Mr Wright thinks so highly'.

On one of his visits, a year later, Elizabeth commented: 'The said good Mr Wright drank tea here last night, and said 'By jingo' with great unction, when very animated, much to William's amusement, not to say delight'. It was at the time when they were about to move to the Plymouth Grove house and she was worrying about the expenses: 'My dear (to Tottie Fox GL 69) it's £150 a year, and I daresay we shall all be ruined; and I've already

asked about the ventilation of the new Borough gaol and bespoken Mr Wright to visit us'.

It was about this time that Wright's work was becoming recognised. An article in Chamber's Magazine read by the young artist G F Watts inspired him to paint a picture of The Good Samaritan using Wright as his 'model', though it was not to be a portrait which Richard Cobden felt was a disadvantage when it came to fund raising:

London 9th February 1850

My Dear Mrs Gaskell

I hope you will not think me neglectful in not having before replied to your letter which you did me the honour to send me upon the subject of the painting of the 'Good Samaritan' - my first suggestion to Mrs Schwabe on reading your note was that to identify the picture with Mr Wright's philanthropic mission it ought to contain his portrait - This I suppose is not possible - Without this I do not see exactly how it can be identified with his proceedings in Manchester - Further let me add my candid doubts whether his character be sufficiently known and appreciated by the wealthy inhabitants of your city to ensure the purchase of a large historical picture to be placed as a tribute to his virtues in one of your public buildings - To one so profoundly acquainted with human nature as yourself, and especially the human nature immediately surrounding you - I need not say how completely the words 'a prophet is not without honour etc.' apply to a man of Mr Wright's humble sphere of action in Manchester. - I mention this in all candour and confidence hoping I may be mistaken - I will endeavour to accompany Mrs Schwabe at the beginning of the week to see the picture, and at all events will let you know through her my opinion of it, which after all is not worth much, as I am not a connoisseur - Again hoping you will excuse my delay in writing.

Believe me

ever faithfully yours

Rhd Cobden

My kind remembrances to Mr Gaskell

(Letters addressed to Mrs Gaskell, ed. R D Waller)



'THE GOOD SAMARITAN' painted by G F Watts

This did not discourage Mrs Gaskell, and a letter from Catherine Winkworth to a friend (Feb 1850, Memorials of Two Sisters) throws further light on the subject: 'One of the things Mrs Gaskell has been busy about is a picture that is going to be painted ... of Mr Wright the prison philanthropist. She got a very hurried note a few days ago, from Mr Tom Taylor, saying that a young artist friend of his, Mr Watts - (does your uncle know him?) Mr Taylor calls him 'one of the noblest natures I ever knew, great genius etc' - having heard of Mr Wright's good deeds, was so struck by them, that he determined to paint a picture of 'The Good Samaritan', the Samaritan himself to be Mr Wright, and to present the picture to some Manchester Institution. Mr Tom Taylor, however and some other friends, knowing that Mr Watts could not well afford to paint for nothing, and wishing to show respect at once to the artist and to the philanthropist, are subscribing to purchase the picture still meaning to give it to some Manchester Institution'.

He showed it at the Royal Academy Exhibition of 1850 with the dedication, 'Painted as an expression of the artist's admiration and respect for the noble philanthropy of Thomas Wright of Manchester'.

Mrs Gaskell did not know of Watts either, as he was just starting on his career, but she wrote to Eliza Fox (GL 63) 'Now write and tell me about Mr Watts.

Mr Cobden will be here the end of this week and I want to work him up, but must know about Mr Watts'. Ever thorough, she also set about copying 'Prison reports, by way of statistical information as to Mr Wright' to supply Mr Tom Taylor with information to circulate in London and he immediately started writing to ask people to go and see the picture and 'got Mr Schwabe, the Bishop and Dr Bell all pretty well interested'.

Mr Tom Taylor was a barrister at the time, soon to be appointed to the Board of Health, but his interests were literary and he later became professor of English Literature at University College, clearly of the absent-minded variety.

'That Mr Tom Taylor is born to get me into scrapes I verily believe! Did I tell you (to Eliza Fox GL 70) of his wishing to be introduced to Mr Schwabe (a Manchester calico printer) to plan about Manchester's having the Good Samaritan (which Manchester somewhat contemptuously declines) so I wrote a very proper note of introduction: and the trouble is to me to write a proper (*italics*) note no one can tell save those who have seen my improper ones ...'

She went on to describe how Taylor had missed several appointments with Mr Schwabe who, as a result 'looks on him as not a good person to conduct business affairs, and draws out of the whole, and thinks it a pity Mr Watts has such injudicious friends' - and such a quantity of persuasion and talking as I have wasted!'

However, her efforts were not wasted and the picture did find a home in Manchester where it can still be seen in the Art Gallery. Mrs Gaskell had found some way of making Wright personally known to Watts, for on July 1st 1850, the painter wrote: 'I return you my dear Madam my sincere thanks for the pleasure and the honour you have done me in making me acquainted with Mr Wright. Such noble natures are indeed rare, and proud should I feel in devoting my trifling talent, and the little time I think remains to me (his health was poor at the time) to the object of making known to the world its real but too often neglected riches ...'

Wright himself expressed his appreciation by the gift to Watts of half-a-dozen handkerchiefs!

In the same month as her efforts for Watts' picture, January 1850, Mrs Gaskell was involved by Thomas Wright in prison visiting, an experience which led to her writing 'Ruth'. In a letter to Charles Dickens (GL 61) she described the plight of a sixteen year old Irish girl in the New Bayley prison. She had been apprenticed to a dressmaker 'who was very profligate and connived at the girl's seduction by a surgeon in the neighbourhood who was called in when the poor creature was ill (when she came face to face with him unexpectedly, in his role as assistant prison doctor, she 'fainted dead away' and ...

he was dismissed from his post in consequence').

The girl had been decoyed into becoming a prostitute and 'for four months led the most miserable life'. In the hopes of killing herself, 'for no one had ever cared for her in this world', she drank, 'wishing it might be poison', pawned every article of clothing - and at last stole. I have been to see her in prison at Mr Wright's request'. Dickens knew of Thomas Wright and wrote an article in 'Household Words'; he also helped to arrange for the girl's emigration.

It was typical of Mrs Gaskell that she showed her sympathy practically, by helping to improve the girl's life and then addressing herself to the wider, underlying faults of society, writing 'Ruth' to stir the conscience.

Mrs Gaskell was just one of the 'dear Christian friends' named by Thomas Wright as having 'liberally assisted me in carrying out my object, and who gave me much valuable counsel and encouragement'. I was fascinated and surprised to note that he headed this list with 'Miss Mary Holland and Miss Lucy Holland of Knutsford'; others were 'Miss J E Wedgwood, Mrs Salis Schwabe, Miss Agnes Ewart, Mr D Darbishire, Captain Holland (5 others) ... and some few other Unitarian friends'.

It was two years later in 1852 that Mr Wright's failing health and strength, at the age of 62, caused his friends to start fund raising to enable him to give up his foundry work. The justices of the Salford Quarter Sessions sent a memorial to the First Lord of the Treasury, detailing his valuable work and asking for government support. This was on January 12th 1852; on February 9th a public meeting was held in Manchester with Mayor Robert Barnes in the chair, as Mrs Gaskell explained in her letter to Mrs Fletcher, though she did not add that William, along with J G Robberds, Thomas Greg and William Fairbairn, Charles Dickens and Lady Hatherton were either subscribers or on the committee.

As the fund grew, further attempts were made to obtain public funds when, on May 14th, a deputation waited upon Lord Derby, among them Lord Shaftesbury and Monckton

Milnes (later Lord Houghton). It was deemed that Wright's unofficial work did not qualify him for a civil list pension but £100 was allotted out of the Royal Bounty and with an annuity bought from the subscription fund, was enough for him to retire on. He wrote in his diary: 'May 4th, 1852. I gave up my employment at the foundry. What can render to my God for his especial mercies towards me?' On the same day Mrs Gaskell wrote, 'Mr Wright (came) too last night. He is a gentleman at large now'.

One must admire Wright's determination to go on with his prison work in his own way; he had turned down the offer of £800 a year as a prison inspector. Perhaps, though, fame had a bad effect on him, as it must have been Thomas Wright that Mrs Gaskell wrote of in this letter, although he is not named: 7th November 1859

... 'A very (*italics*) good man in Manchester was a few years ago brought into much notice for his philanthropy, and many people were only too glad to learn something of the peculiar methods by which he certainly reclaimed the erring. So he was asked about his experiences, and told many true (*italics*) interesting histories. Lately I have observed that it was difficult to 'bring him to book' as it were about his cases. He would tell one of a story that made one's heart bleed - tell it dramatically too which faculty is always a temptation, and when unwilling to let emotion die without passing into action one asked for the address etc - it always became vague - in different ways. For some time I have suspected that he told old (*italics*) true stories, as if they were happening now, or had happened yesterday. And just lately I have found that this temptation to excite his hearers strongly has led to pure invention (*italics*).'

How well she understood human frailties and how true was her own charitable nature. In another letter, about the same time she wrote 'Mr Thomas Wright, beautiful as he is in many ways, is not to be quite relied upon for his facts - and not at all for his opinions - which he generalises into two great theories - one that good mothers are all important - true - and another that we are all going to the dogs because 'people think so much about recreation now a days'. (GL 630)

Finally, the interest of this letter is also in the recipient, Mrs Fletcher. It was addressed to her at the home of her daughter, married to Sir John Richardson and living at Haslar, near Portsmouth. Her other daughter was married to Dr John Davy (brother of Sir Humphrey Davy) and the Gaskells enjoyed visiting them at their Ambleside home where they also met the Arnolds. The first mention of Mrs Fletcher and her daughter, Mrs Davy, in the Collected Letters comes in the same letter as the 'good Mr Wright' drinking tea at the Gaskell's and amusing William with his 'By jingo': 'Mrs Fletcher, Mrs Davy were to have come here this week with a maid ... Dear old lady! I wish she had come under our roof, but she was ill and could not'. (GL 69)

She did stay with them later and recorded in her autobiography (1875, Edinburgh) 'At Mrs Gaskell's we had great pleasure next day at breakfast of meeting Thomas Wright, a philanthropist of no ordinary cast of mind, profoundly pious and humble-minded with the most energetic devotion to the principle of doing good. He devotes every hour he can spare from his employment, that of overseer of an iron foundry, to visiting the prison and doing all he can to reclaim convicts from their evil ways ... he seldom allows himself more than four hours sleep'.

Mrs Fletcher had been a friend of William Stevenson when he lived in Edinburgh. His work as a literary editor brought him into contact with the intellectual, social circle which Mrs Fletcher belonged to. She was delighted to find, on being introduced to the authoress of 'Mary Barton', that Elizabeth was the daughter of William Stevenson and both shared a love of Edinburgh. When Mrs Gaskell set 'Tales around the Sofa' in Edinburgh she used Mrs Fletcher's maiden name of Dawson for her narrator.

To complete the research into the story of this letter it needs someone to find out if Mrs Gaskell's appeal to Mrs Fletcher and to the 'many people who know Mr Wright at Gosport' bore any fruit. Did the people of Gosport have reason to know him because of the transportation of prisoners?

The letter was folded and addressed on the outside:

'Mrs Fletcher
Sir John Richardson's
Haslar
Gosport'

A note in the index of 'Letters of Mrs Gaskell' (Chapple and Pollard) to the effect that Sir John Richardson was an Arctic Explorer who searched for Franklin, sent me to look him up in the Dictionary of National Biography where I found a five column entry, which I must resist the temptation to relate here. Mrs Gaskell refers to his wife as 'Lady (North-Pole) Richardson'; she was his third wife, born Mary Fletcher, daughter of Mrs Fletcher of Edinburgh. Richardson was a man of many talents - surgeon, explorer, naturalist and whilst he was physician to the Royal Hospital at Haslar, T H Huxley was his pupil. One story I must relate concerns his early days when he entered Dumfries Grammar School, on the same day as Robert Burns' eldest son, the poet lent him a copy of 'The Faery Queen'. The DNB states that Richardson was a friend of Burns 'who from 1790-96 spent evenings at Nith Place' (his home), but as Richardson was born in 1787 it seems more likely that Burns was a friend of his father.

Who would have thought that one letter of Mrs Gaskell's could have led to so many fascinating connections?

JOAN LEACH

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I shall be pleased to receive any information or suggestions for future newsletters.

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