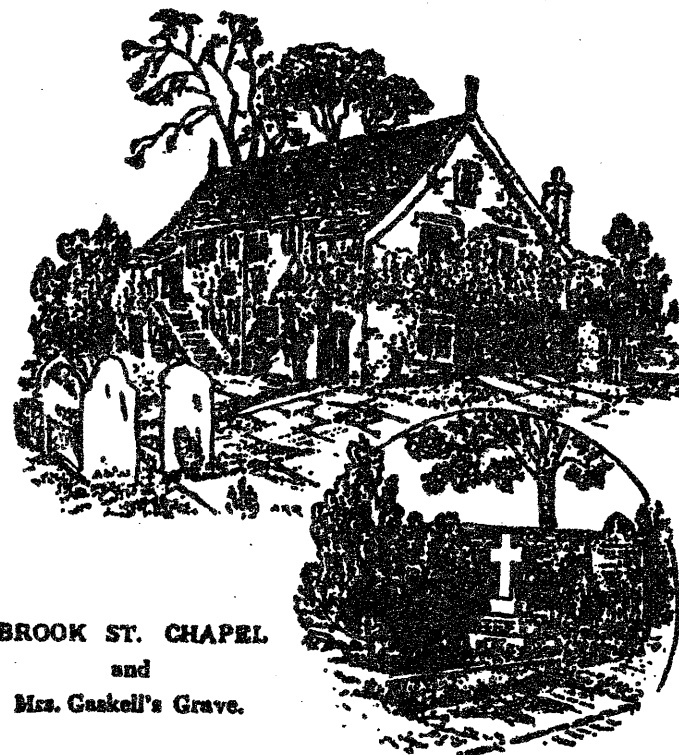


# The Gaskell Society



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

NEWSLETTER

AUGUST 1987

NO. 4

EDITOR'S LETTER

Our Society has had a busy and successful year, steadily recruiting new members and launching our first Journal. Alan Shelston, our editor, had only recently returned to Manchester University from lecturing in the States when he attended our AGM in September last year, little knowing that he was marked as my target to take on this project; he capitulated with good grace. Janet Allen, librarian at The Portico Library, Manchester, has been invaluable as assistant editor, seeing Gaskell Society Journal Vol. 1 through the presses.

We intend to continue the bi-annual newsletters to go out with details of April and September meetings.

As many of our members live locally, we have held several informal lunch or coffee meetings, which have proved popular. Perhaps one of our London or South-East members would like to plan a similar meeting?

We are indebted to Professor Yuriko Yamawaki of Jissen Women's University, Tokyo, for acting as our Japanese secretary, making our activities known in Japan and enrolling members there. Mrs Yamawaki was able to join us at our Manchester meeting in April and hopes to be with us in September, too. Our Vice-President, Professor Francesco Marroni, expects to join us from Italy, and Dr Edgar Wright plans to come over from Canada - quite an international line-up. Incidentally, the Daily Telegraph will have an article about the Society (though probably in its Northern edition only).

The Gaskell Society has had contacts in various ways with other literary societies. We are especially close to the Brontë Society and Jean Hobson, a member of the Brontë council has agreed to be liaison officer between us. Many Dickensians enjoyed an afternoon in Knutsford, escorted by Gaskellians, while they had a conference at Salford University in July. Barbara Brill and I have corresponded with an active Wirral branch of the Angela Thirkell Society.

The Secretary of the George Eliot Fellowship co-ordinates the Alliance of Literary Societies. This proved its

worth recently when the Nuneaton Free School Building (c1745), mentioned in 'Scenes of Clerical Life', was threatened with demolition; so many other literary groups raised objections that it will be restored instead.

We have planned a weekend of various events around the AGM on 26th September, and hope many members will be able to participate. Please return forms by 12th September.

Our Chairman, Dr Ken Walley, is unfortunately ill in hospital and may not be able to join us at the forthcoming AGM. We wish him a speedy recovery.

By now you should all have received our first Journal which I hope you have enjoyed. Our costs have been kept down by advertising; offers or suggestions for the next edition will be welcome.

JOAN LEACH

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#### SOCIETY CALENDAR

AGM Etc - last weekend in September in Knutsford

Spring Meeting - last Saturday in April in Manchester

Newsletters - one month before each meeting

Journal - to be ready for collection at April meeting

Outing -- Next year to Silverdale. Please let us know whether the last Sunday in June is the best date (last outing not too well supported on this date), or whether to have it on the Sunday after the AGM in September.

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#### SUBSCRIPTIONS

These are due on 1st September (I mistakenly put 1st October on some cards). If you are not coming to the AGM events, please send £4.00 (£6.00 sterling overseas) with s.a.e. for membership card, to the Treasurer, Mrs B Kinder, 16 Sandileigh Avenue, Knutsford, or the Secretary (address p.24)

#### THE "WHITFIELD" GASKELL COLLECTION

by Mary Thwaite

This valuable collection of books and documents relating to Mrs Gaskell was presented to Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford (where the writer's grave may be visited), by the late Professor A. Stanton Whitfield (1900-1975), on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of her birth in 1960. The library was the result of a lifelong and devoted interest, which went back to the Professor's student days. His thesis for an Oxford B.Litt. degree was upon the subject of Mrs Gaskell's life and work, and later this was the basis for his book published in 1929. This may now strike the reader as somewhat exuberant and romantic in style, but it ranges with scholarly perception over the whole extent of the writer's work, appraising this in detail, and showing how much wider and deeper was her art and achievement than "the fragrant posy of Cranford" which had too often dominated critical comment. In fact, his book hints at the re-assessment that was to emerge in the 1960s.

The preface of Professor Whitfield's book is dated from Niigata-si, in Japan, where he had been teaching English literature since 1925, the date his book had been completed. He returned to England before the outbreak of the war, but his influence in Japan did not seem to fade. While he was there several Gaskell stories were published in editions with notes for Japanese students. One of them is an edition he edited of The Sexton's Hero, and other tales. These have formed part of the collection, and there are also several later studies in Japanese on Mrs Gaskell, the most recent being the thesis by Mrs Yuriko Yamawaki, a visitor whom we were pleased to welcome to the Society's Manchester meeting in April.

Mr Geoffrey Sharps, who has described the Professor as an "old friend and mentor", has told me how he brought the books to the Knutsford Chapel on that day twenty-seven years ago. They were received by the minister, the Rev. Albert Smith, who gave much attention to their care and cataloguing, and who also made further additions by his

appeal for donations. Mr Smith also compiled an interesting series of scrapbooks containing many cuttings, photos etc. relating to the Chapel and Knutsford and the links with Mrs Gaskell, especially during the 1960 birthday celebrations.

Since then various enquirers and scholars have found this collection very useful, and it has been enriched by generous donations of some of their published works. During the last few years, however, conditions in the Chapel vestry, where the books were housed, much deteriorated and the books were becoming increasingly affected by damp and lack of ventilation. Because of this, and also the need to make the material more readily available, a scheme of co-operation has been arranged with the County Library, which came into effect this spring. The "Whitfield" collection has now been transferred from the Chapel to the Knutsford Library (a building just across the road from the Chapel), where it is now kept "on permanent loan", and accommodated in excellent glass-fronted bookcases generously provided by the County Council. The County Library has also given to the Chapel an exhibition case for installation in the gallery, and so it is now intended to develop this, and have on show there a small display of material about Mrs Gaskell and her connection with the locality for the benefit of visitors.

A typewritten catalogue and a revised index on cards may be consulted at the Knutsford Library, and I still act as "custodian" on behalf of the Chapel. As a former professional librarian I find that closer co-operation with the Knutsford library staff is most useful, and it is hoped that we can deal with enquiries more thoroughly than was formerly possible, especially as there is a good deal of Gaskell material at the Knutsford library. Some rare items there are not in the "Whitfield" collection, notably the first edition of Mary Barton, and the first volume of Dickens' new Journal, Household Words, where Mrs Gaskell's first contribution, Lizzie Leigh, began as a serial on the first page on 30th March 1850.

The "Whitfield" collection very much reflects its former owner's keen interest in everything relating to Mrs Gaskell's life and art - there are even contemporary guide books for her Italian journeys. Pencil notes have sometimes been added as comment or correction to some books about the writer, and there are many scarce items. These include My Diary, the (later privately printed) record kept of "the early years of my daughter Marianne", from March 10th 1835 to October 28th 1838; also the account of Clopton Hall, as it appeared in William Howitt's Visits to remarkable places (1840); and first editions of most of her novels. The Life of Charlotte Brontë is well represented by many editions including the first three. Three autographed letters were also owned by Professor Whitfield, who quoted from them in his book long before they were known and published. These are now being deposited in the County Record Office for safe keeping, but excellent photocopies with transcripts have been obtained, and these are at the Knutsford library.

The latest extension to this Gaskell library has resulted from the interest and activity of Professor Francesco Marroni of Pescara University in Italy, who is one of the Society's Vice-Presidents. Now added to the collection are several volumes in Italian, including an Italian version of Cranford by Mario Casalino, a study of Mary Barton by M. Ingenito, and two articles by Marroni himself. It is hoped to add very soon a copy of his study of Mrs Gaskell recently published in Italy under the title of La Fabbrica nella valle.

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Members may like to know the times of opening of the Knutsford Library, where the "Whitfield" Gaskell collection is now kept:

Monday	9.30-5.00	Thursday	9.30-5.00
Tuesday	9.30-8.00	Friday	9.30-8.00
		Saturday	9.30-1.00

The library is closed on Wednesdays, and also for lunch between 1.00 and 2.00 p.m.

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WILLIAM GASKELL'S HYMNS

by Barbara Brill

During the time I was engaged on research for my book on William Gaskell nothing gave me more pleasure than hearing from Manchester College Oxford that they had in their possession Mr Gaskell's own copy of the book of hymns which he and Dr John Relly Beard collected and published in 1837. The librarian kindly sent me photocopies of all William Gaskell's own hymns contained within it, and also of the fly leaves with his signature at the front, and an additional hymn in his own small neat handwriting at the back.

William contributed seventy hymns to this collection and in his own copy added written amendments to his own verses in the margin. It was the imprint of his own hand that made the words leap out of the page at me. I felt that I could picture him at his desk in his study at 42 Plymouth Grove in the more leisurely days of his old age, making these alterations to his hymns, many years after their original publication when he had a dead-line to meet and no time to give his verses the necessary polishing. He was thirty-two when he wrote them and at that time living at Dover Street, Manchester, the home to which he had brought his bride, Elizabeth, in 1832. The hymn book was published in the same year as their second daughter, Margaret Emily, was born, two and a half years after their first-born, Marianne. In this same year William and Elizabeth had worked together on a poem which was published in Blackwood's Magazine, entitled 'Sketches among the Poor, No. 1' and obviously intended to be the first in a series, in imitation of Crabbe's Scenes from Humble Life. It would appear that the young couple had too many calls upon their time to continue with their 'Sketches'. Elizabeth's increased maternal responsibilities and the necessity for William to complete his hymns for Dr Beard prevented their further collaboration in poetry.

Two years later William brought out a book of Temperance Rhymes, like his hymns simple rhyming verses,

easy to understand and to memorise. William Gaskell firmly believed in the power of poetry to stir the hearts of the unschooled men and women he met with in daily life and saw it as the ideal vehicle for conveying a message simply and memorably. He was struck by the number of natural poets to emerge among these men of humble birth and prepared a series of lectures on 'Poets and Poetry' which attracted large audiences of working men.

William Gaskell would be the last to claim that his verses were inspired poetry, for his hymns were certainly not prompted by the poetic Muse but by the invitation of Dr Beard to contribute to the collection. In his hymn-writing he aimed to convey a clear and pious message to simple homely people, set in conventional verse forms that were easy to set to a tune, and with words fitting to the atmosphere of worship.

When planning my book I hoped that it would be possible to head each chapter in true Victorian style with verses from the hymns and in this way to introduce readers to these little-known hymns. This idea did not prove practical so I am taking this opportunity to let you read those that I chose, giving my reasons for the selection of specific verses to head appropriate chapters and in this way to introduce you to William as a hymn-writer.

Chapter 1. Early Influences

This describes William's beginnings in Warrington and this verse from Hymn 72 in Dr Beard's Collection expresses thankfulness for the gift of life.

"For life and all its pleasant scenes,  
For all it knows of good and fair;  
For love and hope and tranquil joy,  
O God, to thee our thanks we bear."

Chapter 4. Husband and Father

This relates the meeting with Elizabeth, their marriage and early days as man and wife, both well aware of the importance of partnership in marriage, which this Hymn 403 stresses.

Still hand in hand, their journey through  
Meek pilgrims may they go;  
Mingling their joys as help-meets true,  
And sharing every woe."

This deals with William as poet, hymn writer, adviser to Mrs Gaskell, writer of sermons and funeral addresses, and editor. In Hymn 66 William shows his desire to express God's glory in words.

"I will praise thee, O God, with my heart and  
my voice,  
I will call on the earth and the heavens to  
rejoice,  
There's nothing beneath, and nothing above  
But declareth thy glory and telleth thy love."

The days at Plymouth Grove where the Gaskells removed to in 1850 were extremely busy ones and remained so for William, who continued to live there after Elizabeth's death, working as hard as ever.

William continued as teacher, preacher, committee chairman, editor, lecturer and wise counsellor, until a few months before his death and was held in high esteem. This verse from Hymn 511 expresses his acceptance of death.

I wait, my God, I wait for thee."

(Ed. note: Barbara Brill's biography "William Gaskell 1805-84" is published by Manchester Lit & Phil Society, price £7.95)

by Christine Lingard

The Gaskell Collection in the Language and Literature Library, Manchester, has benefited by the purchase of several American doctoral dissertations which represent original research and fill some noticeable gaps. They are available in hard copy not microfilm.

THE HEART OF ELIZABETH GASKELL: THE UNITARIAN SPIRIT by  
Mary Brooks Howell, CPh.D (Texas Women's University) 1985.  
Thematic discussion of her specific religious beliefs.

THE SHORT FICTION OF ELIZABETH GASKELL by Marie D. Bacigalupo, Ph.D(Fordham University, New York) 1984. The only full length study in the collection devoted exclusively to the shorter works.

ELIZABETH GASKELL'S CHRISTIANITY IN A NEW AGE by June B. Kelly M.A. (Wayne State University) 1983.  
Novel by novel discussion including Moorland Cottage and the Life of Charlotte Brontë.

ADAPTING TO EVOLUTION: THE IMPACT OF SCIENTIFIC THOUGHT IN  
THE WORKS OF GASKELL AND TROLLOPE by Erdnut Lerner, Ph.D  
(North Western University, Evanston, Illinois) 1983.  
Perception of time in Cranford and Cousin Phillis, the  
Yorkshire roots of Life of Charlotte Brontë and the  
Darwinian influences in Wives and Daughters.

FATHERS AND DAUGHTERS IN WOMEN'S NOVELS by Linda Roberta Gupta, Ph.D (American University, Washington DC) 1983  
Father/daughter relationships in a wide range of works from the European fairy story to contemporaries such as Margaret Atwood and Mary Gordon.

THE ROLE OF THE MIDDLE CLASS WOMAN IN THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURY BRITISH INDUSTRIAL NOVEL by Patrician Ellen Johnson, Ph.D (University of Minnesota) 1985.  
In particular Shirley, Hard Times, Felix Holt and North and South, the most optimistic of the four.

THE NOVELIST AS BIOGRAPHER: THE TRUTH OF ART, THE LIES OF BIOGRAPHY by Marjorie Cullen Jones, Ph.D (Northwestern University, Evanston, Illinois) August 1983.

Critical appraisal of biographical work of Elizabeth Gaskell, Henry James, E. M. Forster and Virginia Woolf.

It is hoped to continue to add such material as it comes available.

ELIZABETH GASKELL by Patsy Stoneman (Lecturer in English at the University of Hull) The Harvester Press, 1987 £18.95

This is the major contribution to Gaskell studies in 1987. It is part of the "Key Women Writers" series whose other subjects have ranged from Charlotte Brontë to Angela Carter, from Madame de Lafayette to Alice Walker. Its aim is to challenge previous critics who have maintained that Gaskell's work has suffered because she muddled social and domestic issues, and to show that she is a stronger and more unified writer than is realised.

In an interesting opening chapter the author provides a summary of Gaskell critics to date and categorises them into those who have stressed the social problem novels and those who have dealt with the more genteel works, plus a number of recent feminist and Marxist critics of a more general and theoretical nature. In the second chapter the author applies her theory to Mrs Gaskell's private life and the inter-relationship of career and family.

The crux of this complex argument is that class and gender should not be considered as separate issues when assessing Gaskell's work. It is discussed methodically novel by novel beginning with a chapter on the short stories though it excluded the Life of Charlotte Brontë with constant references to other critics incorporated in the text. The alphabetical list of references runs to eight pages.

BEARING THE WORD: LANGUAGE AND FEMALE EXPERIENCE IN NINETEENTH CENTURY WOMEN'S WRITING by Margaret Homans, University of Chicago Press, 1986. £18.75

A discussion of the inter-relationship of woman's role as mother and as writer as shown by language with particular reference to Dorothy Wordsworth, Charlotte and Emily Brontë, Gaskell, George Eliot, Mary Shelley and Virginia Woolf. The first of two chapters devoted to Gaskell aims to show that the death of her still-born daughter in 1833 was a greater stimulus to her writing than the death of her son in 1845 especially to Lizzie Leigh written in 1838 and Lois the Witch. A second chapter deals with the relationship of Mollie Gibson in Wives and daughters to her two mothers - her own already dead mother and her stepmother.

There are also several references to North and South in THE HELL OF THE ENGLISH: BANKRUPTCY AND THE VICTORIAN NOVEL by Barbara Weiss. Associated University Presses 1986. This study includes a factual and historical assessment of the subject as well as a critical one.

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#### GREEN HEYS FIELDS

"Country Rambles and Manchester Walks and Wild Flowers" was the title of a book by Leo H. Grindon, published in 1882, but the latter part of the title came from an earlier edition.

It is interesting to compare this with the opening scenes of Mary Barton as Green Heys Fields.

The preface to the original work of 1858 contained the following passages:- "No grown-up person who has resided in Manchester even twenty years, is unacquainted with the mighty changes that have passed over its suburbs during that period; while those who have lived here thirty, forty, and fifty years tell us of circumstances and conditions almost incredible. Neighbourhoods once familiar as delightful rural solitudes, are now covered with houses, and densely crowded with population; the pleasant field-paths we trod in our youth have disappeared, and in their stead are long lines of

pavement, lighted with gas, and paced by the policeman. In a few years it is not improbable that places described in the following pages as rustic and sylvan will have shared the same fate ... it is easy to understand how in half a century hence our present 'Walks' will have become as obsolete as their author, and the entire subject require a new and livelier treatment. A descriptive history of the suburbs of Manchester as they were fifty years ago, would be a most interesting and valuable item of our local literature. It would be as curious to the lover of by-gones as this book of to-day may perhaps appear to the Manchester people of A.D. 1900. How extraordinary would be the facts may be judged from the following extracts from De Quincey, whose youth, it is well known, was passed in the neighbourhood of Manchester. Mark first what he says of the 'place' he lived in. 'And if, after the manner of the Emperor Aurelius, I should return thanks to Providence for all the separate blessings of my early situation, these four I would single out as worthy of special consideration, - that I lived in a 'rustic solitude'; that this solitude was in England, that my infant feelings were moulded by the gentlest of sisters; and finally, that I and they were dutiful and loving members of a pure, and holy, and magnificent church.' And now mark where lay this 'rustic solitude'. He is describing the expected return of his father:- 'It was a summer evening of unusual solemnity. The servants and four of us children were gathered for hours on the lawn before the house, listening for the sound of wheels. Sunset came, nine, ten, eleven o'clock, and nearly another hour had passed without a warning sound, for Greenhay, being so 'solitary a house', formed a "terminus ad quem", beyond which was nothing but a cluster of cottages, composing the little hamlet of Greenhill; so that any sound of wheels coming from the 'country lane which then connected us with the Rusholme Road', carried with it of necessity, a warning summons to prepare for visitors at Greenhay'. 'Greenhay' was the centre of the modern Greenheys, and the 'hamlet of Greenhill' the predecessor of the present Greenhill Terrace."



ELIZABETH GASKELL'S childhood home, from a water colour dated 1832, the year she was married in Knutsford - that is, CRANFORD. The scene is set at the beginning of that book:

'For keeping the trim gardens full of choice flowers without a weed to speck them; for frightening away little boys who look wistfully at the said flowers through the railings; for rushing out at the geese that occasionally venture into the gardens if the gates are left open ... the ladies of Cranford are quite sufficient.'



# SUMMER OUTING TO NORTH WALES

by Joan Leach

Elizabeth Gaskell loved the Cheshire countryside surrounding the 'little, clean, kindly town of Knutsford', where she grew up, and the Sandlebridge farm two or three miles away which she first knew as her grandparents' home; her picture of Hope Farm in Cousin Phillis was painted from her lifelong love and knowledge of Cheshire. In later years, living in dirty, smoky Manchester, she yearned for Cheshire's 'deep, grassy solitudes'. By contrast the wild, rugged mountain country of North Wales evoked in her a deep, emotional response.

Wishing she could have been with her sister-in-law, Lizzie, to show her all her favourite haunts she recalled, 'When I first came from spending a very happy fortnight at Plas Brereton (nr Caernarvon, you know) I used to get on a sort of knoll from which I could see the Welsh hills, and think of the places beyond again.' (G.L.9) She consoled herself by adding, 'How I shall enjoy talking over Wales with you' and reminiscing about a visit in 1837 when she and Lucy Holland had called at a cottage to dry their shoes and stockings and had been given oat-cake by 'the woman who could not speak English. I long to be in those wild places again ... I cannot help feeling the feelings for you.' (G.L.9) And these were the same feelings she ascribed to Ruth: 'It was most true enjoyment for Ruth. It was opening up a new sense; vast ideas of beauty and grandeur filled her mind at the sight of the mountains, now first beheld in full majesty. She was almost overpowered by the vague and solemn delight; but by and by her love for them equalled her awe.' (p.64) The deep response felt for wild Wales must have helped Elizabeth to identify with the Brontës' love of the Yorkshire Moors.

On Sunday, June 28th, half a coach load of Gaskellians set off from Knutsford early in the morning to follow the Gaskell trail to North Wales. Sadly the weather was grey and drizzly, and, though this did not dampen our

enthusiasm, it shrouded the mountains from view - but at least it was in authentic style:

(Ruth, p.64 Knutsford edn.) The valleys around were filled with thick, cold mist which had crept up the hillside till the hamlet itself was folded in its write dense curtain and from the windows nothing was seen of the beautiful scenery around'.

This was exactly how we found the inn at Ffestiniog, the Pengwern Arms, which displayed a carved slate plaque with a coat of arms and date, I think, 1728. Here I should explain that for our guide book I consulted the memoirs of Elizabeth's cousin, Samuel Holland, who wrote many details of his exploits in the area, developing the slate quarries. His first journey in 1821 had been on foot from Liverpool to Ffestiniog where his father, 'gave me instructions what I was to do to learn the art of quarrying, look after the men etc. - and added that if I could get lodgings in some decent house, it would be better than staying at the hotel ... he rode off for Liverpool leaving me to my own devices. I was then 18 years old'. He played a large part in the building of the narrow gauge Ffestiniog railway. It was his house, Plas Penrhyn, which welcomed the honeymoon couple and became our place of pilgrimage.

The Gaskells and Hollands became even more closely related when Samuel's brother and partner, Charles, married William's sister Lizzie in 1838. A chart will explain some of the many convolutions of the Holland family tree. (see page 22)

As we set out from Knutsford, passing the Parish church where the Gaskells were married on August 30th 1832, we studied a copy of the entry in the parish register. Of course, Uncle Peter Holland 'gave her away'; the other witnesses were William's sister, and Susan and Catherine Holland; Winifred Gérin identifies these as daughters of Peter Holland by his second marriage but I think the latter must have been cousin Samuel's sister, known to the family as Kate. (G.L.3 identifies Kate as Fanny's sister, both probably then living at Liverpool with their father. The Holland family tree notes 'two sons and one daughter' by Peter's second marriage)

The wedding ceremony, according to a letter written by Elizabeth on her honeymoon, was a happy, almost hilarious, occasion (G.L.2)

'Kate had sent us a long, long letter a few days before and among other things made us laugh exceedingly with telling us one report of which I dare say neither you nor Sam (Gaskell) were aware. Pray ask him, with my love, whether he knew that Sue put his shoulder out of joint by pulling him to her at the altar and that so much force was required on Susan's part because Kate was pulling so at his other arm. Since hearing this Wm. and I have felt rather anxious to hear of his health. As you justly conjecture I have a great deal of trouble in managing this obstreperous brother of yours though I dare say he will try and persuade you the trouble is all on his side. I find he has been telling you I look very well, (this was a joint letter) so I think that is a pretty broad hint that I am to tell you he is looking remarkably well which he really is. Mountains seem to agree with us and our appetites admirably ... If you hear of the principality of Wales being swallowed up by an earthquake, for earthquake read Rev Wm. Gaskell'. This letter was postmarked 'Caernarvon' and we were sorry, from limitations of time and distance, not to be able to include this area and 'dear, little Aber' on our itinerary, as it was here that the couple 'spent a fortnight of our wedding journey and where I spent a very happy month with 17 aunts, cousins and such like once before' (G.L.9)

Her memories of the Port Madoc area also went back a long way as she must have been holidaying there when her brother wrote to her in July 1828 (J.G. Sharps owns this letter): 'You have really made a very pretty story of Captain Barton - it would almost make the foundation of a novel (it suggested her short story 'The Sexton's Hero') - it was indeed a narrow escape of Kitty's (? Kate, who signed the wedding register) and must have given her a tremendous fright, though I have heard many stories of them, I never saw a quicksand and hardly believed them to be so dangerous as was generally spoken of'. Ten years

later she enquired of her sister-in-law, 'You never mention Capn. Barton. Is he to the fore yet?' Samuel also mentions his house in the memoirs.

On our day out we had planned to visit the Gloddfa Ganol Quarry which still has a 'Holland tunnel' for tourists to walk in, but the weather prevented us. We arrived at The Pengwen Arms, Ffestiniog for lunch. This stone built old inn had a range of outbuildings which had been stables, and opposite was the village shop. Some of us ate inn fare while the landlord kindly allowed the rest of us to picnic inside and to think of Mr and Mrs Gaskell staying here in 1832. But their happy memories of it were coloured by the sad death of ten month old Willie in August 1845. Mrs Gaskell had brought Marianne and baby William away from the infection of scarlet fever raging in Manchester but after two weeks at the inn Marianne developed the disease. Sea air seemed the best convalescent treatment, so they moved down to Mrs Hughes guest house at Port Madoc, but here Willie sickened and died. Mrs Hughes did all she could to alleviate their distress and was fondly remembered. When Mrs Gaskell wanted a beautiful setting with sad overtones for Ruth, the inn at Ffestiniog would be an obvious choice, and we could feel echoes all around us. It was raining while we were there so we did not ramble as Ruth did: 'Flitting through the village, trying to catch all the beautiful sunny peeps at the scenery between the cold stone houses, which threw the radiant distance into aerial perspective far away, she passed the little shop...' and there it was opposite the inn. (Knutsford Edn. p.70)

Mrs Gaskell could not resist giving Mr Benson her own love of Welsh legend and tradition and particularly about the foxglove: 'its Welsh name is Maneg Ellyllyn - the good people's glove; and hence, I imagine our folk's glove or fox-glove'; the ones we saw, especially along the lane to Plas Penrhyn, had an extra significance for us.

Moving on from Ffestiniog we found the railway station of Tan-y-Bwlch to ride down to Minfford and Plas Penrhyn. Here we noted Samuel Holland's memoirs; he stayed at Tan-y-Bwlch Hotel in 1825 negotiating quarry leases,

advised by his Uncle Swinton and borrowing money from Uncle Peter in Knutsford and cousin Edward of Dumbleton (later Marianne's father-in-law). Edward also allowed Samuel Holland senior £200 a year so long as he did not speculate; when Lizzie stayed at Plas Penrhyn in 1838 she found father and son not on speaking terms over the definition of speculation. By then father and son were living together at Plas Penrhyn which Samuel junior rented on a long lease and had extended. Nephew, Charles Menzies Holland, later advised on steam locomotives for the narrow gauge Ffestiniog railway in which Samuel played a part in building and developing. He described the grand opening in 1836 when 'there was great cheering and rock cannon firing, all along the line and on our arrival at Port Madoc ... we were met by crowds of people, bands playing and the workmen had a good dinner given them. ... I used the Railway (horse drawn originally) for carrying my slates to Port Madoc for two years nearly before the other companies came upon it.' Today it was carrying Gaskellians, a delightful experience - almost miniature-sized carriages winding along mountainsides and wooded slopes as we steadied our drinks served from a refreshment bar.

We were met at our destination by Mr Smithson, the friendly owner of Plas Penrhyn (known to the Gaskells as PP), who kindly took three of our less mobile members in his car after directing us to the charming, secluded lane leading to the house, too narrow for our coach with which we had rendezvoused. The hedgerows on either side were bright with foxgloves and honeysuckle, intertwined with ivy, bramble and ferns; the botanists among us racked our brains to identify pennywort and wall rue and storks-foot cranesbill.

On a clear day the views would have been superb; Bertrand Russell thought so, as he recorded in his autobiography, 'Plas Penrhyn ... would make a pleasant holiday house for us and the children ... it had a most lovely view, south to the sea, west to Port Madoc and the Caernarvon hills, and north up the valley of the Glaslyn

to Snowdon. I was captivated by it and particularly pleased that across the valley could be seen the house where Shelley lived.' Russell spent the last fifteen years of his life here. Winifred Gerin's biography has two pictures of the delightful white plastered house surrounded by natural gardens merging into the wooded landscape and the old kitchen gardens.

It was here in November 1848 that Mrs Gaskell, accompanied by Emily Winkworth sought refuge from publicity and reviews on the publication of Mary Barton, which had come out anonymously, with even close friends and family left to guess at the author's identity. Emily wrote from PP to her sister: 'What do you think? I'm positive 'Mary Barton, a Story of Manchester Life' is by Mrs Gaskell! I got hold of it last night going to bed, and knew by the first few words it was hers - about Green Hays Fields and the stile she was describing to Kate and me the other day; - but we haven't talked about it yet ... The folks here know it I am sure - they all turned so silent when I began to talk about it at breakfast time, and Mrs Gaskell suddenly popped down under the table to look for something which I am sure wasn't there.'

After their return home Mrs Gaskell mischievously enjoyed the 'mystery', writing to Catherine Winkworth: 'By the way, Emily was curious to know the name of the person who wrote 'Mary Barton' (a book she saw at Plas Penrhyn), and I am happy in being able to satisfy her Eve-like craving, Marianne Darbishire told me it was ascertained to be the production of a Mrs Wheeler ... Marianne gave many proofs which I don't think worth repeating but they were quite convincing' (G.L.30). Elizabeth shared the joke with her publisher Edward Chapman adding, 'I am only afraid lest you also should be convinced and transact that part of the business which yet remains unaccomplished with her. I do assure you I am the author'; thus no doubt shaming him into paying his debts.

Samuel Holland wrote in his memoirs that one of his cousin's novels was written or finished while she stayed with him but gives no date or particulars to verify this. Besides the Welsh section of Ruth Mrs Gaskell wrote two

short stories set in this area; so we said goodbye to PP, strolled back down the lane to rejoin our coach and go in search of other Gaskell scenes from The Doom of the Griffiths and The Well of Pen-Morfa.

We made our way over the toll bridge which spanned the Cof, an embankment built by W.A. Maddocks creating the harbour of Port Madoc where Samuel Holland built a quay to ship his slates brought down by the Ffestiniog railway which had its terminus here. We drove through the busy town, returning later for tea, in search of Tremadoc and Pen-Morfa.

The Doom of the Griffiths is based on an old tradition of Owen Glendower. You will remember how Mr Benson in Ruth said he had 'been inoculated by an old innkeeper at Conway with a love for its people and history and traditions'. I detect that Mrs Gaskell's love dated from the visit there with 'seventeen aunts and cousins' when she was eleven or twelve years old. I have no doubt that given time we should have found the Bodowen farmhouse from The Doom of the Griffiths '... situated in a boggy valley ... running from the mountains, which shoulder the Rivals, down to Cardigan Bay ... It was square and heavy looking with just that much pretension to ornament necessary to distinguish it from the mere farmhouse'. (You can read this story in the Alan Sutton collection, 'The Manchester Marriage', price £3.95. Any member holidaying in this area is invited to spot and photograph 'Bodowen' farmhouse for me!)

We stopped our coach at just such a scene as described in The Well of Pen-Morfa: 'There are rocks high above Pen-Morfa; they are the same that hang over Tremadoc ... Everywhere they are beautiful. The great, sharp ledges which would otherwise look hard and cold, are adorned with the brightest coloured moss and the golden lichen ... crane's bill and tufts of purple heather ...' We also saw 'the great plain (formed by the reclaimed estuary) which stretches out like an amphitheatre, in the half circle of hills'. Here, in the story, was Edward Williams 'picturesque old farmhouse ... called by

some Welsh name which I now forget; but its meaning in English is 'The End of Time'. I found J.G. Sharps had been able to identify this, when writing in 1960, as \* Penamser (and the well as St Bueno). It made my day when I spotted this very name at the gateway of a farm on a rising bank as we turned a corner on the road back to Port Madoc. I was too excited to think of taking a photograph! The story is a sad one; the beautiful Nest Gwynn, engaged to be married to Edward Williams falls at the well, becoming a cripple, whereon he rejects her as unfit to be a farmer's wife. The story was probably rewritten in haste for Dickens, appearing in Household Words in November 1850.

Our expedition to North Wales was completed with a tea-stop in Port Madoc and a pleasant journey home.

\*Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention, Linden Press 1970, by J.G. Sharps (The encyclopaedia of Gaskell information)

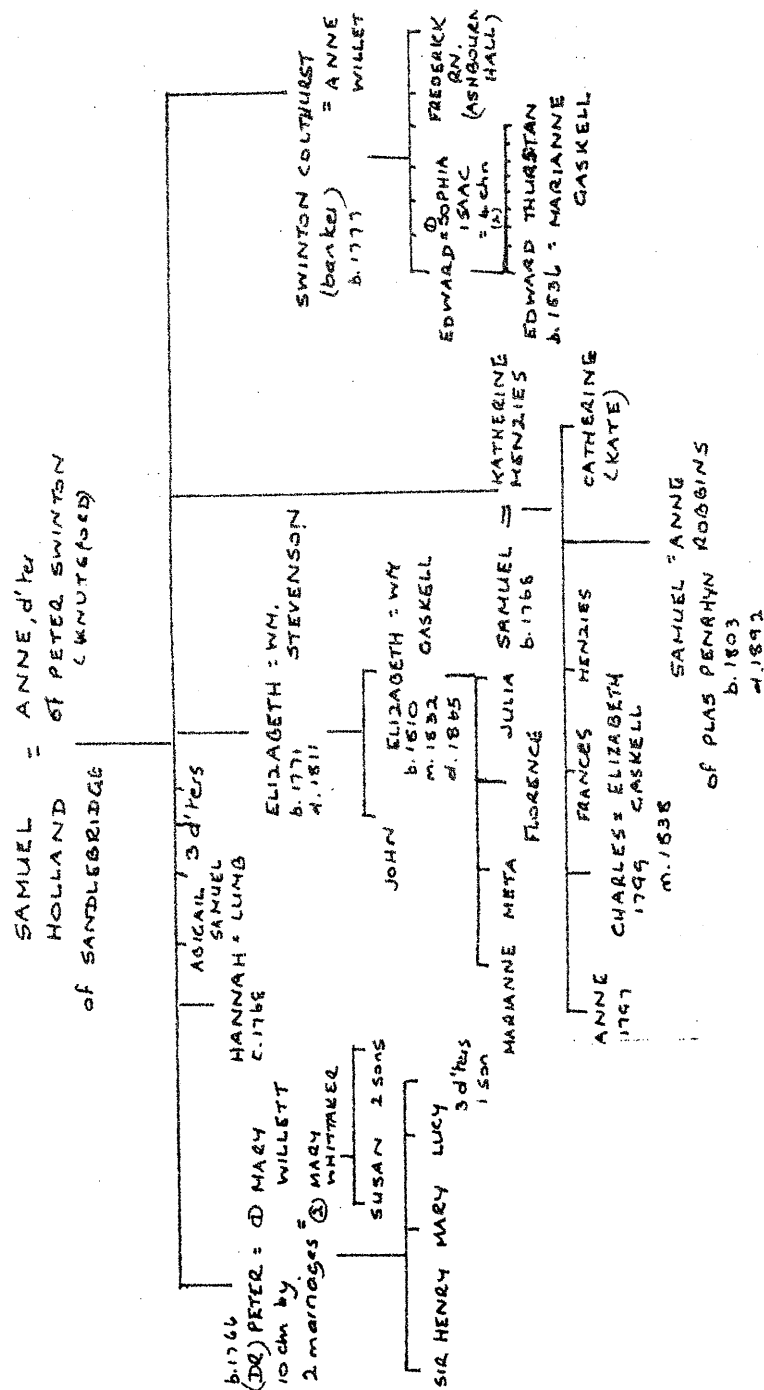
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#### VISITING NORTH WALES?

Plas Penrhyn has a furnished self-contained flat which can sleep five; close to sea, Snowdonia and Portmeirion. Details from G. H. Radcliffe, Plas Penrhyn, Minfford, Gwynedd LL48 6HY

Pengwern Arms, Ffestiniog, Gwynedd LL41 4PB. Fully licensed free house, retaining 18th Century charm - dogs welcome!

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## A 'CRANFORD' FAN

I was surprised to find that a cavalry officer at the battle front in World War I was reading Cranford!

This excerpt is from 'Letters and Journals of Sir Alan Lascelles from 1887-1920' edited by Duff Hart Davis, published by Hamish Hamilton (1986)

23 September 1918

H.Q.

2nd Cavalry Brigade

Who is my favourite woman in fiction? Helen of Troy? Jane Eyre? Belinda Jorrocks? Diana of the Crossways? Tess - no not even Tess, bless her poor heart, though I would sooner have my hands on that man Angel's throat than any German's. Not even little Kitty Cherbatsky (in Tolstoy's 'Anna Karenina') whom I would marry tomorrow. The prize goes to Miss Matilda Jenkyns.

I have just re-read 'Cranford' for the nth time. To me, it is one of the most remarkable books ever written, because, apart from all its obvious qualities, its gentleness, its mellow Raeburn portrait-gallery, its fun, and so on, I find it intensely exciting. It grips me more than any detective or 'Prisoner of Zenda' romance, and the reason I don't know it by heart is that once I start reading it, I go faster and faster till, when the Aga's return is imminent, I am turning pages like a cinematograph.

Can you tell me why this is? I know perfectly well what is going to happen; the story of Miss Betty Barker's cow has been a chestnut to me for nearly twenty years; Signor Brunoni is no mystery to me; the Hoggins-Glenmire marriage comes as no shock; and I know it's Peter long before even Mary Smith suspects it. And still that book makes me burn more midnight oil than almost any other. I have no explanation, except the crude one that its very sweetness makes one bolt it as a child bolts strawberries and cream. Does it take you the same way? I am willing to stake all my war-savings to a single meat-coupon that you are a devout Cranfordian.

\* \* \* \* \*

THE GASKELLS AND POETRY

William's work for the Chapel, various Manchester institutions, teaching and lecturing left him little time for creative work of his own, but Elizabeth's earliest appearance in print was jointly, in verse, with William in 'Sketches Among the Poor' described by Elizabeth Gaskell in a letter to Mary Howitt as 'somewhat after the style of Crabbe', and appeared in Blackwood's magazine January 1837 (see Barbara Brill's article on William Gaskell, p.6ff). In the same letter (G.L.12) she added 'my husband has lately been giving four lectures to the very poorest of the weavers in the very poorest district of Manchester, Miles Platting, on The Poets and Poetry of Humble Life.' She herself had helped to research the poets (G.L.4).

I found this report in the Macclesfield Courier (which would be Knutsford's local paper then):-

1842 Jan 1st

'Temperance Society Tea Party in the Parochial School Room' (situated just below Brook Street Chapel where the small lawn is now). The following evening Rev W. Gaskell delivered a lecture on 'Poets of Humble Life'. On the succeeding evening at the request of some who were present the reverend gentleman gave a second lecture on the 'Poetry of Burns'. Both lectures were highly interesting and gave general satisfaction.

\* \* \* \* \*

We are grateful to 'The Unitarian' magazine for allowing us to reprint Barbara Brill's article.

Any suggestions or material for future Newsletters will be welcome by the Editor, Joan Leach.

\* \* \* \* \*

I am compiling an accommodation in Knutsford leaflet. If any local members would like to offer bed and breakfast etc. please let me know details for inclusion.

Send s.a.e. for a copy, to the Secretary:

MRS JOAN LEACH, FAR YEW TREE HOUSE, OVER TABLEY, KNUTSFORD  
CHESHIRE WA16 0HN (Tel: 0565 4668)