

The Gaskell Society



KNUTSFORD PARISH CHURCH

NEWSLETTER

MARCH 1988

NO. 5

EDITOR'S LETTER

I have enjoyed putting this newsletter together and hope you will enjoy reading it. My only problem has been a surfeit of good things - I have enough left over for the next edition. Alan Shelston, editing the next Journal, is having the same problem, which only goes to show that the Society is fulfilling its aims, to stimulate interest and research.

I had intended to give you profiles of our worthy committee members, but cannot find space; I hope to do this when I send out the Summer outing details, in a mini-newsletter.

Perhaps when our Society has grown a little larger we will be able to afford a computer to keep track of membership details. I have to admit to inefficiency in this department so have enrolled an assistant to deal with membership renewals. Please note that these should be sent to: Mrs Lilian Clode, 15 Mereheath Park, Knutsford WA16 6AT. If you have slipped the net send your £4 cheque; renewals due August 31st for 1988/89 can be paid at AGM which will be on Saturday October 1st this year (please note slight change of date).

Would you like to brush up your Italian? We have several members, most of them Professor Francesco Marroni's students, who would like to visit England as paying guests. There may also be UK members who would like to attend the AGM if hospitality could be offered - perhaps on a reciprocal basis? Mrs Gaskell was such a wonderful hostess that it is difficult to emulate her but I like to think we are a friendly Society, with her example to follow.

We are looking forward to welcoming members of the Brontë Society on their annual outing, this year to Knutsford on June 7th.

Best wishes to you all,

JOAN LEACH

Editor



The watercolour by Herbert Smith, dated 1851, and believed to be a portrait of Mrs Gaskell

MRS GASKELL by E Jacobi

In July last year I bought a portrait at a local antiques fair believed to be of "Mrs Gaskell". The painting is a watercolour, by Herbert Smith, and is dated 1851. I have to admit that at the time my attraction to the painting had nothing to do with the fact it was or might be Mrs Gaskell. Despite having studied English Literature at University, I had somehow managed to miss 'Mrs Gaskell'. I bought the painting simply because I loved it.

My curiosity however, began to grow. I began with Mrs Gaskell's short stories, 'Life in Manchester; Libbie Marsh's Three Eras', 'Lizzie Leigh' and 'The Moorland Cottage' and was more than a little delighted by her work. The painting I had bought because I loved it had not only introduced me to the works of Mrs Gaskell but had also given me a wonderful new project - that being to try to prove the sitter in Herbert Smith's portrait is in fact Mrs Gaskell.

I began checking the sources at the local library and compiled a list of interesting 'coincidences'.

Mrs Gaskell would have been 41 when the portrait was done and looks to be about 40 in the painting.

She is sitting next to a writing desk and two books. This would of course be an appropriate pose for an author.

The sitter in H L Smith's portrait bears a striking resemblance to the watercolour drawing of Mrs Gaskell by her daughter Meta in 1865 and to the pastel drawing of Mrs Gaskell by Samuel Lawrence in 1854.

The pose and position in front of a distinctive picture window is very similar to the photograph of Mrs Gaskell taken about 1864 which is housed in the John Rylands University Library, Manchester.

Mrs Gaskell wrote to Eliza Fox in December 1851 describing a new gown with "blue ribbons all spick and span for Xmas". The gown and bonnet in Herbert Smith's

1851 painting are also trimmed with blue ribbon.

My imagination began to feel a bit stretched when after I showed the painting to a colleague of mine at work, she telephoned a family friend who had taught Mrs Gaskell's novels some 30 years ago. When my colleague described the portrait of Mrs Gaskell in a black silk dress to her friend, the retired school teacher is reported to have said "and she was wearing a white silk bonnet". The woman left me with a reference to chase 'Mary Barton' published by Dent in 1922!

My chances of finding this particular copy through a second-hand book store or inter-library loans was slim, so I went to the British Museum Readers Library in hope of getting a one-day pass. Miraculously, instead of a one-day pass I was granted two weeks! Thankfully my boss was sympathetic and I was given a somewhat unscheduled two week holiday.

Unfortunately, the school teacher's lead did not solve the mystery, though I was convinced she must have seen something. I combed through the British Museum ordering every book I could find which was described in the catalogue as having a portrait. I was sadly not able to find my portrait or even a reference to it in any of the books.

I decided to try a different track. I checked in the catalogue under H L Smith to find he had written a book! 'A Catalogue of Miniatures by H C Ross with Memoirs by H L Smith'. This however was never published. It was a proof. Unfortunately the copy once housed at the British Museum was destroyed during the war. There is reported to be another copy in the Victoria and Albert Museum. On my last visit however, they were unable to find this document.

W C Ross was a miniaturist much employed by Her Majesty Queen Victoria. Ross exhibited over 300 paintings in the Royal Academy and produced an estimated 2,200 portraits in his life. He was a painter of historical figures and was H L Smith's cousin. H L Smith and Ross

Painted many of the same people and subjects. Perhaps it there is any connection with W C Ross and Mrs Gaskell this could provide the vital clue. H L Smith also exhibited at the Royal Academy and was a copyist for Queen Victoria.

The mystery is still unsolved. I am hopeful that when the memoirs are found that there will be some more solid leads to work from. I am curious to know if W J Thomson, who painted the miniature of Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson in 1832, was acquainted with Ross or Smith. I am still chasing the Victoria and Albert Museum - the search continues.

(Ed. I discovered that Herbert Smith exhibited a watercolour portrait of Prince Albert in 1851 - perhaps this endeared him to Queen Victoria!)

* * * * *

RESIDENTIAL HOLIDAY COURSE

Summer Academy in the Peaks and Pennines

'Town and Country Life in Northern Literature'

Week 1, July 16th-23rd. 19th Century writers, focussing on Anne Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell and Alfred Tennyson

Week 2, July 23rd-30th. 20th Century Decades, from suffragettes to contemporary T.V. theatre.

Visits are a feature of both these courses recommended by member Elsie Davis of Sheffield.

Cost £179 per week - with very full board

For further information write to:

University of Sheffield
Dept of Continuing Education
85 Wilkinson Street
Sheffield S10 2GJ

* * * * *

NEW BOOKS

by Christine Lingard

Highlight of this season's new books is a new edition of Wives and Daughters in Oxford University Press' World Classics series (£3.95). It means that all seven major novels are now available from this publisher - the only publisher to offer this. The editor is once again Angus Easson of Salford University whose book, Elizabeth Gaskell was published by Routledge in 1979, and who edited North and South and Cousin Phillis in the same series. He claims that this is the first edition to be based on the text of the Cornhill Magazine serialization rather than the original manuscript (now in the John Rylands University of Manchester Library) or the first edition in book form of 1866. This claim however is also made by Frank Glover Smith for the Penguin edition of 1969.

Professor Easson argues that any variations between the manuscript and the Cornhill text would only have been made with Mrs Gaskell's full approval, whereas she was dead by the time the first edition was published. Nevertheless, he has added a ten page text of textual variants from the Cornhill text, some reverting to the manuscript and some editorial. There is a detailed introduction explaining the editorial policy and describing Mrs Gaskell's inconsistency with names.

Once again this edition chiefly scores with its provision of copious textual notes ranging from textual inconsistencies, to biographical details and definitions of obscure and foreign terms: a total of forty-two pages in all, compared with only three in the Penguin edition. The main introduction praises the novel's structure despite the circumstances and pressures under which it was written.

There are only three other books of interest: Nineteenth Century Women Writers of the English-speaking World edited by Rhoda B Nathan. New York and London: Greenwood Press, 1986, £32.50 - a collection of 23 essays which had

their origins as papers given at the Nineteenth Century Women Writers' International Conference in November 1980 under the auspices of Hofstra University, New York. Five of the articles are devoted to George Eliot, five to Emily Dickinson and two to Charlotte Brontë. The Gaskell contribution is The Price of Love: Gaskell versus Eliot by Coral Lansbury, professor of English at Rutgers University, New Jersey, and author of two books on Elizabeth Gaskell. The aim is to contrast the two authors' attitudes to love and marriage. Eliot was not the radical she is often painted. Her domestic arrangement was one of circumstance not choice which she regretted as much as the next man. She had a dread of women who deliberately chose the celibate life. Gaskell on the other hand maintained a relatively independent lifestyle. She placed devotion to God above devotion to any individual person and appreciated the single state. Evidence of this is given by quoting both authors' opinions of Florence Nightingale.

Consuming Fiction by Terry Lovell. Verso (New Left books) £7.95. Ms Lovell is a lecturer in sociology at the University of Warwick. A constant underlying feature of this book is the continual reference to Marxist literary critics. It shows how the standard of the novel, 1770-1820 was debased when it was merely a commodity whereas from 1840-94 when the "Great Tradition" prevailed and the novel was restored to a higher literary status women lost their dominant position. Elizabeth Gaskell and Sarah Grand are the only two people to be named in the chapter sub-headings. The author feels that Mrs Gaskell has received less attention from feminist critics than her contemporaries. Mary Barton belongs to the "Great Tradition" because of its realism, but she challenges accusations that the novel is melodrama akin to modern soap operas.

The Rich Man and the Diseased Poor in Early Victorian Literature by A Susan Williams. Macmillan, £27.50. The author has worked for UNICEF and the Ministry of Health. This book is a discussion of the threat to the rich of infection from the poor in many writers of early

Victorian Britain both actual and fiction but in particular Carlyle, Dickens, Kingsley and Gaskell. References to Gaskell are dispersed throughout the text.

(Christine Lingard is Sub Librarian, Lang/Lit. Library, St Peter's Square, Manchester)

* * * * *

HOLLINGFORD ALIAS KNUTSFORD

by Joan Leach

The new O.U.P. edition of 'Wives and Daughters' has most helpful explanatory notes but I cannot agree with Note 2 (p.689) which states 'the town initially is based on Knutsford with Cumnor Towers corresponding to Tatton Hall. The novel's topography later shifts to the Midlands, probably prompted by Gaskell's memories of schooldays in Warwickshire: references are made to e.g. the Malvern Hills, the Birmingham coach and the Birmingham-London railway.'

For the first, Malvern Hills, I feel that Mrs Gaskell would name her favourite hills or the first that came into her head, most likely. She often had a vagueness about names; Knutsford has hills on the horizon from several viewpoints and I am never sure if they are Pennines, Snowdonia or the Peak District.

The note for page 601 - 'the Birmingham coach started at early morning' - cites this as, 'another indication of the Midlands topography'.

A glance at the trade directories of the period in which the novel is set reveals that Knutsfordians could take the Birmingham coach, the Bang-up, at The George Inn (which figures throughout Wives and Daughters) every day at twelve; it went through Newcastle, Stone and Wolverhampton (Pigott's 1829 Directory).

The London-Liverpool coach which called at the George was The Umpire. Cynthia arrived on this coach (p.221). Mr Coxe stayed at The George on his return visit to Hollingford 'bringing his horses and groom'; there are still remains of The George's extensive stable block.

Roger departed on his travels by coach from the same inn.

The setting is so often reminiscent of Cranford and Knutsford: the Assembly rooms at the George where the magician performed for the Cranford ladies is the scene of the charity ball when the Countess of Menteith so disappointed everyone by her lack of diamonds. The Sedan chairs are in attendance again. And tea is socially significant in both books.

I do not think a mention of the Worcester/Three Choirs Festival (p.491 and 284) can be interpreted as stressing the Midlands locale again. On p.491 Cynthia explains that she had to borrow money from Mr Preston to TRAVEL to the festival, away from Hollingford. The other reference is by way of a comparison.

In Knutsford Joseph Jackson (alias Mr Johnson p.253 and in Cranford chapter XIII etc) 'respectfully announces that he is now prepared with a large assortment of NEW GOODS in the various departments of his establishment, suitable for the present and approaching season and of which he solicits an inspection' (Ad. in Warrington Guardian, Jan. 7, 1865).

Mr Jackson's goods included TEA:

'Sound congou at 2/4	Excellent family	3/8
Useful " 2/8	Strong rich	4/0
Very good " 3/0	Very fine	4/4
Capital flavoured 3/4	Very superior	4/8

Those were the facts which turned into fiction - Lady Harriet was 'quite struck' with the Misses Browning's tea (p.177). Miss Phoebe explained, 'I told her we only gave 3s/4d a pound for it at Johnson's (sister says I ought to have told her the price of our company tea, which is 5s/- a pound, only that was not what we were drinking; for as ill luck would have it, we'd none of it in the house.'

In 'Cranford' it was Mr Johnson who was consulted by Miss Matty before she, too, sold congou tea.

Whether consciously or not, Mrs Gaskell drew the Cumnor family from the Egertons of Tatton; the parallels are numerous.

The Charity School, known locally as Lady Mary's School, was supported by the Egerton ladies over a period of nearly a hundred years. It taught the girls 'whatever would render them useful to society'.

In the gardens at Tatton there is still a cedar tree and hothouses with orchids though there is no Lord Cumnor to potter around the estate. I have not the slightest doubt that he was the double of Wilbraham Egerton (1781-1856). On several occasions he entered in his carefully kept accounts, 'Five shillings in half pence to the school children'; or 'Gave £1 to a poor man at Ashley who had lost his cow'. Compare this with Lord Cumnor (p.552), 'If ever a peer was an old woman Lord Cumnor was that peer; but he was a very good natured old woman, and rode about on his stout old cob with his pockets full of half pence for the children, and little packets of snuff for the old people'.

He served the county as M.P. between 1812 and 1832 - 'one of the respectable country gentlemen whose influence is so much more felt than seen' (Annual Register, Obituary 1856). His son, William, followed him into Parliament, becoming the first Lord Egerton in 1859. And Mrs Gaskell's version of their political career:-

'If Lord Hollingford had not been returned for the county on the Whig interest - as his father had been before him, until he succeeded to the title - it is quite probable Lord Cumnor would have considered the British constitution in danger.'

You will meet Wilbraham Egerton again when I introduce you to Captain Hill alias Captain Brown.

Of course, she made sure no one would see the connection for the Egertons were Tories, not Whigs!

I have my theories about the Hamleys, too, but will follow them another time. Mrs Gaskell's advice to a would-be novelist (G.L.420) was to 'imagine yourself a spectator and auditor of every scene and event; I'm sure she and I see 'Wives and Daughters' taking place in and around Knutsford.

* * * * *

ADDITIONS TO THE KNUTSFORD COLLECTION

by Mary Thwaite

CRANFORD by Mrs Gaskell. Illustrated by Joan Hassall
The Black Swan Press, Wantage, 1985, £7.95
(ISBN 0 905475 06 2)

This edition, the first in a new series of English classics, reproduces illustrations and some of the decorative designs from the wood-engravings made by the renowned artist, Joan Hassall, for an edition published in 1940 by Harrap. This was evidently planned and in hand before war-time shortages hampered good book production, for this earlier edition (long out of print, but now to be seen in the Gaskell collection at Manchester City Library) is altogether a production of high artistic excellence - paper, print, page and pictures designed into a pleasing harmony.



Miss Jenkyns reading *Rasselas*

Although this present volume cannot compete in the quality of book design, it is printed by Letterpress on good paper and bound in buckram. Although not all the Hassall wood-cuts are included it is most welcome as reviving interest in what was a rather different treatment, unsentimental, yet sympathetic in style, and in contrast to some of the earlier fussy and nostalgic delineations of the Cranford world.

This new edition is, on its own merits, most worthy to present this most famous work by Mrs Gaskell.

Black Swan Press have taken pains to reproduce from the original blocks. They are planning to publish 'Wives and Daughters' using the George du Maurier illustrations.

(Ed. Available from good bookshops or direct from The Black Swan Press, 28 Bosley's Orchard, Grove, Wantage, Oxon. It is the only hardback edition of Cranford in print)

The Great Writers: Their Lives, Works and Inspiration

Elizabeth Gaskell: CRANFORD

No. 24 of a fortnightly series published by Marshall Cavendish Partworks Ltd, 58 Old Compton Street, London W1V 5PA.

Also supplied a hardback copy of "Cranford" 1987. Price £3.95 (inc. postage)

This attractive production (A4 in size) forms pages 554-578 of a fortnightly series begun in 1986, the first twenty-six issues covering 19th century writers. The aim is obviously to interest the general reader, and number 24, devoted to Mrs Gaskell, offers a popular survey, with plentiful pictures, mostly in colour, of the writer's life, art and background. Within its limits it succeeds very well, notwithstanding a few minor mis-statements, and although "Cranford" is made the special feature, it is not allowed to dominate the whole. There are sections on the writer's work, life, and brief summaries of the major

works. "Sources of inspiration", the final part, is devoted almost entirely to "The Poor Man's Charter" and seems to give undue prominence to the history of Chartism, compared with space allowed to other subjects, for example details of the minor writings and short stories. These are only described as they appear in one collection, "Tales of Mystery and Horror", published by Gollancz in 1978, now out of print, a collection of seven items, not thirty as stated on page 569.

The publication is well designed and illustrations are a main feature, covering not only photographs, facsimiles, portraits etc, but supplementary Victorian paintings and illustrations reflecting background or similar episodes to those in the Gaskell novels. For example, Von Herkomer's "Hard Times" is used for the social novels, and contemporary fashion designs are reproduced for the caps and headgear so dear to the Cranford ladies.

No guidance is offered as to further reading, but the work is useful as an introduction which may allure readers not yet familiar with the Gaskell world.

The copy of "Cranford" supplied with the issue of No. 24 in the series is a hardback reprint of the 1911 edition published by Cassell, slightly magnified in size. It is not illustrated except for a frontispiece of a sketch from the Samuel Lawrence portrait.

* * * * *

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES SEMINAR

Saturday April 30th at the Birmingham and Midland Institute.

Alan Shelston, J G Sharps, Kenn Oultram and Joan Leach hope to attend this. Let me know if you would like to come. £3 fee

* * * * *

The Angela Thirkell Society at Birkenhead organised a most enjoyable coffee morning for guest societies which several of us attended. This was such a success that it may be repeated. Send SAE if you would like details.

* * * * *

THE GASKELL SERVANTS by Joan Leach

Roy Charnock, one of our book collector and dealer members, sent me the following excerpt from the Manchester Guardian dated 11th of October 1932:

"The Maid's Medicine"

Sir,

A rather curious incident illustrating the regard the Gaskells had for their servants to which Mr Allan Monkhouse refers in his "Book man's Notes" in your issue of October 7, came under my notice in, I think, 1883.

The daughters, Miss Gaskell and Miss Julia, who were living at 84 Plymouth Grove, had as medical attendant a physician whose abilities and fame were considerable. One morning one of the sisters called upon the chemist, a gentleman whose establishment was well known in Oxford Road, to ask him if he would recommend them to some other medical man. The chemist, who was in all things most discreet, did, however, venture to give some indication of surprise. He was told with some little display of feeling that Dr ----'s medicine had not been suiting her sister and the doctor, who had been asked to prescribe for one of the servants, had suggested that the abandoned physic would serve the needs of the maid. Of course, the idea of such a makeshift treatment of their servants was unthinkable.

I don't know whether the senior physician or the fortunate junior who succeeded him ever learned the true inwardness of the transaction; they have both joined the great majority. Yrs. &c

William Kirkby

Old Mill House, Darley Bridge, nr. Matlock. Oct 8

I was curious as to why this letter had appeared in the paper in 1932, so I checked the Manchester Guardian microfilm. On October 7th there was a review of 'The Letters of Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Eliot Norton',

edited by Jane Whitehill, which had just been published by O.U.P.

The reviewer noted the frequent appearance of Meta and Julia in the letters written by 'their admiring and devoted mother and there are many among us yet who will recall these gracious hostesses'. Elsewhere I saw a description of soirees held by Meta and Julia as a cross between the court of Louis XIV and Cranford!

In a letter from E.G. to Charles Eliot Norton she wrote, of one of the servants, 'I tell her I am writing to you, she bids (or asks me) to say she wished you would come back here again and adds, 'I liked him before he came into the house, I saw he was a good gentleman of the right sort as he stood on the steps'.

It must have been this quote, in the review, which called forth the memory of the Guardian's correspondent.

Another excerpt concerned Silverdale, where E.G. described the guide 'sitting sternly on his white horse the better to be seen when daylight ebbs', and she related how she had 'contrived to dine fifteen people, as hungry as hunters, on shrimps bread and butter'. Perhaps some of you will be able to sample Morecambe Bay shrimps later this year.

* * * * *

Professor Marroni reports that two recent translations into Italian have been published of books by Mrs. Gaskell, formerly not available. These are:

Elizabeth Gaskell, La Vita di Charlotte Bronte, tradotta da Simone Buffa di Castelferro. Milano. La Tartaruga Edizione. 1987. pp. 531

Elizabeth Gaskell, Storie di donne, di bimbe e di streghe, racconti tradotti da Marisa Sestito. (Lois the witch, The Old Nurse's story, The Poor Clare, The Well of Pen-Morfa, "Susan Dixon" (Half a lifetime ago). Firenze. Giunti, 1988. (Collana "Astrea" series)

* * * * *

SILVERDALE

by Elsie Davis

I had an opportunity to visit Silverdale (North Lancashire) a few weeks ago. My daughter lives and works in the area and knows the district well enough to escort me to the village where the Gaskell family first stayed for six weeks in 1850 and fell in love with the place.

Elizabeth Gaskell described it to a friend in these words: 'Silverdale is hardly to be called the seaside as it is a little dale running down to Morecambe Bay, with gray limestone rocks on all sides, which in the sun or moonlight glisten like silver. And we are keeping holiday in the most unusual farmhouse lodgings so that the children learn country interests and ways of living'.

This was written from Lindeth Farm ... but on future holidays they stayed at Lindeth Lodge, which they spoke of as the Wolf House because a wolf figures in the heraldic device over the door; and then at Lindeth Tower, a stone-built folly erected by a retired Preston banker in 1842. This building was four storeys high with a single room on each landing. Elizabeth used the room on the top floor for her writing where, according to farm workers, she was seen at work in the early morning as they were on their way to the fields. 'One is never disappointed in coming back to Silverdale', she wrote, 'the secret is the expanse of view'.

(She stayed here with her daughters during the Summer months to escape from the polluted atmosphere of industrial Manchester where they lived, to enjoy the pure sea and country air of Silverdale, and the Lakeland breezes from the North)

'It is certain that many of her books were conceived, and some may possibly have been written, in Lindeth Tower. It is of interest to note that the title of one of her books, Cranford, which is based on the town of Knutsford in Cheshire, happens to have been the

early name of Carnforth, a mere four miles away from Silverdale. Silverdale itself is Abermouth in her novel "Ruth".

Lindeth Tower is still standing and so is Lindeth Lodge that the Gaskells always spoke of as Wolf House; this is now the Wolf House Gallery of Arts and Crafts and retains its wolf crest.

Mrs Gaskell's own name is perpetuated locally in the name of the Village Hall, The Gaskell Memorial Hall, opened in 1931. There is a large portrait of her on the wall just inside the doorway.

* * * * *

JOHN SEELY HART

by Christine Lingard

The Gaskell collection in the Manchester Central Library has acquired a valuable item once the property of Mrs Gaskell - a copy of John Seely Hart's Essay on the life and writings of Edmund Spenser with a special exposition of the Faery Queen, New York, 1847. It is inscribed:-

To the author of "Mary Barton" as a testimony of respect for her genius and for her admirable sentiments expressed in her work.

John S Hart, Philadelphia, Oct. 10, 1849

John Seely Hart (1810-1877) was at that time Principal of Philadelphia High School and the author of a number of books on English grammar and the Sunday School movement. He was also the editor of the journal Sartain's Union Magazine which in July 1849 carried an article entitled 'The last generation in England' by the author of Mary Barton communicated for Sartain's Magazine by Mary Howitt. Much of the material in this essay was reworked and polished to become Our Society at Cranford (Household Words, December 1851). The text of this essay was reproduced as an appendix to the Oxford University Press edition of Cranford (1972) edited by Elizabeth Porges Watson.

How Hart's book came into Mrs Gaskell's possession is recorded in her letter of April 28th 1850 (Chapple and Pollard ed no. 71). The book remained in the household until the sale of 84 Plymouth Grove in 1913. Manchester acquired it from a bookseller in Northern Ireland. It is a rare item in its own right despite the Gaskell connection. There is no copy in the British Library.

Elizabeth Gaskell's letter to John Seely Hart:-

April 28th 1850

Dear Sir,

It is only an hour since I received your 'Essay on the Fairy Queen' &c; but I will not lose any more time before thanking you for the pleasure which I promise myself in reading your book, and still more for the kind feeling towards me, which induced you to send it. I received a note from you, containing an expression of this feeling which gratified me exceedingly, although I am ashamed to think how long a time has elapsed without my answering it. But, owing to some mischance, the book, (the Essay,) was not to be found. Mrs Howitt had sent it to my publishers, who had mislaid it, and forgotten the very fact of its receipt. I have written often to try if I, at this distance, could find out where it was in London; and I did not like writing to you before I could acknowledge it's safe arrival. Will you forgive me?

The pamphlets you name are not to be heard of anywhere, but the fact of your sending them remains the same, and it gives me great pleasure to think of it. The writing of 'Mary Barton' was a great pleasure to me; and I became so deeply, sometimes painfully, interested in it, that I don't think I cared at the time of it's publication what reception it met with. I was sure a great deal of it was truth, and I knew that I had realized all my people to myself so vividly that parting with them was like parting with friends. But the reception it met with was a great surprise to me.

I neither expected the friends nor the enemies which it has made me. But the latter I am thankful to say are disappearing while the former are (some of them) friends for life. A good deal of it's success I believe was owing to the time of it's publication, - the great revolutions in Europe had directed people's attention to the social evils, and the strange contrasts which exist in old nations. However, I must not intrude upon your time, which sounds to be most valuable, and to be devoted to the highest purposes. I have not told you though how I have liked to receive an expression of approval from an American.

Yours very truly

E. C. GASKELL

* * * * *

Highwayman Higgins was none other than Mr Robinson Higgins of Mrs Gaskell's 'The Squire's Story' - 'quite the gentleman, said the Landlord of The George Inn.'

In Knutsford, where he arrived in 1757 and was married to a respectable local lady at the Parish Church, he was accepted in the best society; at the Assemblies, the card parties and the hunting field but his nefarious career ended on the gallows at Carmarthen in 1767. I hope to tell his story in a book on 'Townfolk', later this year, meanwhile you can buy this charming Staffordshire fairings-type figure for £56, each hand painted.



WHAT THE HOWITTS DID

by Joan Leach

Reading a book about Australian history (Isn't everyone in this bicentennial year?) I was surprised to learn that the Howitt family had played a part.

William and Mary Howitt, you will remember, encouraged Elizabeth Gaskell by printing her first published story 'Libby Marsh's Three Eras', in their Journal. For this she used the pen-name, 'Cotton Mather Mills' - Cotton Mather was a New England divine and scholar and will be the subject of a later article.

Although Elizabeth's success as a writer soon eclipsed theirs, the Howitts long regarded her as their protégée.

At the age of 60, William and two sons, Alfred (22) and Charlton (15) joined the Australian gold rush, hoping, if not to make his fortune, at least to ensure a comfortable old age. Needless to say he returned two years later with no gold, but not disappointed with the experience which provided him with material for several books:

'A Boy's Adventures in the Wilds of Australia', 'The Squatters' Home' (three volumes), 'Land, Labour and Gold or Two Years in Victoria' (two volumes), and 'The History of Discovery in Australia, Tasmania and New Zealand'.

This type of writing was typical of the steady output from his and Mary's pen; between them they produced over two hundred books! The most successful were, perhaps, 'The Rural Life of England' and 'The Seasons'. Both the Howitts worked hard but were never wealthy; Howitts Journal, launched with idealistic hopes of providing good reading for the masses, had to be abandoned after three volumes, leaving them disappointed and in debt. Elizabeth had contributed an essay on 'Clopton House' for the first volume of 'Visits to Remarkable Places'; there were two other volumes; these and 'Homes and Haunts of British Poets' were successful and have been used as reference books ever since.

The Australian adventure was not forgotten for Alfred

stayed on, becoming famous a few years later when he led the expedition to discover the fate of Burke and Wills, lost while attempting the first South to North coast crossing. Alfred found one survivor to tell the tale. He received a hero's welcome when he brought the bodies back for public burial.

The Howitts shared many of their literary and artistic friends with Elizabeth Gaskell; one was Mrs Frederika Bremer, a Swedish novelist whose books were translated by Mary Howitt. However, her friendship was a doubtful asset. Elizabeth described her (G.L.105) as a 'quaint, droll little lady of 60 ... she had annoyed Mrs Davenport and Mrs Stanley by her habit of - how shall I express it? - spitting right and left at the Exhibition and not entirely sparing private home'.

* * * * *

If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs Joan Leach, Far Yew Tree House, Over Tabley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA16 0HN (Tel: 0565 4668)

We are grateful to The Black Swan Press, Wantage, Oxon, for permission to reproduce the picture on our cover - Joan Hassall's wood-cut which appeared in 'Cranford'