

# The Gaskell Society

*A grand day out at Dunham Park, June 2003.*



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

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## NEWSLETTER

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## Editor's Letter

Joan Leach

Our first event of 2004 was a very pleasant New Year Lunch in Knutsford when Dr. Mary Summers gave us a talk on *Education, marriage and parenting seen through the eyes of Anne Brontë and reflected in the writings of Elizabeth Gaskell*. Our SW group, too, had a social meeting and they are planning a short visit to Oxford in June staying overnight at the Harris Manchester College. A North West group will be visiting Stratford-upon-Avon and area for its Gaskell and literary associations, staying in Worcester for three nights from July 3rd to 5th. We have recently discovered several letters in the Elgar Birthplace Museum from Meta to Mrs. Elgar: the Elgars were due to visit Manchester for a performance of *The Dream of Gerontius* and might have stayed at Plymouth Grove if all had gone to plan. We are also planning day trips to Liverpool and Lancaster.

Dudley Barlow who has done sterling work as secretary of our London SE group has moved to York and we are grateful to Frances Twinn for taking over.

I was intrigued to read in the N.T. North West News that Elizabeth Gaskell's *Life in Manchester: Libby Marsh's Three Eras* was partly the inspiration for a 'Grand Day Out' in June 2003 for school children from two Cheshire Schools. They dressed in their Sunday best in Victorian costume, including home made shawls and skirts, and sailed by canal barge to Dunham Park where they sang factory songs, had a picnic and played traditional games.

The sad incident of the Chinese cockle pickers drowned in Morecambe Bay may have reminded members that Elizabeth Gaskell knew the treacherous conditions and wrote about them in *The Sexton's Hero* (1847), which was reprinted as a sixpenny pamphlet, with *Christmas Storms and Sunshine*, to be sold for the benefit of Macclesfield Public Baths and Wash-houses. If you do not have a copy you can read or download it from Mitsu's web page: <http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/EG-etexts.html>.

There has been a series of letters recently in *The Times Literary Supplement* about a portrait owned by Elizabeth Rye, who was told that it was of Elizabeth Gaskell; she has been diligently researching it. We have noted this in earlier *Newsletters* but feel members will like to follow the debate here. Also in this issue John Chapple follows the connections between Tennyson and Gaskell, Frances Twinn considers Gaskell's depiction of Haworth church yard in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

My apologies are due to Marie Moss for unsatisfactory numbering of footnotes in the last Newsletter due to problems at our printers' and my failure in proof reading.

# Elizabeth Gaskell and Tennyson<sup>1</sup>

J.A.V.Chapple

The woods decay, the woods decay and fall,  
The vapours weep their burthen to the ground,  
Man comes and tills the field and lies beneath,  
And after many a summer dies the swan ...

I do not suppose that members of the Tennyson Society expect me to indulge myself now in the great pleasure of reading *Tithonus* aloud. As a member of the Gaskell Society, I have come to speak of the close relationships between two Victorian authors who were in some ways very different from each other.

They were close contemporaries - Tennyson born in 1809, Elizabeth Gaskell in 1810. She was a novelist and writer of short stories. He was the complete poet. He once confessed to Emily Sellwood that 'of all horrors, a little country town seems to me the greatest...' (*Tennyson Letters*, I.171). Elizabeth Gaskell, brought up in Knutsford, was the author of *Cranford* and *Wives and Daughters*. For her, the writing of letters, no matter how busy or ill she was, never ceased. He once declared, 'You know that I would any day as soon kill a pig as write a letter' (quoted in Ricks, *Tennyson*, p.209n). And on another occasion he wrote, 'Gossip is my total abhorrence' (*Tennyson Letters*, I. xxviii). She begged her young friend Harriet Carr for 'every little, leetle particular [and also] gossipry, and scandal'. Letters were as important to her ... as tobacco was to Tennyson.

As far as we know, she does not refer to his first true volume, *Poems, Chiefly Lyrical* (1830). She might just have heard of Tennyson, if her highly successful cousin in London, Dr. Henry Holland, was the doctor whose opinion was canvassed after Arthur Hallam had died in Vienna in September 1833 (*Tennyson Letters*, I. 93). The recently discovered letters to her friend Harriet Carr show that Tyrolese, Swiss and Spanish songs, Spurzheim on Phrenology, Mrs. Trollope on America and Bulwer's novels were her delight when she was young. In 1832 she married a Unitarian minister in Manchester, William Gaskell. He was also a teacher and lecturer, who joined with her in studying earlier poets such as Wordsworth, Coleridge, Crabbe and Byron. 'Poets and poetry of humble life' became their special subject.

On a deeply human level, however, Elizabeth Gaskell and Tennyson were at one with the rest of humanity. She wrote very little poetry indeed, but there is a private sonnet in 1836, 'On Visiting the Grave of my Stillborn Little Girl':

Thee have I not forgot, my firstborn, thou  
Whose eyes ne'er opened to my trustful gaze,  
Whose suff'rings stamped with pain thy little brow...

Tennyson and his wife were to suffer in the same way with their own first-born, in April 1851:

Little bosom not yet cold,  
Noble forehead made for thought,  
Little hands of mighty mould  
Clenched as in the fight which they had fought.  
He had done battle to be born  
But some brute force of Nature had prevailed  
And the little warrior failed...

This, too, was a private poem that remained unpublished in their lifetime.

At last, in 1838, Tennyson's poetry makes an appearance in Gaskell's correspondence. In a rather high-flown letter to that very literary couple, William and Mary Howitt, she writes, 'The dog-rose, that pretty libertine of the hedges with the floating sprays wooing the summer air, its delicate hue and its faint perfume, is unlucky. Never form any plan while sitting near one, for it will never answer.' Such self-consciously poetical prose! (Quite uncharacteristic of this liveliest of letter-writers, I should note.) We are not surprised when she goes on to evoke the 'deserted old halls' she had seen in Lancashire and Cheshire. 'Do they not remind you of Tennyson's "Deserted House" - "Life and thought are [have] gone away", &c.' (*Letters*, no.12, p.32).

Published in Tennyson's 1830 volume, this is not a brilliant poem when compared with the heart-rending stanzas of *In Memoriam* 7, 'Dark house, by which once more I stand / Here in the long unlovely street ...'. But it is a poem that was admired by that tough egg whom Tennyson called 'Topsy Kit' (suppressed), and 'Crusty / Rusty / Musty / Fusty Christopher', that is, Professor John Wilson.<sup>2</sup> Its religious borrowing from 2 Corinthians - the earthly house transformed into a mansion incorruptible - would have appealed to Mrs. Gaskell, whose belief in an afterlife was strong rather than troubled or faintly trusting.

I do not think they ever met, though there was a near miss about April 1849. Tennyson told Mary Howitt that he would have to postpone his meeting with 'the authoress of that fine book *Mary Barton*' (*Tennyson Letters*, I.299). Quite suddenly she had become more than a wife, mother and simple lover of literature. She too was an author, of a very successful first novel, though I doubt very much if she bothered as much as Tennyson did about errors of the press. 'I was with the unlucky author when the proof reached him' claimed Locker Lampson. 'He gazed at it with horror and gave a very prolonged and remarkable groan, which not having been set to music, I cannot do justice to here' (Hagen, p.51). William Gaskell used to look after such little matters for his wife.

She was bold enough to ask John Forster to beg Tennyson for a copy of his poems, as a present for Samuel Bamford, 'a great, gaunt, stalwart Lancashire man, formerly hand-loom weaver'. (Bamford, unable to afford a copy of his own, used to learn the poems by heart whenever he had a chance.) Tennyson turned up trumps, and on 7 December 1849 Mrs. Gaskell was able to send Forster a triumphant account of tracking down Bamford as he came out of 'a little old-fashioned public house' in Manchester, presenting him with the volume and leaving him in the middle of the road reading aloud, of all things, 'The Sleeping Beauty'. Of course, in some danger of being run over. (*Letters*, no.59; *Tennyson Letters*, l.307-9, 314 n.)

In about July 1850 Elizabeth Gaskell was overwhelmed by *In Memoriam*. She found it 'a book to brood over - oh *how* perfect some of them are - I can't leave them to go on to others, and yet I must send it back tomorrow. By dint of coaxing, however, I've got Wm to promise he'll *give* it to me, so I sing *Te Deum*' (*Letters*, no.73). The manuscript underlining of 'give' is interesting, but we might also notice the use of the Latin title, *Te Deum*. The Unitarian who once wrote, 'I do not like the putting in, D V. [*Deo volente*] but it is always in my heart' (*Further Letters*, p.157), evoked a more Catholic tradition when greatly moved.

In August of that year Mrs. Gaskell met Charlotte Brontë for the first time in the Lake District. This was the famous occasion when Sir James Kay-Shuttleworth proposed to drive over to Coniston - they 'very cozy' in a carriage with 'Sir James on the box' - and introduce them to Tennyson, but had turned back when it began to rain. 'I held my peace, and bit my lips', Elizabeth wrote crossly (*Letters*, nos.75 and 79, at pp.124, 130).

As for Charlotte Brontë, 'She and I quarrelled & differed about almost every thing', Mrs. Gaskell told Charlotte Froude, '- she calls me a democrat, and can not bear Tennyson - but we like each other heartily...' (*Letters*, no.78). Charlotte had actually given up reading *In Memoriam* half-way through, she told Mrs Gaskell in a follow-up letter of 27 August, distrusting 'this rhymed and measured and printed monument of grief. What change the lapse of years may work - I do not know - but it seems to me that bitter sorrow, while recent, does not flow out in verse' (*Charlotte Brontë Letters*, II. 457). 'She calls me a democrat, and can not bear Tennyson'. The collocation is intriguing. Had Elizabeth Gaskell attempted to defend Tennyson as speaking for all of us, for humanity, in *In Memoriam*? And we remember that neither Tennyson nor Gaskell had published their private poems of grief.

By 27 August 1850, Elizabeth Gaskell had her own copy of *In Memoriam*, which she promptly plundered in chapter 6 of *The Moorland Cottage*, published on 14 December that year. She quotes the poem (XCVII. 33-6) directly, to express Frank Buxton's trust in Maggie, whose 'faith is fixt and cannot move, / She darkly finds him

great and wise, / She dwells on him with faithful eyes, / "I cannot understand - I love". The sale catalogue (lot 430) of the Gaskell's house in Manchester shows that on 22 November 1852 her husband William also gave her a first edition of Tennyson's 'Ode on the Duke of Wellington'. I can't quite work out what significance this might have.<sup>3</sup>

It is wonderfully easy, however, to appreciate my next instance of the connection between the two authors. When in 'A Love Affair at Cranford' (*Household Words* on 3 January 1852), an aging Miss Matty tremulously met the lover of long ago whom she had been discouraged from marrying, Mr. Thomas Holbrook, he proved to be a devotee of Tennyson, quoting from 'The Gardener's Daughter' the lines about the cedar's 'dark-green layers of shade' and the blackness of ash buds. Besides this, the emotions expressed in the poem could hardly be more appropriate in this particular context. You will surely remember these lines:

Behold her there  
As I beheld her ere she knew my heart,  
My first, last love; the idol of my youth,  
The darling of my manhood, and, alas!  
Now the most blessed memory of mine age.

The literary allusion intensifies, for those who can bring it to mind as they read, the everlasting love and nostalgic emotion involved.

Just as pertinently, Mr. Thomas Holbrook, *yeoman*, went on to read from 'Locksley Hall', a poem in which Tennyson wrestled with his doomed love for Rosa Baring and the *superbia* of the Tennyson D'Eyncourts. But with the tact of a prose realist Mrs. Gaskell makes Miss Matty fall asleep during what we could believe was an impassioned reading. In her youth Miss Matty did not have the strength to resist the disapproval of her father the rector and her sister Deborah. It was ultimately more likely and, despite the irony of this allusion to 'Locksley Hall', more touching, that she would wear something resembling a widow's cap after Mr. Holbrook's unexpected death and keep the volume of Tennyson's poems he had given her beside her Bible.

We can conclude, I think, that Elizabeth Gaskell's general sensibility was attuned to Tennyson's, even in part created by him. His poetry comes to her mind with talismanic force, as when in a letter of December 1857 to Charles Eliot Norton she reminds him of 'that exquisite dreamy Torcello Sunday, - that still, sunny, sleepy canal, - something like the Lady of Shalott - tho' how, why, & wherefore I can't tell' (*Letters*, no.384, at p.489).

Fortunately, Professor Marion Shaw, in her study of the fatal return theme in *Sylvia's Lovers* and *Enoch Arden* (*Gaskell Society Journal* 9), has teased out more subtle literary relationships between the two Victorian authors.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps I should have adopted that more terse new form, the e-mail. The poet who even in his teens was well acquainted with advances in science, and who later was able to envisage 'airy navies grappling in the central blue', became Poet Laureate. Prophetically, perhaps, when wishing to travel incognito in Cornwall in 1860, he suggested that 'Mr. Poelaur would be a good name to direct to me by' (quoted, Ricks, p.232). Lower case, no spaces and no proper punctuation nowadays, of course: mrpoelaur@verseserve.co.uk. That might even arrive on the screen of Andrew Motion. To become Poet Laureate confers a kind of pleasing immortality, I imagine.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Tennyson Society, Memorial Service Address, 2000. Reprinted, with acknowledgements, from the *Tennyson Research Bulletin* 7, 4 (November 2000).

<sup>2</sup> John Jump, ed., *Tennyson: the Critical Heritage* (Routledge, 1967), p. 59.

<sup>3</sup> [Ed. note] Perhaps William gave Elizabeth a copy of 'Ode on the Duke of Wellington' on 22 November 1852, to console her for missing the awesome occasion of his funeral. She wrote to a friend: 'Mr. Chapman [her publisher] wrote a polite invitation to me to come and see the Duke's funeral from his shop window (a sight I should dearly have liked,...)' (*Letters*, no.137, dated ? October 1852). Her daughter Marianne took her place instead and was requested by her mother to write her 'a particular account, *not* so much of the Duke's funeral, as of Mr. Mrs. [*sic*] Chapman & their ménage & children. Everybody here is going into mourning.' (*Letters*, no.140)

<sup>4</sup> Saverio Tomaiuolo has recently stressed the importance of *Sylvia's Lovers* for Tennyson (*Tennyson e il senso del narrare*, Pescara 2003, pp.152-58). Gaskell Sale Catalogue, lots 553 and 555 show 'Enoch Arden', 1st edn 1864, and 'Idylls of the King', 1859.

## Books

J.S. Hagen, *Tennyson and his Publishers* (Macmillan 1979)

Christopher Ricks, *Tennyson* (Macmillan 1989).

*The Poems of Tennyson*, ed. Christopher Ricks (Longman, 1969).

*The Letters of Alfred, Lord Tennyson*, ed. C.Y. Lang and E.F. Shannon (3 vols, Clarendon Press 1981-87).

*The Letters of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Margaret Smith (2 vols, Clarendon Press, 1995, 2000).

# Haworth through unfamiliar eyes

Frances Twinn

*The Life of Charlotte Brontë* appeared in two volumes in 1857. The frontispiece in each of the volumes in many ways represents the subject of the biography. Volume 1 opens with Richmond's portrait of Charlotte Brontë; Volume 2 interestingly contains a drawing of the immediate environs of Haworth Parsonage, Charlotte's home.<sup>1</sup> This pen-and-ink drawing is attributed to Elizabeth Gaskell who, like most Victorian women, would have been taught to draw. Therefore she would have executed the view 'with the eye of the amateur painter'.<sup>2</sup> She was determined to illustrate the biography with 'the old wild place' and, in the end, she wrote to George Smith saying,

I send you a sepia drawing from a sketch of mine of Haworth Parsonage...<sup>3</sup>

However, like her fiction and elements of the biography, the drawing seems to have been a combination of observation and imagination.

Her drawing indicates a rather bleak view of a landscape dominated by a churchyard. This is surely testimony to Gaskell's preoccupation with the deaths which bedevilled Charlotte's life (and perhaps her own). Interestingly the tombstones are a combination of the prostrate and the vertical. There are about forty-five upright gravestones in the drawing. It is not possible to count the number of horizontal ones as they are not so clearly delineated, although there appear to be more than forty-five. If her memo to George Smith, her publisher, is anything to judge by, Gaskell had a clear picture in her mind of the churchyard for she wrote,

The gravestones in Haworth Church Yard, are FLAT, not many head-stones; and not a tuft of grass between.<sup>4</sup>

Ironically the drawing conflicts with the biography which it seeks to illustrate. Gaskell's authorial comment that 'the graveyard is terribly full of upright tombstones'<sup>5</sup> is followed at a much later stage in the book by a quote from Jane Arnold's account of her visit to Haworth. She wrote more accurately of the churchyard as

a dreary, dreary place, literally paved with rain-blackened tombstones (*The Life*, p.363)

The drawing has few buildings other than those associated with the church and the parsonage. Gaskell listed these as the 'Sexton's Shed, School-house, Sexton's (tall) House (where the Curate lodged), and the Church'<sup>6</sup> when she sent her 'sepia drawing' to George Smith. As might be expected, the church and the parsonage have prominent positions.

The stone wall 'keeps out the surrounding churchyard'<sup>7</sup> by delimiting the garden which is depicted by the shrub and bushes adjacent to the wall. The garden can be clearly seen as a buffer zone between the house and churchyard and must have been a godsend given the health hazard posed by the bodies buried just beyond the wall. Just as the foreground is dominated by gravestones, so the background is dominated by treeless hills which are, presumably, moorland-clad although the vegetation is not clearly delineated. The parsonage appears somewhat dwarfed by the hills which rise quite steeply behind the house, certainly more steeply than they do in reality. Wilks' caption to the engraving in his volume on the family observes,

Mrs Gaskell allowed herself a romantic but telling exaggeration of the desolate prospect facing the parsonage children<sup>8</sup>

I am sure there is a romantic element but I would argue too, that her perception of this environment stemmed from unfamiliarity. Indicative of Gaskell's unfamiliarity with this landscape is her exclamation found in the biography,

Oh! Those high, wild, desolate moors, up above the world, and the very realms of silence. (*The Life*, p.439)

I have argued elsewhere that the exclamation 'represents a sharp intake of breath and a frisson of emotion as she re-captured the memory of her first encounter with these moorland expanses around Haworth'.<sup>9</sup> The drawing is her visual representation of that unfamiliarity because for Gaskell those moorlands loomed large in her mind when she thought of Charlotte's home environment.

Disappointed with the photographs commissioned for the biography, Gaskell wrote to George Smith,

They give an idea of wildness and desolation but not of height (*sic*) & steepness, and of the sweeping lines of the moors beyond.<sup>10</sup>

She was determined that her view should prevail, for she continues,

I should like an engraving of the wild old place, and I think perhaps this would be better than the Photograph.<sup>11</sup>

Arguably Gaskell's drawing distorts the reality - which is the gradual rise to a plateau of the moorland surface; but, unlike a photograph, the drawing is a product of the creative imagination and must reflect something of Gaskell's personal perception of the home of 'her dear friend' Charlotte Brontë. The latest Brontë Parsonage Museum souvenir guide highlights Gaskell's perception by juxtaposing a photograph taken before 1878, a contemporary photograph and her own engraving.<sup>12</sup>

It is evident from a comparison of these photographs with Gaskell's drawing that hers was a function of both mental image and artistic licence rather than the reality of the scene.

**Notes:**

- <sup>1</sup> Walter E. Smith, *Elizabeth Gaskell: A Bibliographical Catalogue* (Los Angeles: Heritage Bookshop, 1998), p.106.
- <sup>2</sup> An observation made by Professor Andrew Sanders in conversation, 30 Aug. 1999.
- <sup>3</sup> John Chapple and Arthur Pollard, eds, *The Letters of Mrs Gaskell* (Manchester: MUP, 1966), no.339, p.443.
- <sup>4</sup> *Letters*, no.343, p. 445.
- <sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (Oxford: OUP, 1996), p.12.
- <sup>6</sup> *Letters*, no.339, p.443.
- <sup>7</sup> Gaskell, p.12.
- <sup>8</sup> Brian Wilks, *The Brontës* (London: Hamlyn, 1975), p.32.
- <sup>9</sup> Frances Twinn, 'The Landscapes of Elizabeth Gaskell's Writing', unpublished PhD thesis, University of Durham, 1999.
- <sup>10</sup> *Letters*, no.338, p.442. Interestingly, in his poem 'Haworth Churchyard April 1855', Matthew Arnold emphasizes the moorland and the lonely bleakness of the group of buildings. Clearly, Gaskell's perception was shared by others.
- <sup>11</sup> *Letters*, no.339, p.443.
- <sup>12</sup> Ann Dinsdale and Kathryn White, *Brontë Parsonage Museum. A Souvenir Guide* (Haworth: The Brontë Society, 1998), pp.9-10.



## *Gaskell's Works now searchable via new Hyper-Concordance*

Nancy S. Weyant

Concordances have long been essential reference tools for literary scholars engaged in textual analysis. They are a valuable aid for any analysis of writing style, imagery, or themes, as well as a useful way to quickly locate particular passages within a given text. On December 28, 2003, the one-hundredth anniversary of the death of George Gissing, fellow Gaskell Society member Mitsuhara Matsuoka unveiled his hyper-concordance for the works of a range of Victorian authors, including Elizabeth Gaskell. This addition to the resources available to the Gaskell scholar is most welcome.

The complete collection of concordances for all 31 nineteenth-century authors resides on the Victorian Literary Studies Archives webpage (<http://victorian.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/concordance/>). The hyper-concordance for Gaskell can be accessed from a link on the first page of the Gaskell Web (<http://www.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/~matsuoka/Gaskell.html>) or directly by using the Gaskell Concordance's unique URL: <http://victorian.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/concordance/gaskell>. Upon selecting a specific author from the Archives or upon clicking on the link from the Gaskell Web, you are presented with a dropdown box from which you select a particular work. In the case of Gaskell, if you select "Short Stories", you are then presented with a third dropdown box that lists all of the individual stories. After selecting a specific work, the program allows you to limit or refine your search by specifying that your word or phrase be case-sensitive or non-alphabet-character sensitive (which allows you to search for numbers, types of punctuation - alone or in conjunction with particular words - or symbols such as £) as well as to specify the "head length" and "tail length" (the letters before and after your word or phrase - in other words the textual context for the word or phrase for which you are searching). If you enter no specific term or phrase and click on the "Search" button, two boxes display below. One posts the total number of text lines, the total word count and the number of unique words; the other enumerates all unique words and the number of occurrences of each. If you enter a specific word or phrase, three boxes display below: the same line and word profile of the individual work, each occurrence of the specified word or phrase searched and the full text of the work in question. Each line of the text is numbered, and the line number for each occurrence of the word/phrase displayed serves as a link to its location in the full text at the bottom of the screen. According to Mitsu, the scanned texts are from the Knutsford edition, enhanced by reference to later editions during proofreading.

The ease and speed with which the texts of Gaskell's works can be searched is truly amazing and exciting. For example, it took me less than two minutes to confirm that the words "book" and "books" appear 20 times in *Mary Barton*, 19 times in *Ruth*, 36 times in *Cranford*, 52 times in *North and South*, 43 times in *Sylvia's Lovers*, 53 times in *Cousin Phillis*, 101 times in *Wives and Daughters* and 168 times in *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*. Likewise, it took me less than ten seconds to identify the exact line in *Cranford* (line 5028) on which my e-mail signature quotation ("I'll not listen to reason...") appears. The implications for future Gaskell research and scholarship are significant.

As any visitor to the Gaskell Web knows, Mitsu's computer skills are exceptional. His introduction to the Concordance profiles the program used (C++), identifies "Windows 2000/XP and the latest Microsoft Internet Explorer as the best and quickest way to view the Hyper-Concordance website", and gently notes the need for patience on the part of Macintosh users. This Hyper-Concordance is a wonderful example of how technology greatly enhances our access to literary texts. Everyone who uses computers for their Gaskell research should bookmark this concordance for easy access. Gaskell scholars and librarians alike owe a debt of gratitude to Mitsu Matsuoka.

## *Mrs Gaskell and Miss Fergusson: a new connection*

Alan Shelston

While working in the John Rylands University Library recently I came across a further link between Elizabeth Gaskell and her governess, Barbara Fergusson. Readers of the *Newsletter* will remember that a cache of letters to Miss Fergusson dating from 1847 was included in *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, and that following that date she seemed to have disappeared from our immediate view. While working on the early editions of *Cranford*, however, I discovered that the Library's copy of the so-called 'Second edition' - in fact a second impression of the first edition of 1853, and published in the same year - bore the inscription on its front end-paper: Barbara B[?] Fergusson, with the kind love and affectionate remembrance of E.C. Gaskell/ Plymouth Grove./Sept 29. 1853. This seems not to have been recorded formally, although when I showed it to Carol Burrows, archivist at the library, she said that she had been aware of it, and she kindly gave me a photo-copy.

This clearly confirms that Mrs Gaskell retained her affection for Barbara Fergusson and that she remained in contact with her for some years after she left her employment at Plymouth Grove.

An account of what is known about Miss Fergusson, by Dr. Jean Lindsay, was published in *The Gaskell Society Newsletter* 29, February 2000





## *A Gaskell Portrait?*

Members with long memories and carefully filed *Newsletters* might remember this portrait, dated 1850 or 51, and an article about it in *NL* 5 (1988 ) by the owner, Elizabeth Rye, (then E Jacobi) who bought it at an antique fair in 1987. She added a plea for help with research in *NL* 33.

She was told on buying the picture that it was of Mrs Gaskell and another dealer added that it had come from the family of Mary Warner in 1974. Her researches into the artist, who might have commissioned the portrait and why , and the family who owned it have been extensive and are ongoing.

Ms. Rye succeeded in finding a descendant who confirmed that the Warner family had owned it. Mary Warner was an actress who died young and in debt in 1854, leaving three children who were charitably educated with assistance from William Charles Macready and Angela Burdett-Coutts. Ms. Rye believes that the link between the latter, known as a benefactor, and Mrs Gaskell may be significant. She has recently had an article published in the *Times Literary Supplement* (21.11.03) about the provenance of the picture<sup>1</sup> and wrote:

As I had suspected her association with Miss Coutts and knew that Mrs. Gaskell's work often involved children, I wondered whether she might have been involved in this case? Though the name Warner is not mentioned in Mrs. Gaskell's letters, Mrs. Gaskell had two meetings with Macready shortly before and after the date of Mrs. Warner's death. And only three weeks after Mrs. Warner's death, in October 1854, a letter from Mrs. Gaskell to a Mrs. Ouvry provided the details requested of a private school for girls in Hampstead. Mrs. Ouvry was the wife of Miss Coutts's solicitor. Could this information have been for the benefit of Mrs. Warner's daughter, Ellen, who was thirteen when her mother died? It seems possible that the heavily committed Miss Coutts might have given a portrait of Mrs. Gaskell to Ellen in order to encourage her to contact her if she had any problems.

This is an interesting chain of circumstances, but it has to be said that there is no proven link between Miss Burdett-Coutts, and the artist Herbert Smith, who was mainly known as a copyist. There are some similarities in pose and features between this portrait and those known portraits of Elizabeth Gaskell, but many members will probably agree with another *TLS* correspondent, Anne Kindersley, who wrote:

My doubts about Herbert L. Smith's sitter begin with her hair and go on to her clothes. Mrs. Gaskell was only forty in 1850; she was unlikely to have had glossy white hair [ed: one of the last known photographs of her, dated about 1864, shows her with brown hair]. She was a good looking and elegant woman who took great care with her clothes ... [she] would not have been seen dead in the dowdy, elaborate outfit that Herbert L. Smith painted. ... The blue-and-white tippet (not shawl) the frilly collar and cuffs, and the voluminous black dress are quite alien to her simple and becoming style.

Professor Angus Easson voiced similar doubts in his letter to *The Times Literary Supplement* (2.1.04)

I was intrigued to see Elizabeth Rye's 'Portrait of a Lady: An Unattributed Portrait of Mrs. Gaskell?' (21 November 2003), since some time ago Ms. Rye spoke to me about it by phone. She was understandably excited about



the possibility of Herbert L. Smith's watercolour being a portrait of Mrs. Gaskell, though I was doubtful about the connections that she needed to establish between sitter and the picture's presumed subsequent owner, Ellen, daughter of the actress Mary Warner. Ms. Rye also needed to show that Ellen was given it by Angela Burdett-Coutts. While continuing to admire Ms. Rye's enthusiasm and research and her discretion in still not insisting upon the sitter's identity, I am now, having read her essay, deeply sceptical about both the proposed connections and the sitter's identity.

First, there is the likeness itself. Anne Kindersley (letter, 5 December 2003) reacted interestingly to the sitter's clothes and noted the grey hair, unlikely in a woman of 40, though Kindersley accepts that 'the face is right'. Along with the clothing and the hair colour, I would add that I am not convinced that the face is 'right'. True, portraits necessarily involve subjective elements, both in their execution and in the viewer's response: W.Thomson's lively miniature of Elizabeth Gaskell in 1832 suggests a rather slimmer, more flighty subject, than David Dunbar's bust of 1829, while George Richmond's drawing of 1851 clearly exhibits his notorious idealisation of his subjects. But looking at Dunbar, Thomson (perhaps the facial shape closest to Smith's sitter), Richmond, and Samuel Laurence's pastel of 1854, <sup>2</sup>the impression is of Mrs. Gaskell as a woman with a marked chin, full lower face, and a nose prominent even to beakiness, indented at the top and suddenly pointed. Smith's portrait has an elongated face, chin rounded but neither the prominent lower cheeks nor projecting nose.

Second, in constructing her argument, Ms. Rye links Mrs. Gaskell with Dickens and Angela Burdett-Coutts, suggesting that Burdett-Coutts commissioned the portrait - and by implication, gave it at some considerable time later to Ellen Warner: Smith's picture is dated 1850/51 and Burdett-Coutts only undertook to provide for Ellen's education in 1853. It may be enough to underline that while Mrs. Gaskell's concerns link her to Dickens's and Burdett-Coutts's work at Urania Cottage, both in sympathy and practically, her direct contact with Burdett-Coutts was so slight that a commissioned portrait must seem unlikely. Indeed, a portrait of Burdett-Coutts, as generous benefactor, might have been a more obvious gift to Ellen Warner than a portrait of Mrs. Gaskell.

Third, and more particularly, Ms. Rye does propose a direct link between Mrs. Gaskell and Ellen Warner, when she suggests Mrs. Ouvry - perhaps the wife of the solicitor, Frederic Ouvry - wrote to Mrs. Gaskell about a possible school for Ellen Warner. The Hampstead school, where Mrs. Gaskell's eldest daughter, Marianne, had been educated, was Unitarian. Why should Burdett-Coutts, a committed Anglican (she built, for example, St. Stephen's, Rochester Row) think of sending Ellen Warner, who

presumably was an Anglican and certainly married a Church of England clergyman, to a Unitarian school? We only have Mrs. Gaskell's reply to Mrs. Ouvry, but to read it (*Gaskell Letters*, ed. Pollard & Chapple, pp.802-03), calls in doubt that placing a pupil in the school is at issue at all. Mrs. Gaskell writes that she can 'answer for the safe, though it might be a busy, place, if she did apply'. It being 'a place', with its busyness, and to be applied for, suggests that this is an opening for a servant, a point strengthened by the rest of the letter, about a servant whom Mrs. Gaskell is taking over from Mrs. Ouvry. That Ellen Warner here links Mrs. Gaskell and Mrs. Ouvry surely doesn't survive scrutiny.

I fully understand the wish to give a portrait an identity. But even more than Elizabeth Rye, who wants to suggest but tactfully does not insist that her picture is of Mrs. Gaskell, I must doubt that the sitter has been identified and decline to accept it is Mrs. Gaskell.

The possibility of establishing whether or not the portrait is of Mrs. Gaskell by using techniques of computerised imaging, comparing the new portrait with those that have been authenticated, is currently being investigated.

<sup>1</sup> Elizabeth Rye is still researching the various links. Her article from the *TLS*, and requests for help in research, can be found on the 'Alliance of Literary Societies' web page <http://sndc.demon.co.uk/erye.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> *Members* might like to compare the Smith portrait with the Laurence of Mrs. Gaskell which was on the cover of our last few Newsletters. *NL* 33 gives reasons for dating the Laurence pastel portrait as 1864 rather than '54.

## *Alliance of Literary Societies AGM 24th April*

This will be hosted by The Graham Greene Birthplace Trust at Berkhamsted, linked to a Spring Centenary Weekend. For info e-mail: [secretary@grahamgreenebt.org](mailto:secretary@grahamgreenebt.org)

**The Trollope Society** is holding a one-day conference on Saturday 24<sup>th</sup> April at The Institute for English Studies at London University. This is to coincide with the forthcoming BBC production of *He Knew He was Right*. Contact no.020 7862 8675

**The Arnold Bennett Society** has a one-day conference on 12<sup>th</sup> June at Staffordshire University's Stoke-on-Trent campus info. from: [l.ashwell@staffs.ac.uk](mailto:l.ashwell@staffs.ac.uk)

**The Martineau Society** has its 10<sup>th</sup> annual conference in Birmingham 2-4 July. Info from Alan Middleton: [alan@ajmidd.demon.co.uk](mailto:alan@ajmidd.demon.co.uk).

## *The North West Group*

Knutsford meetings at St. John's Parish Church room: North and South themes. March 31 and April 28. Lunch at 12.15. Trips to Liverpool and Lancaster for Gaskell/Literary links. Dates to be arranged. Autumn meeting September 25.

## *The Gaskell Society Postal Bookstall*

Here is the complete Gaskell postal bookstall list. These books are on our bookstall at major meetings of the Society, and can be sent by post at other times. The prices are given against each title. The books are hardback unless stated otherwise. In some cases there are only one or two copies remaining. To order please contact Janet Allan, 10 Dale Road, New Mills, High Peak, SK22 4NW; phone: 01663 744233; email: [janet@janetbook.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:janet@janetbook.fsnet.co.uk).

**UK orders:** cheques should be payable to The Gaskell Society. Please add postage of £3 for volumes costing £10 and over: those less than £10 are sent post free.

*Anne Brontë: educating Parents* by Mary Summers; Highgate Publications, 2003, paperback £9.95

*Artless Tales* by Anna Maria Porter; Juvenilia Press 2003, paperback £5

*At home with Elizabeth Gaskell* by Barbara Brill; Teamband, 2000, £2.50 paperback

*The Brontës; High Weaving Heather*, a selection of poems; Phoenix 1996, paperback 60p.

*Cousin Phillis and other Tales* by Elizabeth Gaskell; World's Classics, Oxford University Press, 1981 paperback £3.99.

*Cranford*, a reading of the complete text by Prunella Scales. 3 Tapes. Cover to Cover £25.

*Cross Street Chapel in the time of the Gaskells* by Geoffrey Head. Cross Street Chapel, 1999, £1.

*Edward Neville* by Marianne Evans (George Eliot) Juvenilia Press, 1995 paperback £5.

*Elizabeth Gaskell a biography*, Winifred Gérin, Oxford University Press 1976, secondhand copy £10.

*Elizabeth Gaskell, a habit of stories* by Jenny Uglow; Faber and Faber, 1993, £12.50.

*Elizabeth Gaskell, the Early Years* by John Chapple; Manchester University Press, 1997, £19.

*Elizabeth Gaskell: a Literary Life* by Shirley Foster; Palgrave Macmillan, 2002, paperback, £14.

'Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*: a novel of 1848?' by Angus Easson. Offprint from the *Transactions of the Lancashire and Cheshire Antiquarian Society* vol 86, 1990. £2 paperback.

*Emily Brontë* by Robert Barnard; The British Library, 2000, £11 paperback.

*The Experienced English Housekeeper* by Elizabeth Raffald; Southover Press 1997, £15.

*Further Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, edited by John Chapple and Alan Shelston; Manchester University Press, 2000, hardback £38.50, paperback 2003, £12.50.

*Gaskell Society Journals* vols 1-15, and 17, 1987-2001, 2003. Gaskell Society. Paperback, £6 each. Volume 16, 2002 with index to vols 1-16, £9.

*A History of England* by Jane Austen; Juvenilia Press, 2003 paperback, £5.

*Knutsford and Elizabeth Gaskell*, Gaskell Society, 2000, £2.50 paperback.

*Incidents from Phippy's Schooldays* by Philip Larkin; Juvenilia Press, 2002, paperback £5.

*The Letters of Mrs. Gaskell*, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, 1997, reprint, Manchester University Press, £13.50 paperback.

*The Life of Charlotte Brontë* edited by Clement K. Shorter; 1930 reprint, second-hand £5.

*Love and Friendship* Jane Austen; Juvenilia Press, 2001 reprint, paperback £5.

'*Mary Barton*' by Elizabeth Gaskell, edited by Angus Easson. Ryburn, 1993, £12.

*Mrs. Gaskell's Observation and Invention* by John Geoffrey Sharps; Linden Press, 1970, £15.

*Private Voices: the diaries of Elizabeth Gaskell and Sophia Holland*, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Anita Wilson, Keele University Press, 1996, £8.

*The Reverend William Turner; dissent and reform in Georgian Newcastle-upon-Tyne* by Stephen Harbottle; Northern Universities Press, 1997 paperback, £17.50.

*The Story so far: Manchester Academy of Fine Arts from 1859 to 2003* by Sheila Dewsbury; Manchester Academy of Fine Arts, 2003, paperback, £8.95.

*Tales of the Islanders* by Charlotte Brontë; Juvenilia Press, 2001-3, 3 volumes, paperback, each £5.

*William Gaskell* by Barbara Brill. Illustrated. Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society, 1984, £5.

*Wives and Daughters*: a reading of the complete text by Prunella Scales. 8 Tapes. Cover to Cover, £55.

*The Society also sells postcards, notelets, badges and paperweights on the bookstall.*

## Book Notes

Christine Lingard

*Making of the Victorian novelist: anxieties of authorship in the mass market* by Bradley Deane (Visiting Professor of English, Northwestern University, Chicago); Routledge £45.

An original discussion of the social and cultural pressures to which Victorian novelists were subjected, including chapters on Walter Scott's *Waverley*; Dickens' *Pickwick*; Henry James' *Princess Casamassima*; the final chapter is "Veiled women in the marketplace of culture: authorships and domesticities in Gaskell and Eliott."

*Fiction, famine and the rise of economics in Victorian Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-century Literature & Culture) by Gordon E Bigelow, Cambridge University Press, £45.

Continuing the current interest in socio-economics and the novel, this book deals with the interest in economic subjects displayed in general by Victorian novelists and in particular by Dickens and Gaskell (chapter 5 - 'Toward a social theory of novels of Elizabeth Gaskell'), and argues that such literature had a profound effect not only on public opinion but also on the development of political economic theory itself. It compares their writing to contemporary descriptions of the Irish potato famine.

## For Jane Austen Fans

We are delighted that Jane Alderson, C.E.O. of the **CHAWTON HOUSE LIBRARY, HAMPSHIRE** is coming north to give a presentation about the centre's important work.

The event, which is being hosted by "The Bookworm's Club" at the **NORTH MANCHESTER SYNAGOGUE, BURY, LANCASHIRE, will be on SATURDAY 20TH MARCH 2004 at 8.00 p.m.** We are sure that as members of a highly regarded literary society, you would not want to miss the opportunity to meet Ms. Alderson and to learn more of the work being accomplished at Chawton, once the home of Jane Austen's brother, Edward.

We hope also to see representatives of libraries, along with academics and students from local colleges, at the meeting, as well as members of reading and writer's groups. Mr. Ivan Lewis, M.P. for Bury South and a Minister in the Department of Education, will open the event.

We are asking only £3.00 entrance to the event, simply to cover Ms. Alderson's travel expenses. For further info. consult: Natalie Wood, 55 Ajax Drive, Sunny Bank, Bury, Lancs. BL9 8EE Tel/Fax - 0161 796 8018.

## AGM Meeting at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester

on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April 10.30 for 11.00am

### Programme

10.30 Meet for coffee

11.00 AGM

12.00 (approx)

Dr. Leonard Smith, editor of *Unitarian to the Core: Unitarian College Manchester, 1854-2004* and Geoffrey Head, chairman and past president of the college, will speak about the origins of the College, the Gaskells part in it, its students and history.

1.00-2.15 Buffet lunch

2.15 The Daphne Carrick Lecture by Dr. Ann Secord:

Elizabeth Gaskell and the Working-Class Naturalists of Manchester.

In Elizabeth Gaskell's novel *Mary Barton*, with its ambitious suggestions for the improvement of class relations in Manchester, a pivotal role is played by a working-class naturalist, Job Legh. Gaskell could place such importance upon Legh because she had carefully drawn his fictional character from published accounts of impoverished Lancashire artisan naturalists. This talk explores how the philanthropic context in which these accounts were produced, and the cultural context in which artisans actually practised their science, contributed to Gaskell's creation of one of our most enduring images of the Victorian working-class naturalist.

Anne Secord was trained in the history of science at London University. She worked as assistant editor of *The Correspondence of Charles Darwin* for the first seven volumes and is currently an Affiliated Research Scholar in the Department of History and Philosophy of Science, Cambridge University. Her research and writings focus on popular, particularly working-class, natural history in nineteenth-century Britain. She has a forthcoming book *Artisan Naturalists*, which will be published by University of Chicago Press in 2005.

The meeting is expected to close at about 3.30 / 4.00pm

### Summer events

We are planning a visit to Liverpool, (probably late May early June) to trace Gaskell associations. Our guide will be John Tiernan who read a paper on the subject at our Durham conference.

IN early September we will have a similar trip to Lancaster. Please indicate on the form if you would like further information and whether you prefer a mid-week or weekend date.

As we go to press Friends of Plymouth Grove is being inaugurated.

## *The Gaskell Society South-West*

On Monday, January 12<sup>th</sup>, fourteen very local members met for our annual New Year Supper - this is a very social occasion, given a little intellectual respectability this year by a Shakespeare Quiz, which was much harder than we realised. Janet Cunliffe-Jones emerged as a worthy winner.

On Saturday, April 17<sup>th</sup>, Professor Christine Alexander, Professor of English Literature at the University of New South Wales and presently spending a year as a Distinguished Fellow at Cambridge University, is coming to speak to us on 'A Study of Victorian Juvenilia with special reference to the Brontës and Elizabeth Gaskell'. I know she impressed everyone at Durham and we are looking forward to her visit. The event is being run jointly with the Bath Royal Literary and Scientific Institution. Money donated by Waterstones was organised by Ian Wallace, late Professor of German at Bath University.

Then on Saturday, May 22<sup>nd</sup>, we are looking forward to hearing Professor Barbara Hardy, from the University of Oxford, speaking on 'The Art of the Novella: exemplified by *Cousin Phillis*'. Professor Hardy tells me that *Cousin Phillis* is her favourite Gaskell book and she intends to develop the theme of 'intricate simplicity'.

June 23<sup>rd</sup> - 24<sup>th</sup> is the date of our visit to Oxford, where we shall stay in Harris Manchester College, dine in Hall and visit as many of the places enjoyed by Mrs. Gaskell as we can. Gwen Clarke is bearing the brunt of the organisation of this jaunt and we are sure that it will be a good successor to our trips to Penzance and the Quantocks.

Everyone is of course welcome to any of these events. For more details, ring Rosemary Marshall tel: 01225 426732, or e-mail [rosemarymarshall@yahoo.com](mailto:rosemarymarshall@yahoo.com). Best wishes to everyone in the Gaskell heartland from the South-West Branch.

## *The London and South-East Group* Programme for 2004

### **Saturday, 15<sup>th</sup> May**

"A Dark Night's Work" Reconsidered' - Dr. Graham Handley

### **Saturday, 11<sup>th</sup> September**

'Editing the Brontë Letters' - Margaret Smith

### **Saturday, 13<sup>th</sup> November**

'Mme de Sévigné - Gaskell's Eternal Woman' - Howard Gregg

Meetings are held at the Francis Holland School, 39 Graham Terrace, London SW1W 8JF, starting at 2 p.m. Tea and biscuits follow the talks. It is necessary to ring the bell to gain access, for security reasons. Francis Holland School is a few minutes walk from Sloane Street Tube Station (District and Circle Lines).

It has been traditional for some members to meet for a light lunch at the Royal Court Tavern, which is next to the tube station. We meet from 12 noon onwards.

As you may know, Dudley Barlow is moving to the north of England and I have taken over the organisation of this branch of the Society. Please feel able to contact me if you would like further information about the meetings themselves or the arrangements. I hope that the programme appeals and that you will be able to come to the meetings. I look forward to seeing you during 2004.

Frances Twinn, 85 Calton Avenue, London SE21 7DF (tel: 020 8693 3238); email: [frantwinn@aflex.net](mailto:frantwinn@aflex.net).

## **International Conference Manchester Centre for Regional History, Manchester Metropolitan University**

### *Elizabeth Gaskell and Manchester:* **Identity, Culture and the Modern City 19 - 21 July 2005**

#### **CALL FOR PAPERS**

Elizabeth Gaskell is the nineteenth century's most important novelist of industrial society. Her era was of considerable intellectual importance in the making of the modern world. This conference seeks papers which explore Gaskell's intellectual and cultural context. It will explore how such literary legacies also influence the construction of place identities and inform cultural regeneration. It occurs at a particularly appropriate time, as Manchester applies for world heritage status.

Possible themes for papers include but are not limited to the following:

- Gaskell and other nineteenth-century literary figures and movements
- Manchester's cultural and literary significance before and beyond the nineteenth century
- Literary representations of the industrial north-west
- Sense of place in the changing city: the social and the built environment
- Rewriting the post-industrial (and postmodern) city
- Insiders and outsiders: migrant cultures and urban identities
- Official and unofficial narratives of the city

Contributions which are comparative or interdisciplinary in nature or which address other aspects of the conference theme are welcome, as are exhibitions and multi-media presentations.

Send abstracts of papers (200-400 words) or suggestions for panels on particular themes and topics to Dr. Craig Horner, Administrator, Manchester Centre for Regional History, Department of History and Economic History, Manchester Metropolitan University, Geoffrey Manton Building, Rosamond St. West, Off Oxford Rd., Manchester M15 6LL. Email: [c.horner@mmu.ac.uk](mailto:c.horner@mmu.ac.uk)  
Conference web site: [www.mcrh.org.uk/gaskell](http://www.mcrh.org.uk/gaskell)

Deadline; 30<sup>th</sup> September 2004 - Please note that paper presenters will still need to register for the conference and pay the registration fee.