

The Gaskell Society



Knutsford - Cheshire
Mrs. L. Holland, 1846

R.R. West, 1906

*Knutsford, Cheshire
looking up King Street from the foot of Adams Hill*

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2009 - Number 47

THE GASKELL SOCIETY HOME PAGE has all the latest information on meetings.
<http://gaskellsociety.co.uk>

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Editor's Letter

Joan Leach

2010 will be the bicentenary of Elizabeth Gaskell's birth and we are making plans accordingly. The Charles Darwin bicentenary has aroused a lot of interest and we hope to use the year to increase our own profile.

We are delighted to tell you that The Dean of Westminster has agreed to our request for a memorial to her, in the commemorative window near Poets' Corner. We hope to hold a dedication ceremony at Westminster Abbey near to her birth date at the end of September 2010. We will keep you informed of plans and hope you will support an appeal for donations later.

As I write this we are preparing for the conference at Penrith in July and look forward to having some seventy of you with us.

You will read in Ann O'Brien's report about Plymouth Grove that the house is now closed for building work but the programme of events continues and helps to raise money.

We are grateful to Christine Lingard for sharing with us in this issue her researches into Elizabeth Gaskell and the Theatre, following her previous paper on Gaskell and Music. Nancy Weyant, ever alert to Gaskell items through her work as librarian at Bloomsburg University, Pennsylvania, tells us about a newly found Gaskell letter. The Brontë Society too has recently acquired a letter relating to Elizabeth's hobby of autograph hunting.

In the Spring Newsletter Fran Baker wrote about the Jamison/Green letters bought by The John Rylands University of Manchester Library. Remaining in the Green family archives are watercolour pictures and family albums. In one of the albums there are carte de visite photos of Julia, Florence and her husband Charlie Crompton but of great interest to us is one labelled 'Mrs Gaskell. You can study it in this newsletter.

The 300 year old Brook Street Chapel, burial place of Elizabeth and William Gaskell, Julia and Meta, Aunt Hannal Lumb and many of the Holland family now has a web page: www.brookstreetchapel.org

Several enjoyable events have helped in raising funds but more is still needed before work can begin on improving access, providing a lift and exhibition space.

Please remember that our home page has details of meetings, events and the latest news: www.gaskellsociety.co.uk

Gaskell And The Theatre

Christine Lingard

My recent article on Gaskell and music received a lot of interest, so it seems appropriate to follow on with a survey of Gaskell and the theatre. A study of her books and letters indicates a good knowledge of drama, but how much of this was acquired from patronage of the theatre? It dates from an early age. Her family did not share the puritan disapproval of the theatre. In 1836 she wrote:

We have been a very large party this summer, and amongst other spirited actions of our lives, got up a play; I say 'we' though I did not take any part in it, but I was present at all the planning &c. it was the 'Rivals'; and was admirably performed really; considering that with one exception, it was the first appearance of any one on the theatre. Most of the performers kept up their characters during the 'drawing room' part of the evening and Lucy Holland for some days was 'great' as Mrs Malaprop, making some really capital travesties of words. [FL, pp. 19-20]

A perusal of the catalogue of books in Plymouth Grove sale (1913) does not reveal a great interest in the theatre. It includes editions of Shakespeare, Nathaniel Lee, and Philip Massinger, the French authors (Marivaux and Molière-), the Germans (Goethe and Schiller) and the Greeks - Aristophanes, Sophocles, and Euripides. Surprisingly, considering there is little biography in the entire collection, there was an 1826 book of biographical anecdotes, *Reminiscences of Michael Kelly of the King's Theatre and the Theatre Royal Drury Lane*. Michael Kelly (1762-1862) was an author, singer, musician and friend of Sheridan, Kemble and Siddons; he also owned a wine shop.

On a number of occasions when Gaskell refers to going to the theatre we cannot be certain that she was going to a dramatic performance. On her visits to Oxford, she probably went to lectures. There is little evidence of an interest in theatre-going before 1850. This may not be entirely due to the lack of evidence surviving from this period. As a young mother she may have been too busy. In the 1840s the theatre was at a low ebb in Manchester. There were fewer theatres then than there had been a generation earlier. Apart from a couple of music halls the only two theatres were the Theatre Royal, in Spring Gardens, and the Queen's Theatre, round the corner in Fountain St. The former burnt down in 1844 and a new building was opened by the celebrated director, James Sheridan Knowles, situated between the Free Trade Hall and the Gentleman's Concert Hall in Peter St. A wide variety of productions were presented but the staple diet was melodrama.

Many leading actors of the day came to Manchester. William Macready is discussed below; Henry Irving made his first appearance as Hamlet at the Theatre Royal in 1864. Helen Faucit, one of the greatest actresses of her day, was another who first appeared at the Queen's in 1845. She continued her career after she married the judge, Sir Theodore Martin. There is passing mention of Gaskell having missed her in November 1854; but that was a social occasion. Interestingly, she was appearing as Imogen in *Cymbeline*, which is the Shakespeare play most frequently quoted by Gaskell in her novels.

Once her identity as an author became known, Gaskell went to London and was lionized. She dined with Dickens; the guests included the former actor and contributor to *Punch*, Douglas Jerrold:

a very little almost deformed man with grey flowing hair, and very fine eyes. He made so many bon-mots, that at the time I thought I could remember; but which now have quite slipped out of my head.... [Jane Carlyle told her stories about her Scottish servant.] Miss Fanny Kemble called in a hat & a habit, and when Mrs C., spoke to the servant about bringing Miss K. in, unannounced, the servant said 'I did not know if it was a Mr or Mrs.' - [GL, 45a, pp. 827-9]

She met Kemble on a few occasions, including a performance of Mendelssohn's *Overture to A Midsummer Night's Dream* to which Kemble added the vocal readings.

Dickens himself was fascinated by the theatre. As a young man he regularly attended playhouses of all kinds and watched plays irrespective of quality. He seriously considered a career as an actor. In 1847 he played the part of Captain Bobadil in Jonson's *Every man in his humour*. The cast included John Forster, George Cruikshank (the illustrator), Clarkson Stanfield (the artist) and several of Dickens' friends from *Punch* - Mark Lemon, John Leech, Henry Mayhew and Mayhew's father-in-law, Douglas Jerrold. The play came to the Theatre Royal in Manchester in July 1847. Macready saw the play in London although he normally hated amateur productions. He was impressed by some of the performances, with the exception of Jerrold, but found it tedious.

Another literary figure, who also fancied his chances as an actor, appeared in the play - George Henry Lewes. He came again to Manchester in February 1849 to lecture on philosophy at the Athenaeum - to very small audiences, according to one attendee, Elizabeth Gaskell. Within the month he was back, having persuaded a professional company to give him the part of Shylock in *The Merchant of Venice*, a character he tried to play with sympathy. Gaskell confirms she was unable to attend. There is no mention of his own play, *The Noble Heart*, which he brought to the theatre later that year.

In the meantime the company led by Dickens was engaged to stage three performances of Jonson's play at Knebworth House, home of Lord Lytton (Edward Bulwer-Lytton, one of Gaskell's favourite novelists). Lytton was very impressed. With Dickens, he was inspired to form the 'Guild of Literature and Art', an ambitious project designed to help authors in need. Lytton agreed to write a play for them, to tour the provinces with to raise money for its enterprises. This play was *Not So Bad As We Seem*, and it was performed before the Queen at the London home of the Duke of Devonshire with great success. The sets were designed by Joseph Paxton. The Queen wrote in her Journal:

All acted on the whole well...Dickens (the celebrated author) admirably, and Dr Jerrold a funny little man who writes in *Punch*, extremely well... The dresses and scenery were beautiful.

The Duke of Wellington, who was also in the audience, was not so impressed. He left after the second act. It toured to the Free Trade Hall, on 11 February 1852 and this time Gaskell was in the audience:

Yes! we went to see the Amateurs; we asked Mr Forster & Dickens to stay here, but they could not. Mr F came up however to call, & told us they expected to gain 1000£ by these 3 nights (2 at Liverpool, where he was not going to act.) He said the play was very heavy, and so it was. He gave me private admission for any friends, so I took the Winkworths & we escaped the crowd. We sat right under the very much raised stage, on the front row, and I think I got Braidized for I had such a headache with looking up. The play is very very long too - 3 hours & a half, & they omitted 1 scene. And very stupid indeed. The farce was capital. Dickens was so good, & Mark Lemon, - D Jerrold was not there and Mr Forster was sadly too long over his very moral sentences in the play.
[FL, p. 64]

Later that year, she had another opportunity to see them. Catherine Winkworth records:

The next day Charles and Catherine Dickens and Georgina Hogarth called very early, and invited the Gaskells down to watch the 'Amateurs', who were performing Boucicault's farce *Used Up*, J.R. Planché's *Charles XII* and Dickens' own *Mr Nightingale's Diary*.

This time Elizabeth avoided a crick in the neck, telling Marianne: 'Papa & I went behind the scenes to see the play and had tea there, which was a very luxurious way of seeing it' [GL, No.131, p.197]. There was an audience of four thousand at the Free Trade Hall on 4th September. The *Manchester Guardian* called Mr Nightingale the most perfect of the night. The cast also included Wilkie Collins and John Tenniel.

In 1857 the Guild made another tour to Manchester. The date coincided with the opening of the Art Treasures Exhibition and so Dickens was able to give favourable reports of newly formed Hallé Orchestra. The play presented was Wilkie Collins' *Frozen Deep* - a dramatization of the fate of the explorer, John Franklin, who disappeared in the 1840s trying to find a route to the East via the Northwest Passage. This play is famous today because Dickens employed professional actresses. These included Ellen Ternan, who was to become his mistress. The cast included Wilkie Collins, Mark Lemon and the artist Augustus Egg. The sets were designed by Clarkson Stanfield. It was presented at the Free Trade Hall on 21st and 22nd August. There is no record that any of the Gaskells attended. Her house was full of guests attending the Exhibition.

A later visit to the theatre was in May 1860: 'instead about 4 Anne B came to say ...& after that wd call for us & take us to the play ' [GL, No.465, p.614]. This was *Dead Heart* by Watts Phillips (1825-74). It starred the great actor manager Ben Webster & Sarah Woolgar (Mrs Alfred Mellon) in one of her finest performance. The play had been written in 1857. It concerned a tale of self-sacrifice in the French Revolution leading to substitution at the foot of the guillotine. Ben Webster showed it to Dickens and it must have made an impression. Two years later *A Tale of Two Cities* appeared.

Theatre-going at this time had been given respectability by the patronage of the Queen. Gaskell saw her on a number of occasions - the first time at a gala presentation at St James' Theatre of the comic opera *Fra Diavolo* by Daniel Auber in 1849 [FL, p. 42]. She also records seeing her in February 1851. This letter to Marianne is a little confusing. One would be mistaken in thinking that it was at a performance starring Macready:

I do not suppose you can get to see Mr Macready for 10s. I heard before I left London that all the tickets were to be a guinea; and I don't think it is worth more than 10s at any rate. I did not see the Queen. Our box was right over her head. She is to be 'in state' at the benefit. No notice was taken of her that night any farther than that all eyes were directed towards the royal box, because she did not come in state. [GL, No.90, p.143]

But a perusal of newspapers reveals that on Saturday 15 February 1851 the Queen was present at the Princess's Theatre, at the farewell performance of George Bartley, as Falstaff in *Henry IV*. Bartley (1782-1858) was a celebrated comic actor, who had worked with Charles Kean and Sheridan.

We do not know what she saw. There was a lot to choose from. Stanford's Paris Guide (1858) lists 22 theatres, music halls and opera houses. Perhaps she saw one by Molière, whose *Le médecin malgré lui* is referred to in *Curious, if true*. [1860]. He was a favourite of Mme Mohl who loved the theatre. It offered her welcome release in times of stress. She also watched much lighter offerings: 'There's a new play, *Montjoie*, by Octave Feuillet, much talked of. I must find out whether there are any scènes scandaleuses before I can take my niece of sixteen, just out of her village...'.

That year Dickens records being enchanted by Mme Jeanne Sylvanie Arnould-Plessy, who had frequently appeared in the French plays in London and he also saw *Demi Monde* by Alexandre Dumas Fils in 1855.

The leading Paris theatre was the Théâtre Français, which at the time of Gaskell's visit in 1855 was presenting *La Czarine* by Eugène Scribe, a story of Peter the Great and his wife, Catherine. Scribe was one of the most popular and entertaining of French playwrights of the time, penning over 200 plays - as well as librettos and musical pieces. The play starred Rachel, in the last new role she undertook. It was described as a colourless and pointless role and soon closed. The experience was all the more bitter because her greatest rival, the Italian actress Adelaide Ristori (1826-1906), triumphed later in season.

In 1860, following an appearance in *Phèdre* in front of the Racine family in Paris, Ristori embarked on a tour of the Rhineland including Hanover and Wiesbaden. Gaskell got an opportunity to see her while staying in Heidelberg:

& then we went to the 4 o'clock train to Mannheim; meeting all the world at the station... Performance did not begin till 6 so we wandered about in the Park... Well! we went to see Ristori at last! and anything more magnificent I never saw. But I am not going to bore you by raptures. Miss Kell kept wishing to see her 'in repose' - 'in a quieter character'... [GL, No.475, p.626]

I cannot trace what the play was. She was accompanied on the tour by the French playwright Ernest Legouvé, (1807-1903), who was working on his play *Beatrice* for her. Her greatest German role was in Schiller's *Maria Stuart*.

Gaskell had always shown an interest in German drama though she did not read the language:

Yes! I have read Carlyle's W[ilhelm] M[eister] once or twice, - & thought it wonderfully clever & suggestive, & disagreeable & I remember the Hamlet criticism particularly; the oak in the vase &c but surely Hamlet 'fat & scant o' breath' is in Hamlet's self, & that style of fat suggests fairness [FL, p.117] (dated 27 October 1854)

And also the Passion plays staged every ten years at Oberammergau, which Mme Mohl had seen: 'I read them an account of the Ammergau Play, out of the London Guardian that Mr Maltby lent me; & I think they will both go to one of the Sept'r Representations' [GL, No.475, p.627].

And there were also amateur performances: '...but I find that Miss Brontë [sic] would rather enjoy going to the Amateur Performance' [FL, p. 85]. The Manchester Shakespearean Society staged *Twelfth Night* in the Theatre Royal in aid of the Manchester Free Library on Monday 25 April 1853, a production which was panned by the critics. Many of the performances were inaudible.

Gaskell's works soon attracted attention from dramatists themselves. In 1866 the prolific Irish playwright Dion Boucicault (possibly the only English playwright of the 1850s whose work is still performed today) wrote *The Long Strike*, a version of *Mary Barton* and *Lizzie Leigh*. It concentrates on the strike, the murder, and the trial. His wife played the part of Mary, renamed Jane, and the author himself appeared in the comparatively small role of the sea captain. It was staged at the Lyceum in London and in New York. Angus Easson considers it a feeble piece. However it was a success. The Times (2 December) noted John Barton, played by Ben Webster, as 'one of those strongly marked characters in the delineation of which he is almost without a rival'. The play was reduced from four acts to three for later productions. It was staged at the Grand Opera House in Toronto in 1878. The comedian John (Jolly Jack) Langrishe included it in his repertoire at Deadwood, South Dakota, the same year.

GL = The Letters of Mrs Gaskell, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, 1966
FL = Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell, edited by John Chapple and Alan Shelston, 2000

Gaskell Portrait Gallery

This portrait (overleaf) is taken from the Green family photograph album and has 'Mrs Gaskell' written on the back together with a studio photographer's details: *Faedo and Temporal, Plainpalais, Geneve*.

Member Tim Austin has traced other carte-de-visite by this photographer to a collection in Penn State Library, USA, where they are dated from 1860 onwards.

Jean Jamison, who has kindly given us permission to reproduce the photo, tells me that the album was annotated by her Aunt Evie, who lived into her 90s, and was a clever lady who had been librarian of Lady Margaret Hall, Oxford, so would not be likely to put names to pictures unless she was certain.



The album also has pictures of Meta, Florence and her husband, Charlie Crompton. Perhaps the foreign studio setting accounts for this rather odd pose with Elizabeth knitting. She was holidaying with family in Switzerland in 1864 (GL 558) at 'Pontresina and Glion (up above the Lake of Geneva). . ' working hard on Wives and Daughters.



For comparison of Gaskell portraits there are two by Samuel Laurence. The dating of these was considered in Gaskell Newsletter no.33.

In GL 555 Elizabeth wrote:

Sept 12 1864

My Dear Mr Lawrence(sic)

I should have not the least objection to Mr Smith [her publisher] becoming the possessor of your likeness of me...When I am next in London I hope that I and my cap) may be able to give you another sitting...

This must be that portrait which cannot now be traced. A.B. Hopkins reproduced it in her biography of 1952.

But did Laurence also make the better known drawing at that time? This is now in the possession of Mrs Trevor Dabbs, and came to her via Marianne, but the reproduction used here comes from Smith and Elders' Knutsford Edition of 1906 Vol. V and seems to have then been in the possession of the Smith family. A. B Hopkins did not know its whereabouts when she wrote in 1952.



Mrs. Gaskell by Samuel Laurence, said to have been painted about 1864.



This picture is of the bronze medallion plaque that is on The Gaskell Memorial Tower in Knutsford, made by Cavaliere Achille D'Orsi, Professor of Fine Arts in the Royal Academy at Naples, according to Ellis Chadwick,* who added that it was designed from one of the last photographs of her, taken in Edinburgh..

* Mrs Gaskell: Homes, Haunts and Stories (1913 edition)

A newly-discovered letter of introduction returns to England

Nancy S. Weyant

In March, 2008, my weekly review of literary treasures offered for sale on eBay revealed a letter addressed to "My Dear Mrs. Arnold" penned by "E. C. Gaskell". While I had read both volumes of Elizabeth Gaskell's letters as well as letters subsequently published in assorted periodicals, all of my reading of her correspondence had been of letters neatly typeset in very readable form or exceedingly limited samples of her handwriting reproduced in books I own. I had no real first-hand experience of examining original examples of her handwriting. Fortuitously, the Massachusetts seller had included a photograph of the entire letter in his posting. I immediately sent the link of those images to both John Chapple and Alan Shelston, asking if it seemed authentic to them. Following multiple e-mails with them and with Fran Baker, I submitted an unchallenged bid and acquired the following letter¹ which is now archived in the Gaskell Collection of the John Rylands Library of the University of Manchester:

Plymouth Grove
Manchester
Friday, May 25

My dear Mrs Arnold,

The bearer of this note is a very dear and kind friend of ours, who is going to stay with her husband for a few days at Low-wood, and is most anxious to see you, and to visit the home of Dr Arnold. I have ventured to give her this note of introduction at her request, because I know you would be gratified, could you [have\] heard her, as I have done, express her reverence for your husband. I was so sorry to miss the call you paid me, while I was away; and Mr Gaskell tells me he met the Bishop's carriage, close to our house; but he had no idea that you were in it, or he would gladly have turned back.

In great haste, believe me dear Mrs Arnold to remain
Yours affectionately

E. C. Gaskell.

This previously unknown letter contributes in a small way to extending our understanding of the relationship between its author and its recipient. Even though the original envelope is missing, the references to Low-wood and to Dr. Arnold within the text leave no doubt that the recipient is Mary Penrose Arnold, widow of Thomas Arnold (historian, education reformer and headmaster of Rugby School). While there are multiple references to Mrs. Arnold within Gaskell's letters to others, there is only one letter to Mrs. Arnold in either of the two published collections of those letters.² That 1859 letter is one expressing stunned sorrow upon reading in the Times about the death of the Arnolds' son William. The details in that communication speak to the nature of their relationship as women and the quality of the interactions with other members of their families. In the above letter, the reference to what appears to be an unscheduled visit by Mrs. Arnold substantiates that which is documented more explicitly by the 1859 letter and the multiple references to the Arnolds in other correspondence. These two women seem to interact with some regularity, though not great frequency. Certainly Gaskell was comfortable enough with Mrs. Arnold to introduce others to her and the 1859 letter documents that their children interacted as well. That said, my research (greatly augmented by help from John Chapple, Graham Handley and Alan Shelston) has allowed me to make the following comments on this brief letter of introduction.

The first thing of note is that two basic details are missing in the text itself. No year is provided and the "bearer of this note" is not identified by name. In fact, there is absolutely nothing factual that suggests anything about the identity of the "bearer of this note" beyond her marital status and her admiration of Dr. Arnold. It may be that the emergence of the letter in the United States reflects the nationality of the bearer but suggesting so would be undocumented speculation. It is possible that a reference to or an enumeration of guests at either the Gaskell home or the Arnold home might point to the bearer's identity but for now, the bearer's name will remain unknown. As for the missing year, lacking a full date within the letter, one must turn to clues in the text to determine exactly when the letter was written. Though the letter cites no specific year, by identifying May 25th as a Friday, Gaskell herself narrows the possibilities. My perpetual calendar identifies only three years after Gaskell became an established author and a regular visitor to the Lake District that have May 25th on a Friday: 1849, 1855 and 1860. Because she references Plymouth Grove as her address and because the Gaskells did not move to Plymouth Grove until June in 1850, 1849 is simply not a possibility. To determine which of the remaining two years is the most likely, I again turned to the text. Gaskell refers to her absence when Mrs. Arnold made a call at Plymouth Grove, though she fails to provide any reason for that absence. A review of Gaskell's activities during the first five months of 1855 and the first five months of 1860 as recorded in Graham Handley's Chronology,³ document, respectively, an extended planned absence (about a week in London followed by about six weeks in Paris followed by more than a

week in London again) and a protracted absence that kept her in Winchester in February and March. It was while she was in Paris in 1855 that Charlotte Brontë Nicholls died, though she did not learn of that passing until she returned to London. Given that Gaskell and Brontë had visited Mrs. Arnold at Low-wood when the two of them first met, it seems a little unusual to me that if the letter was written in 1855 Gaskell would make absolutely no reference to her friend's death even though the primary purpose of the letter was to introduce "a dear and kind friend". Doing so would have opened a second connection for discussion - an opportunity for Mrs. Arnold and the bearer of the letter to discuss Dr. Arnold AND an opportunity to discuss Charlotte Brontë. Gaskell does not do this. Her absence from home in 1860 was unexpectedly longer than planned because she was ill and remained in Winchester until well enough to travel. This absence occurred in February and March, some two months before Gaskell penned her letter. Although Gaskell makes no reference to suggest that Mrs. Arnold's visit had been paid while she was in Winchester, an illness does not seem a topic likely to be addressed in detail or even as an aside in a letter of introduction. For that reason, I think 1860 is the more likely year.

The letter closes with what I find to be a rather curious statement about William Gaskell and the bishop. I have been told by both John Chapple and Alan Shelston that the "bishop" in question was James Prince Lee, the first Bishop of Manchester. Lee's relationship with the Arnolds went back decades. Volume 11 of the Dictionary of National Biography notes that Lee had served as a master at Rugby from 1830-1838 when Thomas Arnold was headmaster. Interestingly, both the DNB entry and most of the thumbnail biographies of Lee I have located in print or in electronic format comment on the fact that he was despotic and his pedagogical or schoolmasterly manner was an irritation to his clergy. As a Unitarian minister, William Gaskell was not one of "Bishop Lee's clergy". Furthermore, I could find nothing that directly addressed William Gaskell's opinion of Bishop Lee. I recognize that I am participating in some "reading between the lines" and a little speculation as I explore the closing sentence but I do find myself wondering if William Gaskell's choice not to return to the house reflects his opinion of the Bishop and if this closing sentence constitutes a subtle, second-hand apology to a woman who was a respected and dear friend of the family. Certainly such speculation is irrelevant to the primary purpose of the letter but I find the issue an interesting one to contemplate. I should note, however, that though I mention this, I must leave it to others more versed on the character of and relationship between these two religious leaders of Manchester and with better access to primary documents than I to properly explore this topic.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mrs. R. Trevor Dabbs for granting me permission to publish this letter.

I continue to appreciate the gracious assistance of John Chapple, Graham Handley and Alan Shelston. Their commanding knowledge of Elizabeth Gaskell's life and works, as well as Victorian England in general, is a constant wonder to me.

Notes:

1. I wish to thank John and Kate Chapple for their assistance in interpreting the punctuation and the case of individual letters for this transcription.
2. John Chapple and Alan Shelston, *Further Letters of Mrs. Gaskell* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), p. 196.
3. Graham Handley, *An Elizabeth Gaskell Chronology* (Houndsmill, Basingstoke and NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

Editor's note: William and Elizabeth Gaskell both knew Bishop James Prince Lee. Elizabeths' opinion of him and Mrs Lee can be found in GL 70.

Skelwith

Christine Lingard

The Preston family provided the Gaskells with several servants. Elizabeth lodged at their home, Mill Brow, at Skelwith, Loughrigg, near Grasmere, on several occasions including 1849, and 1857. The family had been recommended to her by Wordsworth and the Arnolds. Wordsworth described Mrs Preston as a stateswoman. Gaskell was very fond of the house and describes its 'dear charming' farm-kitchen with warming pans on the wall and spurs hanging beside the crockery on the dresser.

She recommended the Prestons to friends who were visiting the area, among them Charles Bosanquet:

...she is worth knowing, as a fine true friendly sensible woman; if you liked to lodge there and she would take you in I am sure you would be comfortable, & well cared for - N.B. She would make you change your stockings if you got your feet wet, and such like motherly and imperative cares...

Wordsworth said once of the Prestons that they were a 'Homeric family'. I am sorry to say the father sometimes drinks. I say it because you perhaps ought to be told or else when sober he is a fine simple fellow. Mrs Preston's family have lived in that house and on that land for more than 200 years, as I have heard. They have no ambition but much dignity....

Mrs Preston came to visit the Gaskells in Manchester in December 1851:

Who do you think we have staying with us? Mrs Preston from Skelwith; who has never been in a town larger than Kendal before. Kendal reminds me of Lancaster [a town which ECG was very fond of]

One of her daughters, Eleanor was very headstrong and had taken a job in London. The family had heard very little of her for several months, and there was great fear of her being seduced. Gaskell was fully aware of the dangers, as she demonstrated in her novel *Ruth*, and this was confirmed in her letters to Miss Hannah Kay, sister of Sir James Kay Shuttleworth. Eleanor's sister, Margaret, was sent to London to fetch her home. The full details of Eleanor's story are not known but as you will see her life was very short.

Margaret Preston (Mrs Knowles) looked after them in Silverdale. She was employed as a maid at Plymouth Grove but by 1854 she had taken over as cook. She was described as 'sensible and spirited, not a very good temper'. Will Preston, her brother, was an outdoor man - 'easy temper easily persuaded'. He joined them in 1852 and lived over the stable: 'passionate usefulness', 'imperious temper'.

They are buried in Grasmere churchyard under the following inscription:

In memory of Thomas Preston of Mill Brow, Loughrigg, died March 17th 1878 aged 78 years. Jane His wife, died Oct. 23rd 1868 aged 69 years. William their son d. December 17th 1861 aged 37 years. Eleanor their daughter died April 25th 1860 aged 29 y[ears].

Margaret Knowles and her husband Roger Knowles moved to Newby Bridge with their family.

See Gaskell Letters (Chapple and Pollard, editors) 92, 111, 182, 184, 362a, 439a.

A Model for Lady Ludlow

Joan Leach

The BBC's production of *Cranford* incorporated parts of Elizabeth Gaskell's novella *My Lady Ludlow*, picturing her as autocratic but basically benevolent, her prejudices reinforced by the horrors of the French revolution with its agitation for social change. It is to be hoped that the BBC production has encouraged members and others to go back to the original story as so much of it did not fit into the *Cranford* frame. For example, Lady Ludlow had a fraught relationship with the newly appointed evangelical vicar as she was high church Tory but this part of her story could not be included in the BBC script because there was the Vicar from Mr Harrison's *Confessions*: Sophie's Hutton's father.

As a local historian I have a special interest in the character of Lady Ludlow as it seems to me that Elizabeth Gaskell was drawing on local sources. Lady Jane Stanley is still a legend in the town although she died in 1803, so Elizabeth would only have heard the stories about her from the family. The sedan chair carried annually in the May Day procession is believed to have been hers. She was the great aristocrat, daughter of the 11th Earl of Derby, and, like Lady Ludlow, she carried a gold-knobbed walking stick, chiefly as a status symbol. She made use of it if her stately progress along the street was impeded and would rap the erring pedestrian on the shoulder to remind him to give way to a lady; Henry Green relates this story in his history of Knutsford. She had pavements made in Knutsford to protect the ladies' dresses from dirt and mud, and left money in her will to have them maintained. She also left money to maintain the flag pole on the church and provide flags to be 'hoisted upon particular occasions upon the steeple of the parish church'. The flag was a demonstration of loyalty. Lady Jane Stanley's fund is still administered as a charity.

Lady Ludlow took into her household young ladies of gentle birth but impoverished circumstances. Lady Jane Stanley may have done the same as in her lengthy will she left legacies of between £50 and £500 to twenty- one ladies, mostly spinsters. This will, dated 1800, is the longest I have ever seen, on five sheets measuring 21" x 16" and six more sheets of 16" by 12" written in her own hand, and several more pages of codicils. Many small items of family memorabilia -pictures, rings, cameos and coins - are all carefully labelled. Niece Harriet Legh, for example, received a 'double guinea piece, also a smaller piece of gold which my late father carried above sixty years in his pocket it will be found folded up and wrote upon to that effect . . a mourning ring with her aunt Mary Stanley's hair under a crystal.' Lady Ludlow asked Margaret Dawson to help her sort items saved in the 'curious old drawers of her bureau ... locks of hair carefully ticketed . . and locketts and bracelets with miniatures in them'. There was also £7,500 shared between eight hospitals.

Lady Ludlow scorned the dissenting Baptist baker. There is a story told in the Knutsford Methodist church history, of an old silk weaver who had become too old to walk to and from Macclesfield, 11 miles from Knutsford. When he asked Lady Jane for aid she told him firmly that she was a church lady and could not help him, a Methodist. When he replied that he had been converted by them and could not leave them she relented, finding he was true to his faith.

The Vicar, Mr Gray, in My Lady Ludlow is a puzzle because the vicar of Knutsford from 1809-24 was Rev. Harry Grey, who was of aristocratic birth but evangelical and not popular; he did not join the gentry in their hunting or card games and was strict enough to have the church bell rung at 9 p.m. and go round the inns to turn out the drinkers. He certainly instituted a Sunday school and trained girls to sing in the choir but he arrived after Lady Jane's death. It seems odd that Elizabeth Gaskell did not give her character another name.

Lady Jane was firmly against Sunday Schools. These had been promoted by Robert Raikes since 1780, so that children could read their Bibles and catechism, but doubts arose in the reaction to the French Revolution; the workman might also read Tom Paine's Rights of Man instead. Lady Jane did include the Sunday School in her will, sharing £100 with four other charities. Her less wealthy successor at Brook House, Mrs Legh of a local gentry family also left money to the Sunday School and girls' choir.

Lady Ludlow sent six bottles of malmsey wine to the ailing Mr Gray. The last item in final bequest in Lady Jane's long will was:

Whatsoever quantites of spruce beer may be remaining in my cellars at my death may be sent to Mrs Catherine Naylor who will, as I have requested her, distribute it occasionally in the manner I have done for the relief of such poor neighbours whose case may require that fine restorative'.

I have a hand-written recipe for spruce beer from a herbalist's book but it needs essence of spruce, so can anyone can direct me to a supply?

Friends of Plymouth Grove

Ann O'Brien

Autumn was, as usual, a busy time for the Gaskell House. We had the Heritage week-end in September and the regular open days on the first Sunday of each month, all introducing more people to Manchester's neglected treasure. The first talk of the season, Mary Barton's Manchester, was given by John Archer and proved so popular that it had to be repeated in January.

Another successful plant sale in October was followed in November by a dramatised reading of My Lady Ludlow, splendidly adapted by our own Robin Allan. The ever-popular Delia Corrie, playing Lady Ludlow, was joined by Mary Wright, Vin Tuohy, Chris Burton and Joan Hill, taking a variety of other roles. This was such a success that plans are already well in hand for a repeat performance (see 'Future Events').

The final, extremely successful, Open Day at the house took place on December 7th, and was followed by a very enjoyable Carol Concert given by the Grace Darling Singers. The festivities over, the house closed its doors to the general public for the last time in its present unrestored form. When we open the doors again we hope to have the rooms on the ground floor re-created, as much as possible, as they were in the time of the Gaskells. The lower ground floor will be refurbished for community use, and on the first floor there will be conference rooms.

The first stage of the restoration has already begun, with the removal of the dry rot; this rather mundane work has, however, resulted in some exciting finds. When the book-shelves in William Gaskell's study were removed, six layers of wallpaper were revealed. Also revealed, in the outer hall, was a stone- flagged floor. As work progresses we hope many more clues may emerge to help in the task of restoring the rooms as authentically as possible. Of course all this depends on continued success in fundraising.

A good start to the new phase of holding events 'off-site' took place on Saturday, 17th January, when a repeat of John Archer's talk on Mary Barton's Manchester again attracted a capacity audience, this time at the Y.H.A. This was followed, on Saturday 21st February, by an enormously successful Study Day on An Underrated Victorian: Sir James P. Kay Shuttleworth. As one member of the audience wrote afterwards, "The speakers were varied and their topics interesting; I certainly know more about Kay-Shuttleworth than I expected to learn." They were all enthusiastic and engaging and it was an enjoyable day. It also proved financially very rewarding and, although final figures are not yet available, it has raised well in excess of £1000. And, perhaps just as importantly, it brought the plight of the house to the attention of many of Manchester's and the North's intellectual élite, many of whom joined the Friends of Plymouth Grove at the end of the day.

Future Events:

There are two other events on our calendar, before our next major fund-raiser. The first of these is the Manchester Histories Festival at Manchester Town Hall on Saturday, March 21st. The Gaskell Society and the Friends of Plymouth Grove will each have a stall in the Banqueting Hall, so do come along and see us. Help on both stalls would also be appreciated.

Saturday, 18th April is the date of the Manchester Heritage Buildings Trust/ Friends of Plymouth Grove A.G.M. It will begin at 2.30p.m. at the Community Space, Guide Post Square, Devonshire Street, Ardwick. Tea/coffee and our usual, delicious home-made cakes will follow. Cost £2.50; pay on the door.

On Saturday 9th May, at 2.30p.m. in Manchester Cathedral Visitor Centre, Cateaton Street, M3 1SQ, The Travel Journals of Robert Hyde Greg. A talk by Allan and Beryl Freer about Robert Hyde Greg's extensive travels in Scotland, Spain and Portugal, France, Italy and even as far as the Ottoman Empire. He was the second son of Samuel Greg, founder of Quarry Bank Mill, Styal, and became one of Manchester's leading textile manufacturers; he also played a prominent part in the intellectual life of the city. This has proved a very popular talk when given elsewhere, so early booking is recommended.

Tickets £7.50 including tea and cake, may be obtained from Mrs Hilda Holmes, 8, Peter Street, Hazel Grove Stockport SK7 4BQ (Phone in the first instance, tel. 0161 487 2593). Cheques to be made payable to The Manchester Historic Buildings Trust. Please enclose an S.A.E.

Two more treats in store:

Saturday 13th June: A coach trip to Silverdale, calling on the way at Gawthorpe Hall, where we will have lunch. Then on to Silverdale where there may be an opportunity to visit places connected with the Gaskells, if time allows. Then, in the Gaskell Memorial Hall, afternoon tea at will be followed by a repeat performance of the highly successful dramatised reading from *My Lady Ludlow* which had its premiere performance at Plymouth Grove (see above). Not to be missed! There will be more details on this when we have finalised our plans and they will be on the Plymouth Grove website: elizabethgaskellhouse.org and in the next Friends' newsletter.

Saturday 5th September: Music for the Gaskells in St. John's Parish Church, Buxton. A repeat performance, by Opus 5, of their acclaimed concert first given in Alderley Edge last April. If you missed this the first time round, be sure to come to this performance, you won't be disappointed! More details to follow, as above.

So, you see, despite the fact that the house is closed, we are continuing to run as varied a programme as possible, with a number of events we feel sure will appeal to our valued supporters. We still have a substantial amount of money to raise, to fund the restoration, and the sooner we have those funds, the sooner we will be able to re-open the house and show it off in a manner befitting both its literary and historical importance.

Book Notes

Christine Lingard

Penguin books are reissuing a number of editions of Gaskell novels at £6.99 - Cranford, edited by Patricia Ingham; Mary Barton, edited by Macdonald Daly, and Wives and Daughters, edited by Pam Morris. Amberley Press are bringing out an uncritical edition of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* in March.

Also due to be published this Spring:

Literary Tourism and Nineteenth-century Culture, edited by Nicola J. Watson, Senior Lecturer at the Open University. Palgrave Macmillan, £45.

It aims to provide 'fascinating insights into the reception of, amongst others, Petrarch, Shakespeare, Burns, Byron, Wordsworth, Scott, Letitia Landon, Hawthorne, Dickens, Gaskell, Hardy, Stowe, Haggard and Kipling by British and American tourists'.

The Social Problem Novels of Frances Trollope, general editor Brenda Ayres. Pickering and Chatto are issuing a critical annotated edition of the four novels of one of Elizabeth Gaskell's forerunners in the genre of the social problem novel - The Life and Adventures of Jonathan Jefferson Whitlaw; The Vicar of Wrexhill; The Life and Adventures of Michael Armstrong, the Factory Boy; and Jessie Phillips. Michael Armstrong (edited by Christine Sutphin, Professor of English at Central Washington University), published in 1840, makes an interesting comparison with Mary Barton.

In a correction to my preview of Romantic Echoes in the Victorian Era, edited by Andrew Radford and Mark Sandy, (Ashgate Press) in the Autumn 2008 issue of the Newsletter, the chapter on 'Mr. Osborne's secret: Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters, and the gender of Romanticism' is by James Narjarian.

Brontë-related poems

Ian Emberson has just published a collection of nine poems relating to the Brontës - their lives, writings and the landscapes associated with them. Entitled 'Mourning Ring', it is illustrated on every page by the author. It is available from the Brontë Parsonage Museum gift shop, or from Angria Press, 1, Highcroft Road, Todmorden, OL14 5LZ at a cost of £3, plus £1 postage and packing (£2 overseas). Ian can also be contacted by telephone at 01706 812716, or by Email at ianemberson@aol.com

HELP REQUIRED WITH STORAGE

Is there anyone who could help with the storage of back copies of the Journal and a few other bits and pieces? These have accumulated over the years and are overflowing from the various cupboards, spare rooms etc, which various members of the committee have offered in the past. If anyone is fortunate enough to have space to spare, we should be so grateful to move some boxes into it. This would ideally be in the North West, near to Knutsford or Manchester, but if we get desperate enough, perhaps we could share things around!

If you can help, please contact Elizabeth Williams at BDandEMW@aol.com or on 01925 764271.

AGM Meeting

**will be held at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester
on Saturday 28th March 2009**

10.30am: Assemble for coffee 11.00am: AGM
followed by The Daphne Carrick Lecture, given by Fran Baker (archivist at the John Rylands Library, working on the Gaskell Collection):
Intimate and Trusted correspondents: The Gaskells and the Greens
Henry Green and William Gaskell were colleagues and had both taken degrees at Glasgow University. Henry was minister at Knutsford's Brook Street Chapel for some 45 years. He, his wife and four daughters were close friends of the Gaskells.

2.15pm: Alan Shelston on: 'The problems and rewards of editing Cranford and North and South'.

Finish about 3.30pm

North West Group

Meetings are held on the last Wednesday of each month from October to April at St John's Church Rooms, Knutsford.

Talks and discussions led by Elizabeth Williams are preceded by buffet lunch at 12.15. Cost, £7.50

March 25 Six weeks at Heppenheim and Cousin Phillis

April 29 Elizabeth Gaskell's Cheshire: an illustrated talk by Joan Leach

May 20th

There will be a visit to Shrewsbury for a guided tour of Darwin links. Later in the year we will also visit Maer village where Emma Wedgwood, Charles Darwins' wife, grew up and where they were married. If you are not a member of the North West group and would like to join us on either of these trips please let Joan Leach know.

London and South East Group

Saturday May 9 2009: Shirley Foster: 'Character and Environment: Freedom and Enclosure'

Shirley will lead a discussion on Sylvia's Lovers.

She will talk for about 25 minutes and then there will be a discussion based on some selected passages which she will indicate in advance. More homework!!

Saturday June 6 2009, 3 - 5.30 p.m. or thereabouts: A Tea party in the garden (weather permitting!!) at 85 Calton Avenue, Dulwich, London SE21 7DF. Bring your favourite reading about the summer or gardens or any seasonally appropriate reading. It does not have to be Gaskell! Weather permitting we shall have tea first followed by our readings in the garden. You don't have to read but your reading would be welcome.

South West Group

Our next meeting is on 4th April, 3.00 p.m. at Flat 4, Sydney place by kind invitation of Mrs Joan Chandler:

Brenda McKay will speak on "Dramatising Mrs. Gaskell"

Yorkshire Branch Group

19 September at York. Shirley Foster will lead a discussion on Cousin Phillis.

Alliance of Literary Societies News

Web page: www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk

New Member Societies

We are delighted to welcome the Kenneth Grahame Society, the Thackeray Society, the Francis W H Newman Society, the T S Eliot Society, the Thomas Traherne Society, the Joseph Conrad Society and the Reade of Ryedale Society. We hope to welcome their representatives at the AGM next year, which will be held in Knutsford, marking the bicentenary of Elizabeth Gaskell's birth.

AGM and Literary Weekend

The Alliance of Literary Societies' AGM 2009 will be held in Dublin on Saturday 13th June. The formal meeting will be held that morning, and will be accompanied by speaker(s) on Dublin's literary heritage. We look forward to meeting the Dubliners Literary Circle on their home turf and enjoying the famous Irish hospitality. Consult the web page or send SAE to Joan Leach.