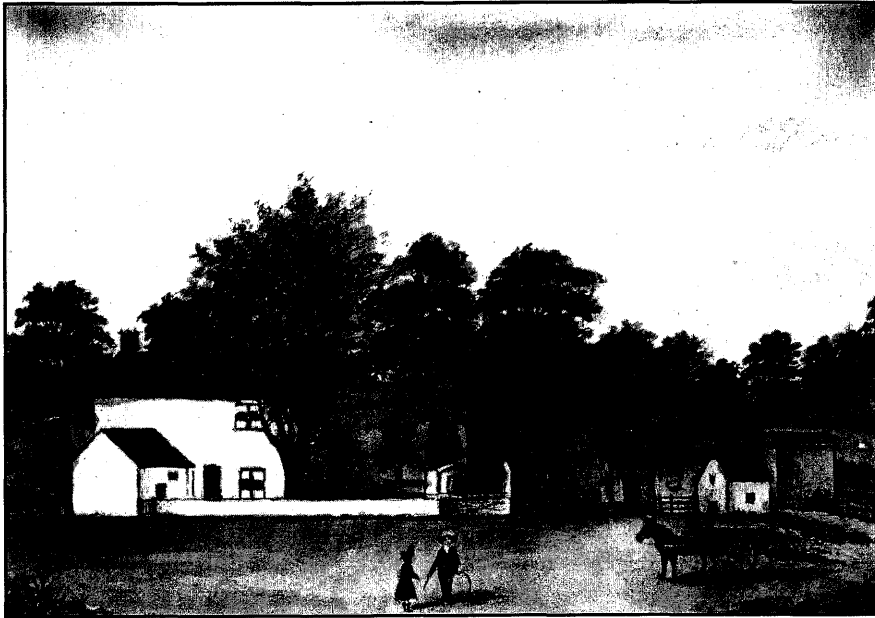


The Gaskell Society



Home Farm at The Mount, Bollington



THE GASKELL SOCIETY HOME PAGE has all the latest information on meetings.
<http://gaskellsociety.users.btopenworld.com>

If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs. Joan Leach,
Far Yew Tree House, Over Tabley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0HN.
Telephone - 01565 634668 E-mail: joanleach@aol.com

Hon Treasurer: Brian Williams, 15 Cawley Avenue, Culcheth, Warrington, Cheshire WA3 4DF

Membership Secretary: Miss C. Lingard, 5 Moran Crescent, Macclesfield SK11 8JJ

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NEWSLETTER
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Editor's Letter

Joan Leach

As I gather together the items for this Newsletter it seems that 2003 will be a lively year for our members. Programmes are offered for branch members in Bath, Knutsford, London and Manchester. We hope to arrange a meeting in Edinburgh with a view to forming a Scottish branch.

The AGM meeting will be held at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester on 5th April. Following the AGM Louise Henson will speak about: *New Perspectives on Gaskell and Science*. In the afternoon we will have a compilation of the life and letters of Catherine Winkworth and will sing some of her hymns, translated from the German. A glance at the indexes for Gaskell letters will tell you how close they were to the Winkworth family and what a gap there would be in our knowledge if Catherine had not been such a faithful correspondent and valued Elizabeth's letters enough to preserve them.

She is not forgotten in Alderley Edge, Cheshire, where the family once lived. As part of the programme for its 150th anniversary, St Philip's Church held a service of evensong celebrating Catherine as a hymn writer. She worked in the Sunday School and was district visitor to 40 families.

Our weekend Conference in Durham, 1st – 4th August, promises well, with excellent speakers and various events. A group will visit the Whitby and Scarborough area *Sylvia's Lovers* country from 15th – 18th September.

In this newsletter we have a report of the trip to Brittany in the footsteps of Gaskell and Mme de Sévigné, written for us by members Jean Hockenhull and Sheila Stephenson. Perhaps those who were not fortunate enough to go on this trip, so ably organised by Christine Bhatt, will be able to follow the trail some other time – or at least in imagination.

In the summer North West members enjoyed three afternoon trips around Gaskell's Cheshire; one of these, in the Macclesfield area, was arranged by Marie Moss, who has written an account of the Gregs' farm at Bollington. We hope it may be possible to produce a booklet for other members to follow these routes and associations. You will find reports and meeting details of the various branches towards the back of this Newsletter.

Member Marjorie Cox, who lives in Bowdon where the Gaskells visited for country air, has researched a fascinating piece of social history in *Mrs Gaskell and the 'Climbing Boys'* and in *The Frozen North: some links with Sylvia's Lovers* Christine Lingard gives intriguing insights into the background history. Thank you to all our contributors.

Speakers List

It would be very useful if potential speakers would let me know what subjects they can offer for talks to members at our various branches. If you have been to a talk or course which you enjoyed, please let me have some details.

Mrs. Gaskell and the 'Climbing Boys'

Marjorie Cox

Some years ago I wrote about the life of William Wood of Manchester and, during twenty years of retirement, of Bowdon. My main interest was his tireless campaign to stop the use of 'climbing boys' to sweep chimneys, a life's work which originated when, in the mid-1820s in Manchester, he witnessed the death of a boy in a chimney fire. In the course of my research I was always puzzled that I could find no evidence that Mrs. Gaskell's tender-heartedness and social conscience had ever involved her in this philanthropic cause, the more so as Manchester, the scene of two well-publicised deaths of boys on industrial premises in 1847 and 1850, was known for the use of this illegal as well as inhumane practice by some of its sweeps.

I combed the large volume of Mrs. Gaskell's letters edited by J.A.V.Chapple and Arthur Pollard but to no avail. However, to my delight, the *Further Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, edited by John Chapple and Alan Shelston, casts a welcome light on the problem and exonerates Mrs Gaskell. One of her letters (pp.83-5), dated 10 March 1853, is in reply to a letter from her friend Mrs Mary Rich, and the first item is as follows:

...First of all about the chimney-sweeps. I have spoken about it everywhere, and so has Mr. Gaskell, and we have threatened to turn informants, and receive the sum of £10 on every such conviction [i.e. of a sweep for using boys, contrary to the Act of 1840]. It is one of those cruelties which people's consciences seem dead to, and it is very difficult to attack them in any way save through their pockets.

As an editorial note observes, informants, then the only way of initiating prosecutions, were to receive half the fine imposed on convicted sweeps; in fact, Mrs Gaskell over-estimated the amount, as the maximum fine was £10. The awkwardness for informants was underlined by William Wood in 1853 to the House of Lords Select Committee, when he pleaded that the police should have a duty of laying information against sweeps, saying 'it is very unpleasant for individuals to have to inform against their neighbours'. This awkwardness was compounded by the existence of an apparent financial reward, although in fact sweeps often chose to go to prison for a short term rather than pay the fine, so that the informant was not compensated for expenses in bringing the case. Like Mrs Gaskell, William Wood recognised the difficulty of reaching the consciences of householders and housewives, and even experienced personally the reluctance of his wife to change

her ingrained belief that the chimney was better cleaned by a boy.

Both the date of Mrs. Gaskell's letter and its recipient are significant. The year 1853 was an important one in Lord Shaftesbury's repeated efforts to make the enforcement of existing laws effective throughout the country. He had already, in 1840, secured an Act tightening up the previous Act of 1834 by making apprenticeship under sixteen years of age and 'climbing' under twenty-one years illegal. This should have been the end of 'climbing boys', since by that age a 'boy' would be far too large, but sadly, though effective in such places as London and Bath, the new Act was not properly observed or enforced in industrial and country districts. After fruitless efforts in 1851 and 1852, Shaftesbury, in May 1853, secured the referral of his proposal to a Select Committee of the House of Lords. There he called fifteen witnesses, including Wood, to give evidence of violations of the law and its lax enforcement by the authorities. Despite cogent evidence, this initiative also failed, and effective legislation, involving the police, did not come until 1875. Mrs. Gaskell's letter is evidence of an effort to rouse public opinion at a crucial time in the 1853 campaign and also offers a glimpse into one aspect of its network.

It was no accident that the Gaskells had been moved to action by Mrs. Mary Rich. She, the widow of Claudius John Rich of the East India Company, was a member of the Wedgwood family circle, and from the 1830s lived with Hensleigh Wedgwood, grandson of the great Josiah Wedgwood I, and Hensleigh's wife, Frances. Both Mary Rich and Frances Wedgwood were daughters of Sir James Mackintosh, lawyer and historian, the former by his first marriage and the latter by his second, so that they were half-sisters. Staffordshire, where the Wedgwoods had their home and their business, resembled Manchester in the defiance of the law on 'climbing boys' and in its lax enforcement by magistrates; the county had the added disadvantage that its press was less independent than Manchester's and rarely reported such cases. In 1855, however, the Hanley and Shelton Chimney Sweeping Association was set up to prosecute sweeps who used boys and to promote sweeps who used 'machines' – the jointed rods, topped with brushes. The moving spirit of this Association was Francis (Frank) Wedgwood, a brother of Hensleigh and thus related to Mary Rich; he was secretary and treasurer and the Minutes bear witness to how active he was. Incidentally, it was he who later paid warm tribute to William Wood for his efforts for the cause in North Staffordshire.

Mrs. Gaskell may possibly have been aware of the plight of 'climbing boys' earlier, through another friend, the Quaker William Howitt, author and publisher. In 1838 she had sent an early essay to him, which he had included in his *Visits to Remarkable Places* published in 1840; in that year, on a visit to Heidelberg, she and her husband had met the Howitts, who were spending three years in Germany.

When they returned to England in 1843, she kept in touch with them and may, perhaps, have seen Howitt's 1842 book, *The Rural and Domestic Life of Germany*, in which he remarked on the fact that 'you never see boys employed as chimney-sweeps, sweeping by climbing is totally unknown'.

It is pleasing to discover evidence that the Gaskells did share in this humanitarian campaign. The Wedgwoods, relations of Mrs Gaskell, were Unitarians too, but members of different denominations were united in the cause of 'climbing boys': Quakers played an important role, Wood had been an active Methodist and became a Congregationalist, while Shaftesbury was a devout Anglican. Denominations could however be divided on the issue, as William Gaskell's own congregation at Cross Street Chapel was. Prominent among its members were John and Thomas Potter, leaders of the Manchester community of industrialists and Free-Traders. A witness, summoned by Shaftesbury to give evidence before the Select Committee in 1853, was W.J. Neale, a London barrister who was secretary of The Climbing Boys Society. Neale quoted a letter of 1850 from Sir John Potter J.P., then Mayor of Manchester, in reply to an invitation to join the Society. In declining the invitation, Sir John claimed to 'deprecate, as much as any one, the cruelties which have been and are still practised in some (I hope few) instances towards climbing boys', but maintained that the flues 'in very many of the best houses in England', 'though not in the least dangerous', were such as to make the use of a sweeping machine impossible. He could 'not think it reasonable that in such cases proprietors should be compelled by Act of Parliament, at a very serious cost, to pull their residences in pieces'. The language in which Sir John couched his letter was urbane and he even professed esteem for the Society's 'humane and charitable motives'; he was himself, in other respects, a noted philanthropist. His language was very different from that of the magistrate who rebuffed William Wood with the reply, 'Lads must be had to sweep chimneys, I can't help what the law is'; none the less, underneath, Potter expressed the same opposition to the total abolition by law of sweeping by climbing. Machines could and did sweep virtually all chimneys as they stood in London and other towns, but in industrial towns with factories as well as dense housing and in country areas, the will to use them was absent. Sir John Potter stood on the letter of the law; the clause in the Act of 1840 which regulated the size and construction of chimneys and flues applied to *new or rebuilt* ones. In contrast to him, the Duke of Wellington, who had not favoured the Bill which became law in 1840, was one among many owners of large houses who accepted the fundamental aim of the Act and had their *existing* chimneys and flues altered where necessary to suit machines. The Gaskells' principled stand on 'climbing boys' in 1853 must have intensified the strained relations with Sir John Potter which had begun after the publication of *Mary Barton*; the Potters believed, though she strongly denied it, that Mrs Gaskell had, in her novel, deliberately revived memories

of the murder in 1831 of Thomas Ashton, brother of Mrs Thomas Potter, the sister-in-law of Sir John. (See *Letters*, pp.195-6, and *Further Letters*, p.173.)

Notes:

1. I am grateful to the editors of *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, John Chapple and Alan Shelston, for permission to quote from the letter to Mrs Rich, and to Alan Shelston for information about the Wedgwood family.
2. For William Wood, see Marjorie Cox, 'William Wood of Bowdon: Champion of "Climbing Boys"', *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society*, Vol. 91.

A Note on Elizabeth Gaskell's Visit to The Mount

Marie Moss

In a letter to William and Mary Howitt written in May 1838, Elizabeth Gaskell recalls the happy days of her youth spent with young friends in the park at Tabley, where on a summer's day which turned to rain, two musical sisters, 'Mary and Ellen Needham from Lenton near Nottingham', sang ballads from Shakespeare in the echoing old hall. The Howitts lived in Nottingham during their early married life and in mentioning the sisters by name Elizabeth was probably aware that the socially active Needham family would be well known to William and Mary. Her letter concludes 'How I wish my dear husband and I could afford to ramble about the country this summer, the sun is shining so brightly. But we are not the richest of the rich (my husband is a Unitarian minister) and moreover, I have two little girls to watch over' (1).

The following month, June 1838, Mary Needham married Samuel Greg II and came to live in Bollington, Cheshire, where the Greg dynasty had acquired an early water-powered cotton mill and Samuel was engaged in establishing a model industrial community in the valley of the river Dean. Samuel and Mary started married life at 'Turner Heath', a large house adjacent to the Bollington/Macclesfield road, and it was here that he conducted his Saturday evening tea parties, designed to give the cream of his employees the opportunity to experience and develop the social graces. He also built a day school, library and baths for his workers, before planning a larger and more gracious home for his growing family. Building work on 'The Mount', which stood above but just out of sight of his 'happy valley', started in 1845 and the family moved there in September 1846.

Meanwhile a branch of the Manchester-Birmingham railway had reached Macclesfield in 1845, and a second line which linked Manchester with the Potteries via Macclesfield

was completed in 1849. It therefore became much easier and cheaper for Elizabeth to escape Manchester's grime by paying short visits to her old friend who, as a young mother herself, would welcome and care for the Gaskells' little girls.

It is not known whether Elizabeth ever stayed with the Gregs at 'Turner Heath', but she certainly took advantage of the ease of travel provided by the expanding local railway network to spend time with Mary and Samuel at 'The Mount' in early November 1849 (2). She took Florence, then aged seven, with her, but on arrival found a cot at her bedside made ready for the baby Julia and much disappointment in the household because 'Baby is not here'. Shy at first, Florence soon made friends with the younger Gregs, 'the eldest not five', and next morning was eager to scamper off to the 'famous nurseries' to be dressed by the family nannies. Elizabeth wrote home to Marianne and Meta before setting off with the Gregs for luncheon at Capesthorpe, starting her letter before breakfast, but finding a moment to add a late postscript:

I have just heard what Florence is to do today; and it is so pleasant I must tell you. She is now putting on her things to go down with Alice, Herbert, Katie (2 years old to-day) & the Baby to the Farm to get some cream; which then they are to come back & churn themselves; then they dine and then have little tea in the nursery, with their own butter. Flossy is in high glee, and thoroughly at home.

In 1849 the Home Farm for the Gregs' estate was a much older property located below the sloping gardens near to the mill and the valley bottom. It is now a private house with the single-storey dairy, shown at a right angle to the main building, now converted to a kitchen and the outhouses incorporated into a separate dwelling. When the Knutsford group visited the site in May 2002 it was difficult to visualise the farm as it had been when Flossy and the little Gregs trooped down to get their cream.

Since then the owners have kindly removed an amateur nineteenth-century water-colour from its frame and made a colour photocopy for us which is reproduced on the back cover in black and white. The children in the foreground sharing the hoop are too well dressed to be farm or mill children, and could well number amongst the large brood of children and grandchildren who always found fun and loving care in the home of the motherly Mary Greg.

Notes:

1. J.A.V.Chapple and Arthur Pollard, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, No.8.
2. *Ibid.*, No.21; date amended in John Chapple and Alan Shelston, *Further Letters*, p.46.

The Frozen North: some links with Sylvia's Lovers

Christine Lingard

There are a number of clues to Gaskell's interest in the search for the Northwest Passage which may have a bearing on the origins of *Sylvia's Lovers*. It is generally accepted that she took her description of the whaling from William Scoresby, whom she met at Auchencairn on Solway Firth in 1855. (*Letters*, No.267a) There were two William Scoresbys – the father (1760-1829), Captain of a whaler which reached a record latitude of 81° north in 1806; and the son (1787-1857), who abandoned the sea to take holy orders and wrote *An Account of the Arctic regions with a description and history of the northern Whale-fishery* (1820). Gaskell's accounts of the dangers of icebergs and of Robson falling into the icy waters closely follow this book, which the Gaskells borrowed from the Portico Library more than once.

Scoresby was very influential. At that time the only sea route westerly to the East Indies was by the perilous Cape Horn – a journey hazardous not only for its length and physical discomforts but rendered even more dangerous by the Napoleonic Wars. Prospects of a northerly route were still attractive. The search had been suspended not just because of the war but also the severe ice. Scoresby's reports that the ice had shrunk prompted a renewal of interest. Several expeditions set out in the 1820s, most notably those of Sir Edward Parry (1790-1855) and Sir John Franklin (1786-1847). Parry went even further north. He is now almost forgotten but in his day was a national hero. He is interesting because of his Cheshire connections. His wife Isabella was the daughter of Lord Stanley of Alderley and he spent a lot of time at Nether Alderley Rectory, the home of her uncle, the Rev Edward Stanley. His eldest son was born there. The Stanleys were well known to the Hollands and Gaskell herself was a good friend of Mrs Stanley. Gaskell's uncle Peter Holland was the Stanley family doctor and there are references to Parry in the writings of his son Sir Henry Holland. Gaskell must surely have been familiar with his achievements.

Franklin's disappearance in 1847 was a sensation. Over forty expeditions were dispatched to find him. When official interest waned Lady Franklin raised the finance for an expedition herself. The fate of the party was rarely out of the news and rumours of cannibalism gripped the nation. Though traces of them were found in 1850, their deaths were not confirmed till 1859. The story was the subject of a play by Wilkie Collins, *The Frozen Deep*, which Dickens and a number of amateur actors presented at the Free Trade Hall in August 1857, but there is no evidence that any of the Gaskells saw it. She was in Manchester at the time working on revisions to *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. The scenery was the work of the

distinguished marine painter Clarkson Stanfield, a former impressed sailor, whom she met in 1859 at the start of her research (*Letters*, No.429a)

William Gaskell borrowed books about Franklin from the Portico Library. Women were barred from borrowing so we can only speculate on whether they were for her. But in 1859 on a second trip to Auchencairn, when she first mentioned her contract for *Sylvia's Lovers*, she was trying to get hold of William Elder's *Life of Elisha Kent Kane*. Kane (1820-57) was an American explorer who led an expedition to find Franklin in 1854. She was not impressed: 'I don't like American biographies. Dr Kane's life is *murdered*'. Which implies some familiarity with the subject. (*Letters*, No.394)

Further evidence of this interest may be found in the catalogue of books from Plymouth Grove offered for sale on the death of Meta Gaskell. It includes *Franklin's Journey to the Coppermine River* (see bibliographical note). Franklin made two voyages to this area of Northern Canada. The first expedition set out in 1819 to chart the Arctic coast. A second trip in 1825 covered a wider area. The surgeon on both voyages was John Richardson (1787-1865), an Edinburgh doctor who had seen active service in 1807. His third wife was Mary, daughter of Mrs Eliza Fletcher, an elderly friend of Gaskell's father from Edinburgh who had retired to Lancrigg, Grasmere. She is well known to Gaskell scholars as the basis for Margaret Dawson in the linking passages of *My Lady Ludlow and other stories*. Gaskell made several visits to her and another daughter, Mrs Davy, and the visits were reciprocated. They often got in touch with one another in their fundraising activities. On one occasion Mary was dubbed 'Lady (North Pole) Richardson'. (*Letters*, No.56)

On its return in 1821 the party got into difficulties and was gradually depleted as man after man succumbed to the elements. Often their only food was lichen scraped from rocks or boiled shoelaces. They were obliged to divide. Franklin went in search of rescue while Richardson stayed put with the injured. They were suffering from cold, exhaustion and starvation – their legs swollen with oedema. They lost their last canoe and had to build a raft. Richardson attempted to swim across the river in temperatures of 37° Fahrenheit (3° Celsius) with a line attached to his waist to launch it but in his weakened state he nearly died. The group included a number of Iroquois Indians and at least one able seaman – John Hepburn (born 1787).

Meanwhile as their situation worsened one of the Indians was acting strangely. He returned with meat but as one of the party was missing suspicions grew. When another was found dead the rest began to fear for their lives. Richardson personally shot him dead. Hepburn had offered to do it but Richardson took responsibility. The relationship between the two men was strong. Richardson called him 'A man who by his humane actions and devotedness had so endeared himself to me, that I felt more anxiety for his safety than my own'. It was a year before they began the return to England where the deed was declared the justifiable act of a commanding officer.

Though there is little in their circumstances that matches the exploits of the fictional Philip Hepburn, I feel there are certain parallels in the bond which can develop between enlisted man and officer in the face of extreme adversity. In the only mention of Franklin in her letters Gaskell refers to the godless country in which he disappeared – significant, as Richardson had justified his actions by the fact that his victim was pagan. (*Letters*, No.108a)

John Hepburn was a very religious man. He was an experienced seaman who had been held prisoner by the French during the War. A great storyteller, he whiled away many an evening hour with his tales. He belonged to a lowland clan from Haddington. A cousin founded the Smeaton Hill station near Ballarat in Victoria, Australia. In the 1830s Franklin was Governor of Van Dieman's Land (Tasmania) and Hepburn entered his service as a kind of major-domo but proved to be more a friend than a servant. He had experience dealing with convict boys transported to the colony. When Franklin disappeared in 1847, the first expedition to take supplies was led by Richardson. In 1852 Hepburn joined the crew of Lady Franklin's expedition, at her insistence, even though by then he was well into his 60s. An act of Charity maybe, but such was the trust they had in him.

Mrs Fletcher was horrified by the treatment of casualties brought back to Portsmouth from the Crimea in 1855. 'Boiling with indignation' was her phrase about the callous way they were left to fend for themselves – ill, filthy and nowhere to go. This is the essence of Chapter 41 of *Sylvia's Lovers*; Philip Hepburn too landed at Portsmouth and wandered for days before reaching Winchester. This situation was covered in the press at the time, though probably over-sensationalised. Gaskell could have read it there but Mrs Fletcher did include the story in her autobiography. While this was not published till 1875, I wonder whether she showed the manuscript to Gaskell, a professional author, for advice?

There are several small points of detail that suggest a link with *Sylvia's Lovers*. For instance, Gaskell mentions the activities of the press gangs extending as far inland as Tadcaster (*SL*, Chapter 22). Tadcaster was Mrs Fletcher's hometown and she kept up links with the area throughout her life. She also knew York and was interested in the assizes (her husband was a judge), but I think it is stretching the point to suggest she was familiar with the case of William Atkinson who was tried and executed in York in 1793. Her maiden name, Dawson, is also used in *Sylvia's Lovers*.

The Fletchers were famous for their story telling sessions. She was very proud of her son-in-law and always eager to talk about him, as testified to by Tennyson in 1850. Mrs Fletcher spoke of Sir John 'con amore'. Mrs Tennyson (Emily Sellwood) and Richardson's second wife (Mary Booth, died 1845) had been cousins. They were nieces of Franklin, from Lincolnshire. Mrs Tennyson was anxious for any information of her missing uncle. Richardson took up an appointment at the Naval

Hospital, at Haslar near Gosport, but retired to Lancrigg, which he inherited on his mother-in-law's death. He was also a naturalist writing books about the flora and fauna of the Arctic – a sort of northern Roger Hamley. He sent specimens collected on his travels to his friend Charles Darwin and spent a lot of time laying out gardens at Lancrigg. He is best known today for the plants he introduced into this country.

The temptation to ascribe this as a source is hampered by the dates. Most of Gaskell's acquaintance with the Fletchers predates *Sylvia's Lovers* by several years. Mrs Fletcher died in 1858, Sir John in 1865, and I am not certain whether Gaskell actually met him. Lady Richardson and Mrs Davy both outlived her. The last mention is to Mrs Davy in 1859 when Gaskell supplies an introduction for Charles Bosanquet. She had not seen her for two years (*Letters*, No.439a). It may simply be a case of a distant memory kindling an interest and leading to her to find her sources elsewhere. Unless anybody knows any different!

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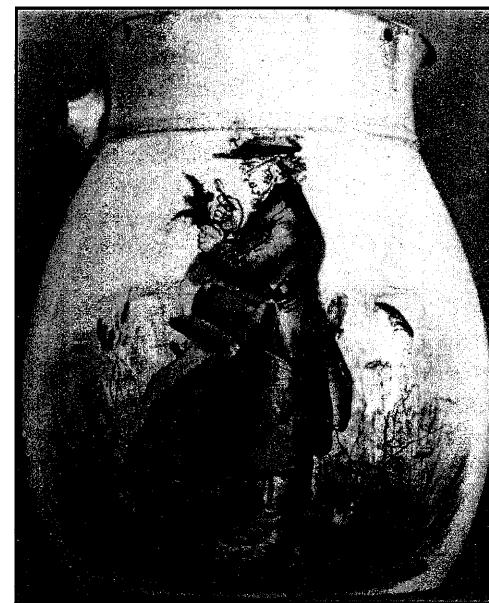
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Manchester Botanist?

Jane Wilson, a curatorial assistant at The Museum of Garden History* and a member of the Society, writes:

With reference to the article on Manchester Botanists in the autumn *Newsletter*, we have, in the Museum collection, a jug with an image of a nineteenth-century botanist on it. The jug was made by Doulton at Burslem some time after 1882, at a factory which they took over in that year. The original factory was called Pinder Bourne and a number of their early designs were kept in production by Doulton, of which this was one; it may therefore date back possibly to the 1850s. We have always felt that the portrait must be based on a real person but have been unable to find out whom. (Doulton are unable to help beyond what I have already told you.) Of course he might be based on a botanist local to the Potteries rather than Manchester but he is a wonderful character with his open vasculum, book, lens and flower in his cap, and must have known or corresponded with the Manchester botanists. If anyone can make any suggestions as to his identity we should be so pleased to hear from them. Personally, I always call him Job Legh!

Acknowledgements to The Museum of Garden History, Lambeth Palace Road, London SE1 7LB, tel: 020 7401 8865.



The Gaskell Trip To Brittany

Sheila Stephenson and Jean Hockenhuil

Elizabeth Gaskell tells in her letters that she set out for Brittany in 1862, accompanied by Meta and Isobel Thompson, with 'a mixture of the ideas of sea, health, rocks, ferns and Madame de Sévigné in our heads' (*French Life*). Our party of thirty-five Gaskell members set out with similar ideas; well, perhaps not so much the ferns, more the wonderful fish restaurants and patisseries. Christine had provided us with a full and informative itinerary before we set off, so we had a lot to look forward to. We were not disappointed. The weather was perfect and we enjoyed warm summer sunshine for the whole visit.

After an effortless journey we arrived outside the walls of St. Malo just as the lovely medieval buildings of the town were switching on their lights. The *Hotel France et Chateaubriand*, the birthplace of Chateaubriand, which was our base, overlooked a main square of the 'Intra Muros' area.

FRIDAY, 13th SEPTEMBER.

Our first full day began with a guided tour of St. Malo. Our guide, full of infectious enthusiasm, began by telling us that St. Malo was named after a Welsh monk called Maclow, which didn't sound very Welsh but then it was a long time ago, the sixth century in fact; he set up a Bishopric very close to the rock where the walled town now stands. Our guide took us on a tour of the ramparts and towers which safeguard the old town, taking great pains to assure us that the town had had a chequered history over the centuries and that the English were not the only ones to pursue imperialistic designs on the port. We heard about the Corsairs, a title that somehow seemed more romantic than mere pirates, who had plied their trade along this coastline and indeed given the area its soubriquet 'The Corsair city'. It was difficult to imagine that more recently, in 1944, enemy bombing had destroyed 75% of the area, as it had been so painstakingly restored.

We returned to the hotel for a talk by Professor Chapple on Chateaubriand, and after first telling us that he knew very little about him, he proceeded to set him in the literary context of his time and tell us about his popularity with the 'salon society' of the day; and so to Mrs Gaskell via Madame Recamier and to Madame Mohl and the Rue du Bac (which we had visited whilst in Paris).

The afternoon and evening were free to explore the interesting streets and buildings around the area, and there were certainly plenty of those; to finish off the first full day, we had the difficult task of selecting which one out of the many fish restaurants and crêperies to choose for our evening meal.

SATURDAY, 14th SEPTEMBER.

Our first full day excursion was by coach to Avranches, situated in the beautiful region between the Norman headland of Champeaux and the Breton Pointe du Grouin. It would appear from Mrs Gaskell's brief reference to Avranches (*Letters*, No.509b) that the town was not as attractive then as it is now: 'On the next morning by a carriage of the country to Pont Orson, where we breakfasted & thence to Mt. St. Michel, — that night to Avranches; where we staid 2 days, kept by the rain & a laudable desire to wash our clothes'. We, however, stopped at the Jardin des Plantes (the Botanic Garden) with its brilliant displays of flowers and shrubs and superb vantage point overlooking the Mont St. Michel Bay. We were not able to see the Mont as it was shrouded in the morning mist, a happy chance as it turned out, as our kindly driver made a detour on the way back and we were able to get within walking distance of the rock.

Arriving at Avranches for a brief stop many of the group climbed the winding path to visit the eleventh-century monument that indicates the original location of the Cathedral's west door. The Cathedral itself was destroyed during the French Revolution and never rebuilt; it is the place where Henry II made public penance in 1172 for the murder of Thomas à Becket. Fanny Trollope's son Adolphus, writing in 1840 in his book *Summer In Brittany*, tells us of Henry's attempt to justify himself before many of his nobles and the Papal Legate by declaring with his hand on the Bible that - "I swear that I neither ordered nor wished the murder of my Archbishop. When I heard of it I was extremely grieved" - Wonder if they had spin-doctors in the 11th Century!

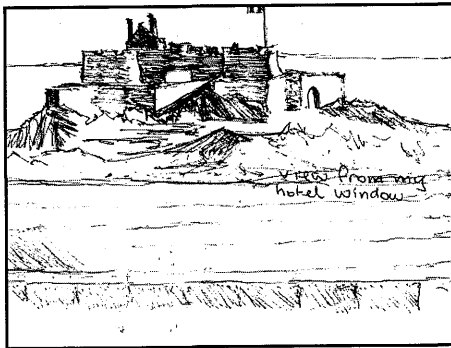
We drove on to Coutances and, as usual, it was first stop lunch. A large and pleasantly situated café overlooking the main square served us well and we were able to enjoy our lunch and at the same time watch the guests and bridal party arrive for the civil ceremony at the Hotel de Ville. Paying the bill for our meal caused a few problems as the proprietor apparently had not yet come to terms with euros and was still reckoning in francs but, soon sorted, we moved on to visit the Cathedral; a truly magnificent building that was completed in 1274 and has remained basically unaltered ever since. Its twin towers and the octagonal lantern dominate the surrounding area. Inside the cathedral was the outcome of over 900 years of continuous worship by the people of Coutances with ancient stained glass, medieval tiles showing the fleur de lys, emblem of the French Royal family, and many ancient effigies and monuments. It was lovely to see that the church is still in active use in the present day as flowers and orders of service were being set out ready for the religious part of the wedding ceremony that we had just seen in the town square. Sadly, there was no time to wait for the service as we had to get on the coach for our promised visit to Mont St. Michel. On the way we read more extracts

from *Summer in Brittany*, where Trollope describes in graphic detail his traumatic journey to visit the Mont, which was only accessible by a causeway at low tide. Seemingly, the guide they had booked could not be roused from his bed at 9a.m. as he had only been in it since 4a.m., so they had to find another one in a hurry. They eventually located one who agreed to take them but fell asleep on the journey and left the horses to find the way; perhaps he too had been out the night before. Trollope continues 'I thought it advisable that our guide should be awake.... I commenced very perseveringly jerking my elbow into his ribs but could get nothing out of him except "pas de danger" and then the brute snored again'. After a hair-raising time when the carriage and horses almost disappeared into the sands, local fishermen were able to pull them free with ropes. Anyway, no such problems with our guide, a perfect model of sobriety and efficiency! And after a walk to the bottom of the Mont and lots of photo-taking we were shepherded back onto the coach to complete our journey back to the hotel in time for dinner.

After dinner Christine gave us a talk about Madame de Sévigné, the seventeenth-century épistolière who was such a prolific correspondent and whose life Gaskell was researching; we were able to hear a very few extracts from some of the 1700 letters to her daughter reflecting the social history of the reign of Louis XIV.

SUNDAY, 15TH SEPTEMBER.

Our first free day. Early in the morning, when the causeway was clear, a group of enthusiasts crossed to a small island to visit the grave of Chateaubriand, others went to mass at the cathedral and some, following the advice of Friday's guide, Josephine, acquainted themselves with the numerous sights of interest in the town. From the moment of our arrival I realised St. Malo was an artists' paradise, so I used my free time filling my sketch book with buildings and views that attracted me. Our hotel was situated 'Intra Muros' and from my bedroom on the second floor I looked down on the old city walls and beyond to an island fortress proudly displaying the Tricolour.



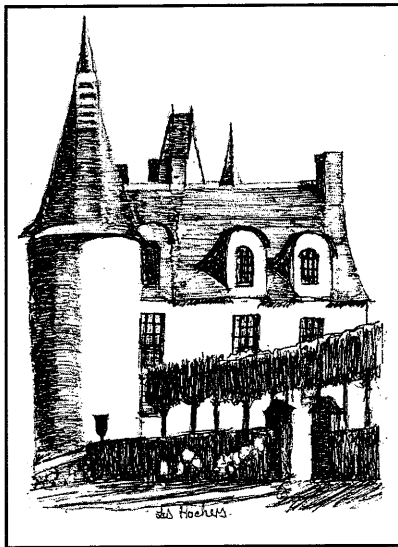
A walk round the wall was a favourite attraction for visitors and I spent an hour or two observing and recording the great variety of people indulging in this activity. I lunched at 'La Licorne' in the main square and then wandered up to the cathedral and admired the beautiful rose window through which the setting sun fired the glass into a glorious kaleidoscope of colour which made patterns on the old stone walls. Across the square was a 'Salon de Thé', where I observed an elegant French lady whilst I drank rose-scented tea and ate a slice of delicious rhubarb tart.

Returning to the hotel through narrow streets of art galleries and historic houses I met other members of the party enthusiastic about their afternoon in Dinard where they had walked, taken tea and in some cases visited art exhibitions. Two people had returned to Mont St. Michel by bus and explored the abbey.

MONDAY, 16th SEPTEMBER.

A very important day, for we were to follow in Mrs Gaskell's footsteps to the house where Madame de Sévigné spent her happiest hours. Whilst en route a letter from Mrs Gaskell to Catherine Winkworth was read to us. This gave an account of her journey in 1862 with her daughter Meta and a friend to 'Les Rochers'. I listened to her description of the countryside with its woods and little farmyard scenes, a truly pastoral setting, and, looking out of the window, felt that, apart from the state of the roads and our mode of transport, little had changed in the intervening years. We came to Vitré with its pink and white striped railway station in mid-morning. Our guide conducted us to the castle where we had a most interesting tour followed by a meander through the narrow streets looking at the old houses and eventually to the cathedral dedicated to Our Lady, a lovely building that had two pulpits, one internal and one on an outside wall. From there we went on to view the town house of Madame de Sévigné, which is in a sadly neglected state and about to be converted into apartments. Rather disheartened about this we took leave of our guide and went off in search of lunch. Four of us ate a delicious, reasonably priced meal at the 'Taverne de l'Ecu'. Back in the coach we drove through countryside displaying the early autumn colours, to 'Les Rochers'; the estate entrance was too narrow for the coach so we got out and walked to a building which now serves as ticket office, shop and small museum. From there we crossed to a grassy path bordered by a wood and eventually, just as Mrs Gaskell and her party had experienced, saw ahead an exquisite little chateau. By the entrance to the gardens our guide related the history of the building and the small chapel which Madame de Sévigné had had built in honour of one of her uncles who had been a benefactor.

The party then had a guided tour of the house, but I, following Meta's example, sat in the garden and sketched. We returned to St. Malo by the motorway route at the end of a very busy day.



TUESDAY, 17th SEPTEMBER.

Another day when we made our own plans. Time for a second visit to somewhere, an opportunity to get to know more of St. Malo or just to drink a *citron pressé* whilst lazing in the sun. It was market day in the area so a few people went to a nearby town where there was a large market.

WEDNESDAY, 18th SEPTEMBER.

This was the last excursion of our holiday and a chance to relax with a two and a half hours' sail along the River Rance to the medieval town of Dinan situated on its banks. We were told that the tidal forces of the estuary have been harnessed for the world's first tidal power station producing more than 600 million kWh of electricity a year and is the most popular site of scientific interest in France. The market town of Dinan is encircled by the ancient city walls and ramparts that give it its defining characteristics and is set at the top of a steep hill overlooking the port. A 'petit train touristique' is provided to take visitors from the quayside to the town but, sadly, only runs in the summer season so there was nothing for it but to start climbing.

The town has been designated a protected site and is a wealth of picturesque streets with pillared and timbered houses and much evidence of its past commercial importance included tradesmen's houses similar to the Shambles in York.

THURSDAY, 19th SEPTEMBER.

We had a free morning on the last day and an opportunity to have a last wander round St. Malo and buy our souvenirs and postcards before departing for the flight home. Everyone agreed that it had been a super holiday, thanks in no small part to Christine Bhatt, who had given so much time to organising it and ensuring that everything ran smoothly. For myself I have a happy jumble of memories: of a chateau with 'witches hat' turrets, half-timbered houses, slate-roofed, that lurched in all directions onto cobbled streets, magnificent cathedrals and of course the crêpes. The only sadness was that there was no book. Elizabeth Gaskell obviously loved the region and wrote enthusiastically about it in her letters and in 'French Life'. It would have made a wonderful story.

The Alliance of Literary Societies AGM

Saturday 26th - Sunday 27th April: hosted by The Dylan Thomas Society of Great Britain at The Dylan Thomas Centre, Swansea.

Last year several members of the Gaskell Society enjoyed a similar event hosted by The Arnold Bennett Society. This year, it promises to be a fascinating weekend with a varied programme, held in this attractive area to commemorate the 50th anniversary of Dylan Thomas' death. The Alliance of Literary Societies' homepage is at www.sndc.demon.co.uk.

BOOK NOTES

Christine Lingard

A few books to look out for this year:

Women's Voices in the Fiction of Elizabeth Gaskell (1810-1865)

by Marianne Camus of the University of Besançon, Edward Mellen Press, due January 2003, £74.95.

The author intends to study Gaskell's work as a whole, avoiding the usual division between condition-of-England and other more intimate books, and to provide a discussion of her feminism.

Women, work and representation

by Lynn Mae Alexander, Ohio University Press, £34.95, due January 2003.

The condition of the seamstress was something of a cultural icon in the 1840s and 1850s, not only in literature by such authors as Dickens and Charlotte Elizabeth Tonna, but also in painting. Concern arose not only for the young girls' physical welfare but also for their morals, as they were often sent a long way from home and left to their own devices in their spare time: a situation that is particularly relevant to *Ruth* and concerned Gaskell not only in her fiction but in her personal life and philanthropic work. This study looks at the subject in general.

A new edition of *Lois the Witch*

with a foreword by Jenny Uglow is promised from Hesperus Press at the end of June, £6.99.

Faithful Realism: Elizabeth Gaskell and Leo Tolstoy: a comparative study

by Josie Billington of Chester College, Bucknell University Press, \$43.50.

This book, published in June 2002, includes information on which the author has addressed the Society and published in the *Journal*, namely the importance of the rewriting of *Wives and Daughters*.

Elizabeth Gaskell: A Literary Life

by Shirley Foster, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, £15.99.

The aim of the Literary Lives series is to offer 'stimulating accounts of the literary careers of the most admired and influential English-language authors. Volumes follow the outline of the writers' working lives, not in the spirit of traditional biography, but aiming to trace the professional, publishing and social contexts which shaped their writing'. Shirley's book fulfils all these aims, making it an excellent addition to Gaskell studies. The book is aimed at students, but its usefulness is certainly not confined to them. It will be fully reviewed in the next *Journal*.

Note:

Graham Handley, series editor for the Everyman Elizabeth Gaskell series and regular contributor to the London and South-East meetings of the Gaskell Society, has been commissioned by Palgrave/Macmillan to write a 'Chronology' of Elizabeth Gaskell in their Author Chronology Series. He would like to hear from any Gaskell enthusiast who has firm dates not listed in the *Letters* or biographies, and from anyone who could lend him a copy of *Letters and Memorials of Catherine Winkworth*, ed. Susanna Winkworth and Margaret Shaen, 2 vols, privately printed, Clifton 1883-6. He hopes to complete the Chronology by the late summer, and can be contacted by email: graham@pentonhouse.co.uk or by letter to Dr. Graham Handley, Penton House, 18 High Street, CHESHUNT Herts EN8 0AE. Tel: 01992632399. Any expense incurred will be paid.

Gaskell Society North-West

Meetings at Manchester and Knutsford have been well attended.

On the last Wednesday in the month at St. John's Church Centre, Knutsford: meetings begin with buffet lunch. This year, *Sylvia's Lovers* has been the theme, with discussion and talks on naval history (by Christine Lingard) and on the historical novel (by Elizabeth Williams).

At Cross Street Chapel: subjects have had a Manchester connection: Beatrix Potter, Dickens and North West England, Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth.

At the New Year Lunch at Cottons Hotel, Knutsford, we were fortunate to have with us Bob Barnard, chairman of The Brontë Society who spoke to us about the problems of writing a biography of Emily Brontë.

The three local outings we took in Gaskell's footsteps, on 27 May, 14 August and 16 October made us realise that it is time we put this together in print so that others may explore the associations at their leisure. The four Unitarian Chapels all have interesting histories.

June 4th 2003:

Summer outing to Wirksworth, with George Eliot connections, and Well Dressing at Tissington.

Future dates:

Knutsford meetings: 26th March, 30th April 2003 and May 28th

Cross Street Chapel, 11th March 2003:

the topic will be 'Readers of Goethe in Manchester, with particular reference to the Gaskells', by Peter Skrine.

Forthcoming Events

5th April 2003:

AGM meeting at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester

10.30: Coffee

11.00: AGM

11.45: Talk by Louise Henson: 'New perspectives on Gaskell and Science'

Louise completed her PhD on Charles Dickens, Elizabeth Gaskell and Victorian Science at The University of Sheffield in 2000 and has published many articles in this area (including a two-part article in the latest and the forthcoming volumes of our *Journal*). She is one of the editors of the forthcoming volume *Culture and Science in the Nineteenth Century Media*. She is now working on an online version of The Old Bailey Proceedings, 1670-1834, for the Humanities Research Institute at The University of Sheffield.

1.00: Lunch

2.15: Catherine Winkworth (1827-78) A compilation of her life and letters which will include singing some of her hymns

The meeting ends at 3.30p.m. approximately.

1st - 4th August 2003:

Durham Conference on the theme of Elizabeth Gaskell's early years, especially at Newcastle, and *Sylvia's Lovers*.

Gaskell Society South-West

We were very pleased to welcome Gwen Clark from Oxford to our meeting in November. Gwen's subject was "Elizabeth Gaskell: Escape from the City" and, by close reference to the novels and letters, she showed us how, although Mrs. Gaskell enjoyed all the social and cultural life of Manchester and London, she was never so happy as when she was on holiday or staying with friends in the country. We had a comprehensive discussion about how far she would have enjoyed Hampshire on the grounds that living in the country is very different from enjoying a holiday, but Gwen pointed out that London would be very accessible for visits. In the evening, a group went to see *The Rivals* at the Theatre Royal, as a follow-on from some play-reading which we enjoyed at the August country tea, hosted by Alex and Kate Crawford in their garden at Norton St. Philip. I was rather worried in case Mrs. Gaskell would not have approved, but Kay Millard assured us that the Unitarians enjoyed drama and that many Unitarian churches had their own drama groups.

In January, twelve of us met in Fairfield Park Road, Bath, for a New Year Supper, after which we played card games found in Jane Austen's novels. These were very jolly round games and it was clear how Henry Crawford would have enjoyed helping Fanny. I was like Lady Bertram, and found it hard to understand!

Forthcoming Programme

Saturday, 5th April

Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Queen Square, 2.00 for 2.30:
Mrs. Kay Millard will speak on "Elizabeth Gaskell and Coleridge". Mrs. Millard is Secretary of the Bath Unitarian Fellowship and we always appreciate the depth of her knowledge and understanding. During May we hope to arrange a trip to Nether Stowey.

Sunday, 17th August, 3.00 p.m.

The Summer Tea at Murhill House again, kindly hosted by Janet and David Cunliffe-Jones.

Saturday, 22nd November

Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution, Queen Square. Dr. Ian Gregg will speak on "The Second Mrs. Stephenson", including some new material. Dr. Gregg is directly descended from Mrs. Gaskell's stepmother, and we look forward to seeing her in a new light.

Gaskell Society London And South-East

Saturday 10th May

'The Web of friendship between women writers in England and America in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries' – **Jane Silvey**

Saturday 13th September

Title to be announced – **Shirley Foster**

Saturday 8th November

'Elizabeth Gaskell and Manchester: a difficult relationship' – **Gwen Clarke**

All the meetings will be held at the Francis Holland School, 39 Graham Terrace, London SW1W 8JF and will commence at 2pm. Francis Holland School is a few minutes' walk from Sloane Square underground station (District and Circle lines).

Anyone who wishes may meet at 12 noon at Sloane Square underground station for a light lunch at the Royal Court Tavern, also on Sloane Square. Those arriving later than 12 noon should proceed directly to the Royal Court Tavern. During the summer a Literary Walk will be led by **Sylvia Burch**. Details will be sent out later in the year. If further information is required please contact Dudley J Barlow.

(Tel: 020 8874 7727)