

# The Gaskell Society



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

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NEWSLETTER  
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## GASKELL 20 QUESTIONS QUIZ

1. What was the address of Elizabeth Stevenson's London birthplace?
2. **In which month and year did she die?**
3. What was the second name of ECG's daughter, Julia?
4. **Who was the music teacher to the Gaskell family at Plymouth Grove?**
5. Name 4 other names which appear with ECG in the window of Poets' Corner.
6. **What was the cause of death of ECG's son, William?**
7. Which of ECG's novels finish with these words – "That woman!" ?
8. **In "North & South", where is Captain Lennox's regiment stationed?**
9. What was the name of Aunt Lumb's daughter?
10. **Which continental city is featured in "Dark Night's Work" ?**
11. Which publication was Mr Davis reading in "The Squire's Story" ?
12. **Which word did ECG use to describe the drains at Plymouth Grove?**
13. By what name did William Gaskell call his wife?
14. **Where was ECG when she wished she had a book to write instead of just a letter?**
15. What did Lizzie Leigh want her baby to be called?
16. **Which ECG novel has a link with Winchester?**
17. Name 3 doctors who appear in ECG's fiction.
18. **Which surname does ECG use in both "Wives and Daughters" and "The Half Brothers" ?**
19. Which short story by ECG begins with this line – "Mr & Mrs Openshaw came from Manchester to settle in London."
20. **Which ECG biographer has recently become the President of The Alliance of Literary Societies?**

Janet Kennerley prepared this quiz for our New Year lunch held at The Cottons Hotel near Knutsford on 12 January 2011. Members who were unable to join us on that occasion may like to pit their wits against this quiz now. No prizes. Answers will appear in the Spring Newsletter 2012.

"The centenary of Mrs Gaskell falls on this 29th of this month, and should not be passed unnoted. "Cranford" and in lesser degree "Mary Barton" still have their admiring readers, though the author is far less powerfully imaginative than her friend Charlotte Brontë, and even in quiet realism is never rated with the incomparable Miss Austen. But she did produce one piece of work that grips the reader with a sense of unmistakable and, in passages, tragic reality, - her biography of Charlotte Brontë. If ever living word fell from writer's pen, such may be found in that remarkable life of a remarkable woman". Found in The Dial - Chicago - Sept 16th, 1910 - page 172.

## Editor's Letter

Helen Smith

Welcome to this, our 52nd Newsletter and a very warm welcome to our new Chairman, Ann O'Brien and to our new Secretary, Pam Griffiths, who were elected at the AGM in April.

The Winchester Conference brought together almost 90 members from home and overseas to share in our love of Mrs. Gaskell and to explore the surrounding countryside. (We now also understand Mrs. Gaskell's desire to live in rural Hampshire!) Janet Cunliffe-Jones has written an excellent summary of the conference so that the many members who could not join us can see what they have missed.

We have decided to instigate a Joan Leach Memorial Lecture to be presented annually at the autumn meeting in Knutsford. The inaugural lecture will be given by Professor James Drife on 24 September 2011.

To all who have contributed to this Newsletter, I offer my grateful thanks. Very special thanks to Neil Morrison, the Scottish artist now living in Manosque, Provence, for creating the new young Mrs. Gaskell for our front cover. Many thanks are also due to my brother, David Robinson who lives in Alberta, Canada for his drawing of Winchester Cathedral on the conference brochure.

And for the finished product, we thank Rebecca Stuart at Lithotech Print.

## Thoughts of Chairman Ann

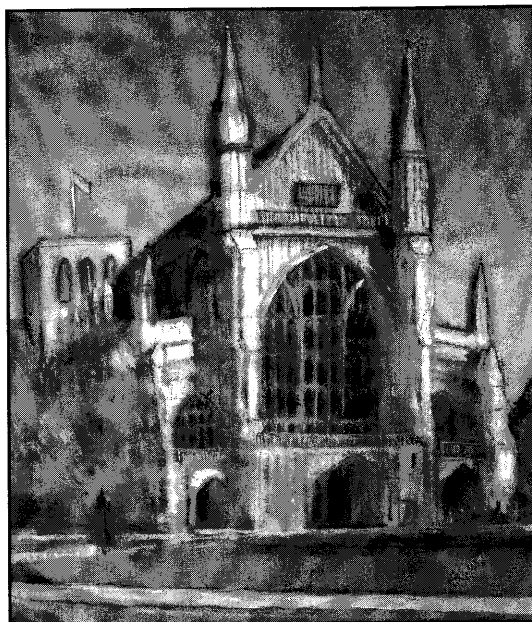
Ann O'Brien

It was lovely to meet so many of you at the recent conference - and what a successful conference it was - one of the best ever, as a conference veteran told me. Certainly the quality of the speakers and the unaccustomed luxury of the accommodation were highlights of the week-end and the visits added to our enjoyment. It was a fitting tribute to all who worked so hard over the last two years.

I don't know if this last figure surprises you - it really does take that long to organise such an event, and so, very soon we shall have to start planning the next conference! We would therefore like to ask for your help: if you have any suggestions for the venue, topics or speakers, we would like to hear them. Indeed any ideas are always welcome, not only for conferences but also for meetings.

As you will no doubt have realised, if this conference took two years to organise, Joan Leach must have played a major role in the early stages. During my opening remarks at the conference, I mentioned that although, sadly, this was the first conference without Joan, I was sure she was with us in spirit. Well, I like to think this was proved to be the case. Let me tell you why: while visiting Winchester Cathedral, our new secretary, Pam (Griffiths), a close friend of Joan's, found herself in the second-hand bookshop there. Browsing among the books on the shelf, she espied a book called "The Great Book Raid" .... By a certain Christopher Leach, the book dedicated to his wife, Joan and their two sons. (With apologies to Elizabeth Gaskell) Curious but true!!





## Gaskell Society Conference 2011

Janet Cunliffe-Jones

The first thing to say is how very enjoyable the Conference was, with excellent talks, a pleasant venue, well-organised outings, and interesting and friendly people to meet.

An introduction to Winchester, and its literary associations was given by **Elizabeth Proudman**, Winchester blue badge guide and vice-chair of the Jane Austen society.

Winchester, a Roman town, is set on the Itchen, a clear chalk stream. It was once the capital of England, under King Alfred - who had parts of the Bible translated into Anglo-Saxon. Much later, Isaac Walton fished in the Itchen, and Elizabeth Montague, the "Queen of the Blue-stockings" lived in the town - but the two most famous literary events came in the early 19th Century. Jane Austen came to Winchester when her illness became severe, and died there in 1817. Two years later, John Keats spent some autumn weeks in the town, enjoying a brief respite of beautiful autumn weather, and wrote there his ode To Autumn. Later visitors or residents included Charlotte Yonge and Trollope, who based *The Warden* on the hospital of St Cross.

**Alan Shelston**, President of the Society, spoke after supper the first night, on *The Letters of Jane Austen* and Elizabeth Gaskell.

Gaskell, a Victorian novelist, grew up under the Regency, and George IV. Austen's

novels were published during the first decade of Gaskell's life, but though she read them later, there is no evidence that she did so in her youth.

Shelston referred mainly to the letters Gaskell wrote as a young, unmarried woman - often to her friend, Harriet Carr. The tone is gossipy, and often flirtatious. Both her letters and Austen's show how little such young women had to do, often opening with an elaborate way of saying - "I'm writing because I've nothing else to do." In *Emma* the heroine's troubles stem largely from her not having enough to occupy her bright and eager mind. Writing these letters, however, gave Austen and Gaskell practice in narrative technique, and character description.

Saturday, July 23rd

**Dr. Bill Hutchings**, spoke about Eighteenth Century Fiction by Women Writers.

Early novelists were creating a new form, which expresses what it is to be an individual. They explored the relation between the world of outer reality, and other people, and the interior world of thought and feeling. Women writers were central to this development, where realistic fiction intersects with readers' own experience.

A useful hand-out gave well-selected quotations to illustrate Dr Hutchings' argument.

"[The novel] is, or ought to be, a picture of supposed but natural and probable human existence," and again, "the hero and heroine are neither plunged in the depths of misery nor exalted to *UNhuman* happiness," wrote Fanny Burney, who blended good and bad in her characters.

These writers reflected the concern of eighteenth century philosophy with the relation of body and mind, and led on to the modern - and even modernist - novel.

*The Female Quixote* (1752) by Charlotte Lennox provides often hilarious examples of characters who cannot connect their self-image with the real world.

In *Evelina* (1778), *A Young Lady's Entrance into the World*, Burney opposes country and city, innocence and experience. She illustrates different social levels in London with subtle differences of dialogue.

The novel developed the device of soliloquy. Burney merged soliloquies with the voice of the narrator, a technique known as "free indirect style".

"Left now to herself, sensations unfelt before filled the heart of Cecilia. All that had passed for a while appeared a dream; her faculties all seemed out of order . . . But when at length her recollection more clearly returned, and her situation appeared to her such as it really was, divested alike of false terrors or delusive expectations, she found herself still further removed from tranquillity."

Burney, said Hutchings, was central to the map of the development of the novel.

Of all the excellent talks in the conference, this one by Dr Hutchings was, for me, the very best - showing how writers, mainly women, developed the novel in the eighteenth century to be the dominant literary form it became in the nineteenth.

The next talk, on Domestic Comedy in Austen and Gaskell was by **Emma Karin Brandin**, and delivered in impeccable English by this Swedish lecturer.

Domestic comedy has been seen as gentler and more subtle than that of male writers such as Dickens, and therefore sometimes dismissed as inferior - or at least weaker. But women lived in a world of limitations, and comedy was a vehicle for their "thinly disguised rage" (Regina Barreca Untamed and Unabashed). Comedy was a means of exploring the complex stories of women. Women writers were sensitive to subtleties of speech. Brandin gave examples of Austen's use of dialogue, from the notorious pun of Mary Crawford (a character drawn, perhaps, from the earlier tradition of restoration comedy) about "rears and vices" to Mr Elton's gushing admiration of Emma's portrait of Harriet, in a scene in which every person's speech reflects their character and preoccupations.

In *Cranford*, the apparently naïve narrator, Mary Smith, tells us her father says Miss Matty's ways in her shop "would not do" in the world, and adds, "I fancy the world must be very bad, for . . . in spite of [my father's] many precautions, he lost upwards of a thousand pound by roguery only last year."

Molly Gibson develops irony as a defence against her stepmother, Mrs Gibson: "I was always of such an affectionate, sensitive nature. I remember a little poem of Mr. Kirkpatrick's in which he compared my heart to a harp-string, vibrating to the slightest breeze."

"I thought harp-strings required a pretty strong finger to make them sound," said Molly."

#### **Professor Avril Horner: Women writers and the Gothic tradition.**

Professor Horner made it entertainingly clear that the Gothic is NOT realistic fiction.

In 1764 of *The Castle of Otranto* by Horace Walpole, with its wildly unrealistic plot, won instant fame. A cartoon showed a group of women open-mouthed at a late night reading - but library records show that men read gothic too - as Henry Tilney has done in *Northanger Abbey*.

Characteristics of the genre include: a young and vulnerable heroine; pursuit by an older man; issues of property and inheritance; an exotic setting - usually in Southern Europe; a building, usually old; pictures; extremes of feeling. Anti-Catholic prejudice is shown in the settings in southern, Catholic countries.

Supernatural events occur or are suggested. Some writers, "Monk" Lewis, or Harrison Ainsworth, appear to believe in such events; others, such as Ann Radcliffe,

offer realistic explanations. Radcliffe also ensures that virtue is preserved.

The genre is extremely open to parody - *Nightmare Abbey*, *Castle Rackrent*, and, above all, *Northanger Abbey*.

Does Austen's famous defence of the novel here include the Gothic? It does not appear the Isabella Thorpe's reading has improved her mind or moral judgement.

*Northanger Abbey* shows darker elements in 'real life' - General Tilney is not a villain, but his behaviour is really unpleasant. Some gothic characteristics, we see, can and do appear in realistic novels, up to the present.

#### **Sunday July 24th**

##### **Dr Catherine Spooner: The Northern Gothic**

Early gothic writers set their novels in southern Europe (Catherine Morland reflects that events she has read of would not happen in England), but Henry James noted that Victorian writers brought gothic elements closer to home.

Dr Spooner talked of a specifically Northern - or even Lancashire - Gothic, and argued that Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë represents Haworth as a gothic location. The Brontë's servant, Tabby, was a source of folk tales. The term 'folklore' had been coined in 1846 and interest in local legends linked to interest in the supernatural. Rural areas were seen to be backward, and were sometimes presented by a more sophisticated narrator, such as Lockwood.

Gaskell's *The Poor Clare* (1856) is complementary to the Biography. It is set in the Trough of Bowland, and the action takes place in 1718, when witchcraft was still officially believed. Yet Gaskell's treatment is nuanced. The Catholic priest is shown as kinder than the Protestant - and the Poor Clares in Antwerp are seen sympathetically. Gaskell always shows realism in presentation of place.

##### **Dr Shirley Foster:**

The family was idealised in Victorian England - with Victoria and Albert and their many children as a central image. The English liked to believe their country was especially distinguished for its family life, the home a haven from the world of business. Some contemporaries, however, were aware that the image was flawed - that the home could be a place of confinement and oppression.

Novels both reinforce and question the image.

##### **Barbara Dennis:**

Charlotte Yonge (1823 - 1901) has been credited with creating this idealised image; she had only one brother, and never married, but saw family life with uncles and aunts, and many cousins. She came early under the influence of Keble, of the Oxford Movement, and religion was central to her views.

She is more traditional in her many articles, preaching duty, obedience to lawful authority, and self-sacrifice, than in her novels which often show families without parents; sibling relationships become the most important; the sanctity of the family must be preserved, dissidents expelled.

Gaskell is one of the few novelists who was also a wife and mother, but her own upbringing was not orthodox and her novels show few orthodox families. She portrays dysfunctional families, questions the importance of lineage, and criticises paternal authority, yet she also shows alternatives, and that nurturing love does not come only from blood parents. In *Ruth*, and many short stories, she portrays different groupings. This openness may have come in part from her Unitarian background.

#### **Margaret Lesser: Gaskell and the translators.**

This was a specialised subject - but the talk was given with much wit and verve. Elizabeth Gaskell knew French well, and dealt directly with the French publisher Hachette; English writing was popular in 19th century France.

It was interesting to know that while George Eliot wrote, of translation, that it was "treason to literature to encourage incompetence", Gaskell recommended people - women - who she thought needed work.

Because of pressure of time, the Conference Review Panel was called off, and the Conference ended in style on Sunday night with a brilliant dramatic - and Gothic - reading of *The Grey Woman*, devised by Robin Allan and performed by Delia Corrie.

Each afternoon there was a choice of outings:

On Saturday we went to Jane Austen's home at Chawton, and on to Holybourne, where we were able to peer at The Lawn, the house Elizabeth Gaskell bought at the end of her life, the scene of her sudden death, and to visit the parish church.

On Sunday we visited Winchester, and the beautiful hospital of St Cross - a probable model for St Sepulchre's in *Sylvia's Lovers*. On a lovely summer afternoon, the Abbot's Garden was very beautiful indeed, and the walk back into Winchester along the Itchen was that which Keats often took when staying in the town in 1819.

"There are the most beautiful streams about I ever saw", he wrote, " - full of trout."

The Conference venue, a large hotel outside Winchester, was very comfortable, though long walks between rooms were a problem for a few. The only other problem was that there seemed to be too few staff to serve meals and coffee quickly to a large number. This was the main reason why we tended to run late on the programme. However, the small swimming pool was a delight - some conference members enjoyed it several times over the weekend.

As I belong to the South-West Group, centred in Bath, I welcomed the chance to meet members from the main society in and around Manchester, and put more faces to names! I very much enjoyed hearing northern voices - having lived for many years in the north of England myself!

## Beau Geste

PS Margaret Lesser left us with a riddle which would have been solved had the final review panel not been cancelled. Margaret now reveals 'le mot juste':

The riddle in English, you'll remember, was:

'What would Majesty be without its externals?'

Answer: 'Nothing but a jest.'

Louise Swanton Belloc's lateral-thinking solution was:  
'Que serait UN ROI sans son extérieur?'

Answer: 'Rien qu'un 0 (= zéro).'

(Ed.:Merci beaucoup, Margaret.)

## With Gaskell in Naples

Alan Shelston

Readers of our journal will be familiar with accounts of Gaskell studies in Italy. These are very much attributable to the work done by academics and students under our vice-president Professor Francesco Marroni at the Centro Universitario di Studi Vittoriani e Edouardiani at the University of Chieti-Pescara. I have attended a number of conferences there, and have sometimes arranged for its members to visit Manchester, and I have always been impressed by their work.

A number of scholars from the research centre have been appointed to academic posts in Italy, and early this summer I was invited by my good friend and colleague there, Dottoressa Raffaella Antinnuci, to contribute to a conference at the Parthenope University of Naples. The theme of the conference was the perception of Naples in the eyes of writers and travellers from abroad: there were papers on the responses of authors past and present - Dickens and D.H. Lawrence for example - on graphic artists, and on the musical traditions of Naples: speakers spoke in Italian or in English as they wished.

I had agreed to speak on Gaskell (in English). As far as we know, Gaskell, unlike Dickens, never visited Naples. J.G. Sharps suggested that she might have found

time to do so in her Italian visit of 1857. I would never carelessly contradict such an authority, but in fact the 1857 visit is very well documented. Gaskell would seem to have spent most of her time in Rome, later writing that "It was in those charming Roman days that my life, at any rate, culminated". She travelled homeward via the northern cities of Perugia, Florence and Venice. 1820 it took Keats a week to make the journey by carriage from Naples to Rome. Keats was then a dying man, and things would perhaps have improved by the time of Gaskell's Italian ventures, but there was still no railway between Rome and Naples when she was there. It seems very unlikely that she would have ventured south. Her passport - still available - shows no sign of a visit to the kingdom of the two Sicilies, of which Naples formed a significant part. However, books about Italy - a good number of them in Manchester's Portico Library - were many at the time of the Risorgimento. Gaskell's knowledge of the city would almost certainly have come from her reading.

In 1863 Gaskell published an essay with the title of 'An Italian Institution' for Dickens's journal *All the Year Round*. The 'institution' referred to was the Camorra, and the Camorra were famous, then as now, as a Neapolitan version of the mafia. If this was a surprising topic for the author of *Cranford*, that in itself was a starting point for me.

The conference was held in the Villa Doria d'Angri, an elegant nineteenth century villa at Posillipo, high up and overlooking the Bay of Naples. In the entrance hall a plaque told us that Wagner had written *Parsifal* while staying there. It is now a conference and meeting centre for the university. Across the water, Vesuvius loomed up through the sunny mist. We were told several times that the longer the interval between eruptions the more severe the eruption when it came: the last one had been in 1944, so the Neapolitans were constantly expecting a spectacular event. Nevertheless the slopes were covered with small houses, built there illicitly since building on Vesuvius is officially banned. I had recently been reading Gillian Darley's new book, *Vesuvius*, with its accounts of the intrepid ascents made by Dickens and other nineteenth century travellers. We were able to see the ruined city of Herculaneum during our stay.

The conference opened with a splendid sequence of slides of early paintings and drawings of Naples shown by an ex-BBC correspondent, Charles Lister. My own paper was scheduled for the same morning. It focused on Gaskell's authorship of 'An Italian Institution' in the context of the unification of Italy in 1861 (Gaskell's essay appeared in 1863). In my paper I followed a lead in J.G. Sharps's *Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention*. Sharps points out that amongst the books recorded as having been at Plymouth Grove during this period was a work entitled *La Camorra; Notizie Storiche* written in Italian but by a Swiss author, Marco Monnier. When I compared this book with Gaskell's essay it became clear that she had read this work. I was asked about Gaskell's competence in Italian: she was probably taught the language at the Miss Byerleys' school. More than that though, in Cousin Phillis she shows her heroine struggling with Dante - something

which I suspect may reflect personal experience: she herself read Dante and eventually came to quote Dante from the original with confidence. *All the Year Round* shows how strong interest was in the Italian political situation at the time, and this was an interest that Gaskell clearly shared.

As I have said, there was a range of interesting papers at the conference, and there was also some good discussion. Poor Dickens got into trouble for his very forthright account of Naples in his *Pictures of Italy*, English commentators on the region at this time often emphasized the beauty of the bay and the magnificence of the volcano, contrasting them with the city's squalor. Dickens spent the best part of a year in 1844-45 in Italy and he had some scathing things to say about Neapolitan poverty, which he attributed to the power of the priesthood who, he wrote, taught the poor nothing but how to beg. Naples is a densely populated city and its urban sprawl, then as now, made it one of the largest in Europe: if it is a very vibrant city its social problems, again then as now, were inevitably extensive.

The conference over we were free to explore the city. It is, of course, notorious for its danger and its dirt, but these seemed less in evidence. As we left, brand new rubbish wagons were clearing the streets. Rubbish is the source of much of the modern Camorra's wealth so it is not clear who was controlling the operation but the white wagons had a certain symbolic appropriateness. A recent BBC programme suggested that you cannot spend a month in Naples without having come into contact with the Camorra. That is probably so, but you are unlikely to be aware of it. Anyway it seemed to me safe to give a paper on the Camorra in its home city, and no-one so far has come knocking at the door.

The Camorra has been in existence for some hundreds of years although its origins lie obscurely in the past. Bourbon rule in the 1840s and 50s turned it into a revolutionary organisation, although 'organisation' is perhaps not the right word. One of its features, sustained until now as Roberto Saviano's book and subsequent film, *Gomorra* makes clear, is that there is no apparent organisation as such; rather are there anonymous groups, each with its own capo who infiltrate every activity in the city. In her account of its activities Gaskell wrote: "It is a system of black-mail, so extended and organized as to apply to every walk in life, and every condition of human industry" and by Saviano's account this description still stands. As Saviano has shown, the concentration on the workplaces of the poor are what supports its authority to-day, but the revolutionary impetus of the 1850s having been superseded by the unification of Italy, the activities of the Camorra would seem now to have become exclusively criminal.

In my paper I referred to other writings about the Italian situation in 1862, and their implications for Gaskell's article. The 1850s and 60s were a crucial decade for Italy's emergence to nationhood and there are a number of indications of her interest in Italy at this time. She wrote a short introduction to a work by Colonel Vecchi, secretary to Garibaldi, *Garibaldi in Caprera*, a copy of which, with a letter

by its author, rests in the Gaskell collection in Knutsford public library. In *Cousin Phillis* Edward Holdsworth has been an engineer on Italy's new railway system: this is accurate both chronologically and geographically, and there are a number of other Italian references in the story. A *Dark Night's Work* has its heroine make a journey by sea from Italy which replicates aspects of Gaskell's own voyage out. Elizabeth Gaskell was a traveller in Italy, but one very much on the northern side of that north/south divide which is still sustained in Italy to-day. When, as she wrote to Charles Eliot Norton, she looked back to "those wonderful Italian days" we have to admit that it is unlikely that she would have been thinking of Naples and its politics as she called Italy to mind.

## Cranford in Crewe

Helen Smith

How delightful to have a refreshingly straightforward stage version of *Cranford* (adapted by Martyn Coleman and first produced in 1951), presented in Crewe by Ian Dickens Productions International Ltd., at the start of their national tour (spring 2011).

The action takes place entirely in Miss Matty's parlour in 1830 and 1831. All actors appear to enjoy their roles. Miss Matilda Jenkyns gains considerably in stature as her tribulations mount in the course of the action. The gentle retiring younger daughter of the late Rector and meek sister of the indomitable though now deceased Deborah develops into a strong-minded independent woman capable, as a share-holder, of defending the bank (The Town and County Bank) and herself able to cope with bankruptcy. Martha (Alicia Grace Turrell), the gauche maidservant, becomes a young lady of integrity and an excellent wife, mother and landlady. Miss Pole (Karen Ford), Miss Barker (Paula Stockbridge) and Mrs. Forrester (Susan Skipper) make their entrances and their exits. Mary Smith (Isla Carter) gently and unobtrusively manipulates and co-ordinates the activities of Cranford.

The Hon. Mrs. Jamieson (Hildegard Neil) gets her come-uppance with gout. As expected in the town of Amazons, the two male characters make but rare appearances. Even they come up trumps in the end. Finally snobbery is stifled; the goodness of human nature and justice prevail. Everyone appears to live happily ever after in this fairytale world of Cranford. A few characters of the original book are missing: "poor Peter", the Misses Jenkyns' missing brother; Signor Brunoni, Captain Brown and daughters. Rather surprisingly, these persons are remarkably inconspicuous in their absence.

Recorded Schubert (Unfinished Symphony, Arpeggione Sonata and other chamber works) provides a useful prelude and incidental music of the authentic period which fades out as the action gets underway.

The gentle irony and humour with the genuinely funny ways of "elegant economy" in Cranford come over so well in this stage performance. On the evening we attended (14 April) it was most unfortunate that the audience at the Lyceum in Crewe was rather thin and took a little time to tune in to the slightly whimsical atmosphere of Cranford.

## Elizabeth Rosemary Trevor Dabbs

8 July 1922 – 28th September 2010

Sarah Prince

It is now one year since I, accompanied by my mother Rosemary, opened the exhibition 'Elizabeth Gaskell - A Connected Life', at the John Rylands Library in Manchester to celebrate Elizabeth Gaskell's bicentenary; and what a year it has been. This exhibition drew on the connections of Elizabeth Gaskell through her writings and prolific correspondence with family and friends, with examples of those connections exhibited, both past and present, demonstrating her influence in her lifetime and how those alive are inspired by her life and work.

Now I have been asked to write something about our ancestral connection and specifically about my mother, Elizabeth 'Rosemary' Trevor Dabbs, née Jones, and Elizabeth Gaskell's great great granddaughter, who died on 28th September 2011, the day before Elizabeth Gaskell's 200th birthday.

Rosemary was born in Radyr, just outside Cardiff, on 8th July 1922, the only daughter of Clifford Trevor Jones and Daysie Jones (née Holland), Elizabeth Gaskell's great granddaughter. The simplest family tree runs like this: 201 years ago on the 29th September 1810 'Elly' (as William called her) was born in London. Most of the rest of her story is well documented, but her eldest child Marianne married Edward Thurstan Holland and gave birth to William; William married Evelyn Isdell and they had an only child Margaret Evelyn Averia (known as Daysie), my grandmother, who too had an only child: Rosemary. William was the only one of Marianne's children to marry, and since then there has been only one child born in each generation until 1958 when I was born to join my brother.

What comes to my mind when thinking this through is how tantalisingly close my mother was to having known someone who knew Mrs Gaskell. Her mother (Daysie), who died in 1990, stayed with Meta and Julia at 84 Plymouth Grove. She went up with her 'Nanny' and stayed for several days in around 1900. She didn't remember very much about it except that they were 'very frightening'; but how lucky we are to have photographs of the drawing room of Plymouth Grove and to be able to identify pieces of furniture in that room that we have lived with all our lives. She also stayed with Marianne in Bromsgrove and remembers the artist ... who painted the picture of Marianne in old age.

Rosemary stayed in Malvern as a child with Marianne's children, Uncle Brian and Aunt Enie, and remembers morning prayers in the dining room, where the staff filed in and sat on one side of the room whilst the Holland siblings and my mother sat on the other for the proceedings.

My mother grew up in Radyr in a house fascinatingly full of wonderful items of furniture, beautifully and lovingly polished, which included a rather large and overpowering credenza in the sitting room. Stored within this rather grand piece of furniture was the most fascinating collection of Gaskell artefacts that were treasured, but at the same time almost taken for granted in their existence. Any curator will be horrified to know that her letters that were kept in the credenza (these are now on permanent loan to the Brotherton Collection at the University of Leeds) were casually stored in a brown envelope and there was no restraint on getting them out and having a good browse!

She attended school in Devon (Poltimore College) which recently featured in the BBC Restoration programme and was 'finished' in Switzerland. On returning from there, the Second World War broke out and she joined the ATS driving an Austin K2 ambulance initially in the UK and then after D-Day in France, Belgium and Germany. She returned to England to work in a bank and then with MI5. She met Jack through a mutual friend when they both got involved as Wardrobe Mistress and Stage Manager for the Baltic Amateur Dramatic Society.

When Rosemary married Jack Dabbs, in 1952, she wore Elizabeth Gaskell's wedding veil, a tradition which has been carried on by a least four generations of Gaskell female descendants. This requires the planning of the whole ensemble to show off the veil to its greatest advantage. She also enjoyed the spectacle of us using Elizabeth's teapot at my daughter Eleanor's 21<sup>st</sup> birthday tea in 2009.

Following marriage and the birth of two children, Tim in 1954 and Sarah in 1958, she settled down to life in Wimbledon, as a full-time mother, wife and supporter of Jack who was a shipbroker in the City. As this stage in her life, my grandmother Daysie was still very much in charge of all things Gaskell and whilst my mother had an interest she was not active in events. In 1960, Daysie helped to celebrate Gaskell's 150<sup>th</sup> celebrations with events in Knutsford, and a detailed scrapbook of those events remains as a record.

I think Rosemary inherited many qualities from her ancestor; one of the principal ones being hoarding. This has proved to be a blessing as she grew up amongst these treasures of Gaskell life and we have in more recent years had an opportunity, because of the interest that they engender, to become more familiar with them. One must remember that until perhaps fifteen to twenty years ago Mrs Gaskell did not have the wide publicity and following that she now attracts. But thankfully the hoarding habit appears to have been a most useful one, in that it gave Rosemary some insight into Elizabeth's belongings and life and the opportunity to share these items with others. Another quality that I feel Rosemary shared with Mrs Gaskell

was quiet determination: since being widowed in 1987 she lived independently and quietly, supporting her charities, attending church, being neighbourly but never making a fuss or demanding attention.

My mother was thrilled with the wider awareness of Elizabeth Gaskell's work that became so much more prominent in recent years, largely due to the efforts of Joan Leach, the Gaskell Society, the restoration of Plymouth Grove and the popularisation of her work through film and television. She was very pleased and proud to be invited to become a patron of Plymouth Grove and gave generously towards the restoration project. She had in recent years several opportunities to visit the house both before and after the work and to see for herself the progress. Some of her photographs of life in the house in Meta's and Julia's time have enabled those working on the restoration to understand what it looked like at that time.

More recently she was honoured and excited to attend the première of the Cranford series in London, Alan Shelston's talk and the exhibition at the Portico Library, and the exhibition at the John Rylands Library last year. She had hoped to visit Heathwaite but, owing to a change of date, was unable to do so. Whenever we were in the area, we would stop in Knutsford and look at the Gaskell Memorial Tower and pay a visit to Brook Street Chapel. She was also delighted to be able to lend items to these exhibitions, following in the footsteps of her mother Daysie who lent items to the Knutsford Museum for Mrs Gaskell's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Rosemary made a great effort to correspond with all those who enquired of her for information regarding the Gaskell family, including John Chapple, Jenny Uglow, Barbara Brill and Alan Shelston to name but a few. She was always very happy to help students and scholars in their research, both from this country and abroad from as far afield as Russia and Japan.

It was with much regret that, owing to illness, she was unable to attend the service in Westminster Abbey last September. We had made arrangements for a very special weekend in London and she was insistent that the rest of us should attend. I was able to visit her in hospital on the Sunday evening and show her the Order of Service and the article in The Independent. This was the last time I was to see her. The extraordinary events of that week are now known to all, with Mrs Gaskell's bicentenary the following day, followed the next by the death of Joan.

Now I am faced with the onerous task of being responsible for one twig of the family tree and am very thankful I have two wonderful daughters Eleanor and Imogen to become the adjoining twigs through what appears to have become a tradition of female lineage in this family.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank everyone from the Gaskell Society and Plymouth Grove who expressed their words of comfort during my mother's illness and their subsequent condolences. I have a very full archive of recent events which will take me a while to collate ... but will be hoarded!



# Elizabeth Gaskell's Encounters with the Internet Technology of the 21st Century

Nancy S. Weyant

Elizabeth Gaskell lived and wrote in an era of dramatic scientific and technological developments. Readers of her fiction and her correspondence encounter numerous examples of the transformative impact of nineteenth-century technology on the lives of individuals and society as a whole. As dramatic as those developments were, readers of works by and about Gaskell, and Gaskell scholars writing on her life and works during the last quarter of the twentieth century and the first decade of the twenty-first century, have likewise experienced dramatic changes brought about by computer technology. As a librarian and a Gaskell bibliographer I have actively tracked with interest the impact of electronic access to the works of Gaskell, to critical analysis of her writing, and to the ever-growing presence of Gaskell on the Internet.

In 1966 when I began my work on my Master's degree in Library Science at Wayne State University, the chair of the Department, Dr. Robert E. Booth, after welcoming the entering class, informed us that, on some levels, he felt sorry for us. He noted that in our course-work we were going to be required to master all the traditional paper sources required to be effective librarians upon graduation but within ten years, we were going to have to adapt *all* those skills to a new research world - a world defined by computer technology. Dr. Booth was correct. Exactly 10 years later, in 1976, I accepted a job at Bucknell University after taking five years off from my career as a librarian until my son began school. In those intervening years, computers had invaded libraries and redefined both how librarians provided reference assistance and how scholars conducted research.

When I began my MA in 1981, writings by Elizabeth Gaskell, like those of all authors, were accessed by reading versions printed on paper or listening to versions recorded on audio tapes. Biographies, bibliographies and critical analysis (books, book chapters, and journal articles) were similarly still being published in paper. At the same time, however, researchers interested in identifying 'new' sources on Gaskell found themselves having to straddle two worlds. To locate literary criticism, they were dependent on both traditional paper indexes such as the *Annual Bibliography of English Language and Literature*, the *Year's Work in English Studies* and the Modern Language Association's *Annual Bibliography* as well as a core of new bibliographic databases that were rapidly becoming standard tools for research. Some of these research tools had paper equivalents while others 'lived' only in the online world. The challenge for scholars was made more complex because subscribing to and even accessing the bibliographic databases was costly. Unfortunately, this transformation of *how* research was conducted coincided with an economic slump that challenged libraries' ability to afford the new technology that was transforming research. Both libraries and individual scholars found themselves

challenged by the fiscal realities of this 'brave new world' of electronic access to information. And then came the Internet!

While the history of the Internet reaches back to the post-Sputnik era of the early 1960s, its impact on scholarly research didn't really begin to be broadly felt until the 1990s. The blend of computer technology, the concept of a personal computer on every desk, and an ever-growing number of 'websites' that included scholarly information, popular information, and business information combined to dramatically change both the volume and the nature of information readily available on Elizabeth Gaskell. Just as technological advances in Gaskell's lifetime had both positive and negative qualities, so too the technological advances in our time, most notably the Internet, have both positive and negative qualities.

In 2003 at the Gaskell Conference at Durham, I made a presentation profiling 'A Decade of Gaskell Scholarship, 1992-2001.' In that talk, I reported that conducting a simple keyword search of "Elizabeth Gaskell" on the Internet using several different search engines generated between 6,856 and 34,118 'hits'. By the time I reported on patterns of scholarship from 2002-2007 at the Canterbury Conference in 2007, these numbers had jumped from 67,400 to 309,000. Today, that same search generated between some 556,000 and 1,020,000 'hits'. Following the links takes one to a wide range of reputable information sources: Gaskell's works themselves, plot summaries, biographies, photographs, literary criticism, conference presentations, offerings of thousands of bookstores, announcements of completed theses and dissertations focusing on Gaskell, and vita for faculty teaching courses that include works by Gaskell or writing on Gaskell. Most recently, there has been an infusion of thousands of Gaskell-related 'blogs', online diaries that either discuss or briefly comment on Gaskell or on individual works by her. To date, virtually none of these are devoted exclusively to Gaskell. Some of these are created by major literary scholars; most by a wide range of individual enthusiasts: high school students, college students or adults reading Gaskell for the first time or viewing one of the BBC dramatisations of *Cranford*, *North and South* or *Wives and Daughters*.

As an academic librarian (albeit retired) and a Gaskell bibliographer (still active) who maintains my own website only partially devoted to Elizabeth Gaskell (<http://www.nancyweyant.com>), I spend a significant amount of time tracking Gaskell's presence on the Internet. It has allowed me to identify new Gaskell scholars and Gaskell enthusiasts from over twenty-five countries. It has helped me learn of works in progress or new publications by faculty who post their vitas on their college's or university's websites. It has helped me identify in a timely way new books issued by the publishers most prominent in Gaskell scholarship by regularly checking publishers' websites. The Internet, in short, has complemented the electronic databases available to me that give me access to the more traditional form of scholarly publishing: journal articles, book chapters and books, enhancing my ability to identify more scholarship devoted to Elizabeth Gaskell.



**Chairman Ann O'Brien and Secretary Pam Griffiths  
enjoy lunch together at the Knutsford meeting, 27 April 2011**



**Conference outing to the Hospital of St. Cross, Winchester, 23 July 2011**



**Samuel Johnson  
looks down on  
Gaskell Society  
members et al. at  
ALS Lichfield, May  
2011**



**Wedding Day  
for Mr. & Mrs. Dabbs, 1952  
(N.B. Veil belonging to ECG)**



**Mrs. Dabbs with Mrs. Gaskell  
at the Portico Library, April 2010**

Disturbingly, however, the Internet can also take one to hundreds of web sites that **sell** term papers. YES - one can now purchase book reports, term papers, theses, dissertation proposals and EVEN entire dissertations on the works of Elizabeth Gaskell. Some of these businesses soften their sales pitch with the spurious suggestion that buying one of their well-written papers will help you write a better paper on your own. (RIGHT!) Others are more forthright. These entrepreneurs use phrases such as "Written by our experienced writers", describing their "product" as "high-quality, custom written and research-based term papers" while claiming to employ "writers holding PhD and Master's degrees, along with writing experience of no less than 25 years, to work upon your term papers." Another posts this claim: "For nearly a decade, we've written hundreds of doctoral-level thesis papers and dissertations for research - 24 hours a day, 7 days a week - on incredibly intricate topics. Our 'Elizabeth Gaskell' researchers are highly-educated specialists with impeccable research and writing skills who have vast experience in preparing doctoral-level research materials. Equipped with proper tools, statistical software, and sources of reference, we write dissertations and theses that are one-of-a-kind, innovative, accurate, and up-to-date. In addition to regular libraries, our professional researchers have access to online, member-only research libraries that contain millions of books, journals, periodicals, magazines, and vast information on every conceivable 'Elizabeth Gaskell' subject. And remember, we can research ANY topic, of ANY length, at ANY level, for virtually ANY delivery date - guaranteed!" The cost of these term paper mills vary but the one that specializes in theses and dissertations has a rate of "only" \$18/page IF they can have more than 30 days to write it. If you need a paper no longer than 15 pages, you can have it in 24 hours for \$35/page. This same site talks about its "respect for the customer" and its "academic integrity". Having attended a college with an honour code and having applied that concept to all aspects of my life, I find myself bristling at this latter phrase. Clearly they are comfortable passing the concept of academic responsibility on to the "respected customer". I acknowledge that I am a bit of an academic elitist. I also am not naïve. Term papers have been bought, sold and recycled on college campuses for decades. Nonetheless, I am saddened by the blatant abuse of the academic process in general and by Gaskell's inclusion in particular. \*

Elizabeth Gaskell embraced the positive aspects of the scientific and technological developments of her day while exposing the negative fallout from those developments. I am certain she would similarly embrace the way in which the Internet has united both scholars and enthusiasts interested in her life and writings (albeit with some embarrassment) and adapt her strong communication skills to the Internet by maintaining her own 'blog'. Similarly, I am certain she would be disturbed by this entrepreneurial theft of her literary legacy that circumvents the integrity of the educational system. I am certain she would apply her skills as a teller of stories and write to expose this negative aspect of the Internet.

\* Much of this paragraph was included in my newsletter, posted through my website.

## A Dear Good Valuable Friend

Christine Lingard

Elizabeth Gaskell is often credited with being one of the first women writers to successfully combine a career with a full home life. She wrote of the problems of juggling the demands of a minister's wife, parochial work and mother to four daughters, with her writing. Cynics would point out that none of this would have been possible without a houseful of servants. The 1861 census for 46 Plymouth Grove lists a lady's maid, a waiter and three other housemaids. There would normally have been a cook as well but the post was vacant at the time - not an unusual occurrence - her letters reveal a number of occasions when this was the case. The family also made use of an outdoor man to look after the animals and garden, and a woman came in to do the laundry.

There was certainly chaos when the status quo was upset. Once, when the nurse was in London supervising Marianne on a shopping expedition, one of the maids was on compassionate leave, visitors were expected and the washerwoman hadn't turned up, she wrote in desperation to her daughter:

*Oh dear! poteration [confusion] take the house. - Moreover we can't get a bit of butter; - our butter woman won't come, why we can't make out. Please bring us some butter from London - really, I mean it;... Tell Hearn all her wits are wanted in this desolate, servantless, headless, washerwomanless, company full household. [L478].*

Normally the house ran like clockwork. The credit for this lay with the nurse - the redoubtable Hearn. (Use of surname was indicative of rank and prestige in the hierarchy of servants). Ann Hearn first came to work for the Gaskells about 1842, the time when they moved to Upper Rumford Street and was initially employed as a nursemaid to the three youngest children but took on more general duties when they older. It was Hearn who registered her mistress's death, the male members having returned to Manchester to break the sad news to her husband.

*She is a dear good valuable friend [L570] Gaskell wrote in 1865, and in 1858:*

*Hearn is going to... Venice, Yes! Our own old dear English Hearn!... She has had a good number of distressing events in her family, & lost all her savings during this past year, & she had been but in languid spirits, which we have been afraid were affecting her health. A week or two ago Meta was going sketching, & took Hearn to sit with her; not as chaperone, for we are too primitive here to require such articles, - but by way of giving Hearn a little fresh air, & merry talk. Meta came in, & said 'Do you know Mama the summit of Hearn's ambition is to go to Paris...there came a letter from a very good kind, & also very wealthy lady in Manchester, asking me if I could recommend her a respectable lady's maid for travelling...She [Hearn] quite jumped at the idea, - 'if we could but spare her.' [L401]*



And so Hearn went to Europe. She later accompanied the family on their second visit to Heidelberg, as well as many trips in this country. In the early years she slept with the babies, and could be trusted to take them without their parents to places such as to Bowdon. She was also responsible for the training and recruitment of the other servants. Her duties were varied:

*[Hearn] and Elliott talk of going over to see A Cheshire someday soon; if they can find a gap of time between pig-killing, painting & visitors [L415].*

When the eldest daughter Marianne was nominally left in charge while mother was away, she was always expected to consult Hearn, who was certainly confident enough to express her own opinion on the girls:

*Hearn holds up her hands over yr green frock, and proposes you should be dressed in leather. [L117].*

But who was this treasure? How did she come to work for the family? Gaskell, not for the first time, is contradictory. When in 1859 Hearn took an extended holiday in the West Country Gaskell twice named Devonshire as her native shire but on other occasions said that she came from Cornwall. For instance when trying to trace the words of the traditional Cornish ballad 'But Forty thousand Cornish boys will know the reason why':

*One of our servants, who comes from Cornwall, tells me it was a much longer song when she used to hear it from the miners in her youth. She lived near Penryn, which is the Trelawny country. [L125].*

Even her death has proved hard to track down. The General Register Office Index has transcribed her age as 51 rather than 81. She died in a lodging house in Buxton in January 1892, probably undertaking treatment at the spa. Her will gives her address as 84 Plymouth Grove and Meta and Julia Gaskell as her executors (replacing her first choice - their brother-in-law, Charles Crompton, who had died in the interim). She left a remarkable £413, including books, jewellery and trinkets.

Census and parish records confirm that she was baptised in Bodmin in February 1812 the daughter of William Hearn and Mary Hocking, who came from the nearby village of Cardinham. Her father was a publican and probably died at the age of 42 in 1822 when Ann was 12. On the 1841 census Mary Hearn is listed as a nurse at Calleyough Farm on the outskirts of Cardinham. The only Ann Hearn listed on that census was a laundress in Bodmin, but that person is five years younger than one would expect. (Ages on the 1841 census are rounded to the nearest 5 years.) I cannot explain the reference to Penryn, which is nowhere near Bodmin. Her cousin Elizabeth Isabella Hocking was in service at Littleham, near Exmouth, Devon, which would probably account for the confusion about her native shire. It is not impossible that she left Cornwall to be with her sister.

This sister, Elizabeth Hocking, was at least twelve years her senior, and an illegitimate daughter of her mother. She married John Ogle Curtis, from Boston, Lincolnshire,

at St. Pancras' church London, in 1825. Their first child, John, was born the following year and baptised at Hinde Street Wesleyan Chapel, Manchester Square. By 1830 they were living in Mansfield, Nottinghamshire where two daughters Mary (who probably died in childhood) and Elizabeth were born. In 1836 Curtis was appointed headmaster of the new school opened by the Unitarians in Lower Mosley Street, Manchester. This was the year when Charles, son of Rev John Gooch Robberds, senior minister at Cross Street Chapel, took up his first position as a Unitarian minister in Mansfield. Is this just a coincidence or did Mr Curtis recommend the position to him? Alternatively, he may have been the one who recommended Mr Curtis to his father.

Another daughter, Sarah, was born in Manchester and by the end of the 1840s Mary Hearn had also come to live with the Curtises at White Street in the suburb of Hulme, about a mile from Upper Rumford Street where the Gaskells were still living. Gaskell made enquiries about her health as early as 1848. By February 1850 she was described as dying, and Hearn had already had three weeks leave to help nurse her. The household was consequently 'at sixes and sevens' in her absence. Mrs Hearn died on 13th April at the age of 72. The cause was bronchitis. Hearn returned to work and immersed herself in the move to Plymouth Grove.

Mr Curtis was a respected figure in the Unitarian community. His school replaced the crowded old schoolrooms in the cellar of Lower Mosley Chapel. Only thirty children attended his first class. By 1847 there were four hundred pupils, both girls and boys, in the school, each paying 4 pence a week. He was also paid an extra £10 a year to establish a Sunday School, employing a number of volunteer teachers including Gaskell herself, who taught the children in her own home. He also started evening classes for adults, a forerunner of Mechanics Institutes, and taught English (he was particularly interested in the English language and the origin of words), Geography and Drawing himself. A number of his pupils underwent training as teachers.

When one of the Gaskell's servants was seduced it was Mr Curtis who was sent to ask the father to marry her. Given his own wife's origins he would have been a sympathetic choice for the task. We can only speculate how much all this fed into the novel *Ruth*. In 1857 he succumbed to the same disease as his mother-in-law and had to take several periods of leave. He went to St. Bees in Cumberland in October but died at the age of 55 the following month. William Gaskell conducted the funeral service. (Curiously Letter 136a in which Gaskell described a visit to Seascale in Cumberland has been speculatively dated as October 1857.) This is one of Hearn's family tragedies that Gaskell alluded to. Others included the death in 1855 of her uncle Richard Hocking who ran a grocer's shop opposite Bodmin's ancient parish church, and his son in 1858.

There are other occurrences of the name Curtis in Gaskell's Letters and it is now possible to clarify some of these and rectify some errors. In Letter 119, dated Tuesday Ap 14. Gaskell wrote:

*I received a letter yesterday from Mrs John Curtis (formerly Miss Crossley) at Heidelberg, in great anxiety as to the fate of three or four little orphan children of her cousin, Mr Robert Salter, who was drowned in the Mersey near Cheadle about a fortnight ago...the relations, who, it seems, are justly incensed by Mr Robert Salter's conduct.*

She was worried that the children may have to go into a workhouse. This letter has been dated as 1852 on the grounds that 14 April was a Tuesday in that year. The Stockport Advertiser reported the inquest in 1856 when the 14th was a Monday. Who hasn't made such an error with dates? An open verdict was recorded on Salter, a civil engineer. The nature of his misconduct remains a mystery. What is now known is that John Curtis was Hearn's nephew, born in London. He married Ann Crossley at Bolton register office in 1849, and may have been a cashier, living near his father in 1851. Ann is recorded as a widow in 1861, though I have not been able to verify the date of her husband's death. It may have taken place abroad.

It is also now possible to identify this Mrs Curtis with the Annie Curtis mentioned in Further Letters. In 1857 Gaskell was contacted by the German lexicographer, Jacob Grimm, (of folk tale fame). Gaskell wrote in reply and it was Annie Curtis whom she asked to translate the letter into German. Annie was a governess and as Gaskell's letter proves, had spent time in Heidelberg. The Curtises were known to the Schwabes, a family of wealthy German-born calico printers, who had relations in that city. In 1861 Annie was living with her mother-in-law and sisters-in-law in Hulme.

Hearn spent the rest of her life at Plymouth Grove. By the time of her death she had little family of her own. Her sister had died in 1882 at the home of her unmarried daughter Elizabeth, who ran a school in Birkdale, near Southport. Her other niece Sarah, married Frank Taylor, a member of a Bolton cotton spinning family, a leading Unitarian and later a magistrate, famous in the town for the promotion of education. Sarah also died childless in 1889, as did her cousin Elizabeth. Despite her frequent bouts of depression she stayed with the Gaskells and they became her family. Though we may never know her full story, Ann Hearn played a not insignificant part in the Gaskell's story, and deserves to be recognised.

*Further reading:*

*Cross Street Chapel Schools, Manchester, 1734-1942, by Lester Burney, 1977.*

*Letters of Mrs Gaskell, edited by J.A.V. Chapple and Arthur Pollard, 1997 edition. (letter numbers quoted in square brackets).*

*Further letters of Mrs Gaskell edited by John Chapple & Alan Shelston, 2000.*

## Two Encounters with ECG

Doreen Pleydell

I was born and brought up in a London suburb. At the age of 11, because I did not pass the scholarship exam, I attended a Central School, halfway between an elementary and a grammar school. There we had an inspiring English teacher who instilled in me a love literature which as lasted all my life.

Our first 'set book' was *Cranford* and immediately I was transported to a world so different from that of dull Ilford where I lived. I loved all the quirky characters, the small society and above all, the kindness of people one to another. I wished with all my heart that I could live in such a place.

Later I read many essays, articles about Mrs. Gaskell, but no actual novels. I knew of course that Knutsford was the real Cranford, but what an incredible piece of good fortune to find myself actually living in the town of my dreams!

This was many years later after the war years, marriage, children and many moves around the country. After fifty years of living in Knutsford I can still look at it through rose-coloured spectacles. Yes, I know the traffic is horrendous, the roads and pavements badly maintained, the aircraft noise almost insupportable - I could go on. If you believe that a place has a spirit, then Knutsford has a spirit of kindness. Mrs. Gaskell felt it - not in the bricks and mortar, but the way people look out for each other, are kind to each other - or so I've always found. The only time I'll leave it, I hope, is when I'm carried out in a wooden box!

The second, very brief, encounter with ECG was in Florence, many years ago. John and I were looking round the beautiful Uffizi art gallery, but it's possible to get cultural indigestion (and besides, my feet were hurting!). I was resting my weary limbs in the café when three people entered and asked if they might join me - husband, wife and their son. As they were carrying an English guidebook, I started to talk to them in English. They weren't British but Swedish and ran a bookshop in a provincial town in Sweden. They told me they were very keen on Victorian literature, profoundly hoped they could go one day to the Lake District (for Wordsworth) and to Haworth, as they much admired the Brontës. "Ah" I exclaimed, "then possibly you'll have heard of Elizabeth Gaskell, who wrote *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*."

"Yes indeed, *Cranford* is one of our favourite books. A new translation has just appeared called 'Cranford: an ideal village'". When I explained that I actually lived in Knutsford, they could hardly believe it and fell about my neck with delight. "To think" exclaimed the wife, "that we have met a lady who actually lives in Cranford." I tried to explain that Knutsford is no longer a "dear little country town". Nevertheless they continued to admire ME - I'd never been so flattered in my life!

We parted like old friends and wrote to each other once or twice but gradually lost touch. I still remember the Uffizi though, not for the pictures, but for that Brief Encounter.

## Happy 20th Birthday!

Fran Twinn

The London and SE Branch of the Gaskell Society is 20 years old this year: it was founded in 1991 by a small loyal group of 10 who wanted to consider, 'aspects of Mrs Gaskell's life and works that interested us individually'.

The first meetings took place at Francis Holland School close to Sloane Square thanks to another founding member, Jane Wilson, then Deputy Headmistress at the school. (Sadly, she has since died prematurely and as a group, we donated several volumes to the school library in her memory and as a token of gratitude.)

At the inaugural meeting of ten it was Dudley Barlow who graciously agreed to run the branch, and effortlessly and efficiently continued to do so for 12 years until he retired to Yorkshire in 2003. At the outset, when Francis Holland was not available, meetings were held in other venues. Olive Bridge offered hospitality in her delightful house close to Sloane Square but, on other occasions, the meetings became peripatetic. My abiding memory remains of a meeting on September 3rd 1994 which was held at the Central Baptist Church in Bloomsbury. I do not remember much about either the talk or the venue but because the rain was relentless and torrential I arrived soaked to the skin!! I shall never forget it but the weather that afternoon did not deter me, as I took over from Dudley in 2003 and continue to enjoy the quarterly meetings hugely.

Gradually over the 20 years the number of members has fluctuated but regularly there are over 20 at meetings and sometimes it can be over 30!! Of the founding members only Sylvia Burch remains a regular attendee. She is to be congratulated on her long standing loyalty to the branch and the society. Sadly death, and removals to other parts of the country, have taken their toll on those others who were there at the first meeting. However, Francis Holland has become the regular venue where we are made very welcome by the headmistress and looked after royally by the caretaker; we are all very thankful for this central and well-connected location.

Over the years the informal lunches somewhere in the vicinity before the meeting have been replaced by a sandwich lunch at the school followed by tea and cake after the formal part of the afternoon. Usually the meetings take the form of a talk by a visiting speaker, which is sometimes illuminated by slides, or now, by PowerPoint presentations; on occasions we have a led discussion about one of Gaskell's works but the focus of the afternoon is always an aspect of Gaskell's life or work in the tradition of the original aims of the founding group. Talks range from literary criticism of texts to aspects of Gaskell's life (a favourite with members) to places with which she was familiar and about which she wrote. For instance, we now know more about the plans for the future planting of the garden at Plymouth Grove; her web of friendships both here and across the Atlantic, more about Vernon

Lushington, her Cousin 'V'; the use of flowers in her writing and more about the relationship between *The Moorland Cottage* and *The Mill on the Floss*. These, and many other subjects, have been intellectually stimulating, entertaining and have enriched our knowledge of this great Victorian woman writer.

In addition there have been visits to Holybourne and Crix, a literary walk around Southwark and a summer tea party. The branch is flourishing; a bring and buy bookstall enables us to make modest but frequent contributions to The Gaskell House fund and it is to be hoped that we can continue to flourish for the next 20 years.

I should like to thank Dudley and all the founding members who had the foresight to recognise the need and potential for a branch of the Gaskell Society in this part of the world. We all appreciate the commitment and enthusiasm of those early members and, I hope, we can carry forward their approach into this century, 200 years after Gaskell's birth.

Thank you  
Elizabeth Williams

At our AGM in April, I retired as Chairman of The Gaskell Society, and was overwhelmed to be presented with a magnificent Victorian pendant. It's a moonstone, surrounded by amethysts and seed pearls, and mounted in gold, with a gold chain. As if this wasn't enough, I was also presented with a copy of Walter E. Smith's bibliographical catalogue of early editions of Elizabeth Gaskell's writing, which enables me to dream of acquiring a library of early editions. I don't feel that my thanks on the occasion were adequate (I was so stunned) and would therefore like to thank you all very much indeed for such wonderful generosity. I was informed that I could always exchange the pendant for another one, but nothing would persuade me to do that. It's far too lovely. That and the book are two perfect gifts.

The editor has asked me to write about my experiences as Chairman in the last six years, but I have problems because so much happened in that time. The last three years in particular were hectic, but I think that we can all be proud of what we achieved - the many meetings, the special events, the conferences and the never-to-be-forgotten commemorative event at Westminster Abbey in 2010.

Much of this activity owed its inspiration to Joan. Having nourished the society from its birth, she was always eager to see us doing more and more, and her ambition and hard work were the driving forces behind many of our finer moments. She seemed to have the same sort of energy as Elizabeth Gaskell (maybe it's something in the water in Knutsford) and never spared herself in organising events and outings for members. Planning events with Joan was always exciting - the challenge was to persuade her that you can't fit six events and 200 miles of travel



into one day. She commanded immense personal loyalty, and although there were occasions when the committee decided that they just couldn't do any more, these were few. So when, in the middle of our most hectic year ever, that of Elizabeth Gaskell's bicentenary, it became obvious that Joan was very ill, many of us were concerned for the society. How could we manage without Joan?

The simple answer is that we did. I'm not sure how, but somehow we carried on, and all the planned events happened. This was partly because we were inspired by our memories of Joan, but also because we had a determined and hard-working committee, and enthusiastic and loyal members. The bicentenary events all happened and there were no major disasters. This year's conference was as well-attended and successful as ever, and it was a delight to see a mixture of old friends with those who had never attended a conference before, all getting on well with each other. It was a very positive indication of our ability to survive.

We shouldn't be complacent however - all societies are having problems finding new recruits (especially active ones) and we are no exception. So if you think that you can help in any way, please let us know. We need a new treasurer, and a new minutes' secretary. I was fortunate in the level of support I received, and Ann O'Brien, our new Chairman, is going to need that same level of support. I was very lucky in the people I worked with, and I was continually struck by what very nice people our members are. So I shall end as I began, with a very big thank you to you all. And please carry on helping!

## Friends of Plymouth Grove: Update

Janet Allan

### The Roof

Many of you will have heard about the theft from our new lead-covered roof, which was discovered by two members of the Friends who found water running down the stairs. Very prompt action was taken and we now have a watertight temporary covering of roofing-felt, which hopefully will last until we raise the major funding to put on a (unstealable) steel roof. Generous donations have helped so we are grateful to everyone for this.

### The Lottery Application

We are busy putting together the full application to the Heritage Lottery Fund, having completed the first stage of reports so that an accurate costing can be made. You can see these reports at the house. They include detailed recommendations on the Gaskells' paint colours, wallpapers, furnishing, garden layout, the restoration and conversion of the entire house and opening it up to the public.

Before this becomes a reality we need to raise over 2.5 million - hopefully over 2 million from the Lottery and £500,000 from ourselves. We are halfway to this

target, with £221,000 already promised. Applications for £200,000 more in the pipeline (no guarantee we will get these however!). You can help by sponsoring a length of the beautiful cornice, a step on the Gaskells' front stairs the restoration of a newly-discovered flagstone or some of the roof.

### Friends' Activities

As always the Friends have been very busy not only with Open Days but with specialist groups and events. Our youngest recruit is 7-year-old Noah, who with other children from the Grove Village Improvement Team helped to do a grand clearance of the garden and plant the myriad pots of flowers which now stand at each side of the front steps. One of our oldest visitors was a 82-year-old from Texas, on a tailor-made literary tour. She had read many of Gaskell's books and enjoyed an afternoon tea in the dining room. We have had a very successful William Gaskell exhibition, researched and created by students from MMU, and an excellent tour of Victorian paintings at Manchester Art Gallery. Our enchanting Summer Soirée was much enjoyed, and our trip to Oakwell Hall and the Red House gave a fascinating insight into an early nineteenth-century house and garden.

### Requests

We are still collecting china teasetts, small teapots and embroidered tablecloths. Give them a good home! We also need rugs in traditional designs and an old-fashioned carpet sweeper.

We have a reputation for good food and would like to produce our own cookbook. Please send your recipes to Joss Hill on [josshattie62@btinternet.com](mailto:josshattie62@btinternet.com)

### Autumn Events

As this Newsletter goes to press we are still putting the final touches to our programme, including booking details. However please note the following in your diary.

**Open Days:** (admission £1): 12pm - 4pm, on Sundays - **4 September, 2 October, 6 November and 4 December.**

**Heritage Open Days:** (admission free) 12pm - 4pm **Saturday and Sunday, 10 and 11 September.** Volunteers needed! Please contact Joss 0161 248 6226.

**Greenheys Development Thursday 29 September (THE birthday!):** Mosscares Housing are officially opening their 65-home estate, including Elizabeth Gaskell Square and Mary Barton Fields. 84 Plymouth Grove will also be open on that day - details to follow.

**Musical Delights from Opus 5: Friday 7 October 7pm.** A fundraising concert at Alderley Edge Methodist Chapel (tickets £10).

**Tour of Ford Madox Brown Exhibition at Manchester Art Gallery:** 11.30 am, Wednesday 2 November, lead by the curator Julian Treuherz (cost £8 plus exhibition entry of £8/£6 unless you are a Friend of the gallery)

**Christmas event, Saturday 10 December:** A Christmas Carol.

## Book Notes

Christine Lingard

Cozzi, Annette, Assistant Professor of Humanities and Cultural Studies at the University of South Florida. *The discourses of food in nineteenth-century British fiction*. Palgrave Macmillan, £52.50.

Readings of discourses about food in a wide range of sources, from Victorian novels by authors such as Dickens, Gaskell, Disraeli and Hardy to parliamentary speeches, royal proclamations, and Amendment Acts. It considers the cultural politics and poetics of food in relation to issues of race, class, gender, regionalism, urbanisation, colonialism, and imperialism in order to discover how national identity is constructed.

Freedgood, Elaine, Professor of English at New York University. *The ideas in things: fugitive meaning in the Victorian novel*. University of Chicago Press, originally published in 2006 and now reissued in paperback, £19.50.

Discusses the hidden darker meaning of familiar objects in three novels Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, Elizabeth Gaskell's *Mary Barton*, and Charles Dickens' *Great Expectations*.

Marroni, Professor Francesco, Vice President of the Gaskell Society. *Victorian disharmonies: a reconsideration of nineteenth-century English fiction*; translated from the Italian - *Disarmonie vittoriane*. John Cabot University Press: distributed by University of Delaware Press, £31.50.

A collection of literary essays including *Cousin Phillis*: illness as language, The cursed hearth: desire and deceit in the short stories of Elizabeth Gaskell. There are also essays on Dickens' *A tale of two cities*: and the guillotine, Wilkie Collins, George Gissing, and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the obscure*.

Fernandez, Jean. *Victorian servants, class, and the politics of literacy*. Routledge studies in nineteenth-century literature, University of Maryland, £80. First published 2009.

Using a wide range of fiction and non-fictional sources including diaries and autobiographies concerning servants this book discusses the development of mass literacy and its affect on class structure. Books discussed include Mary

Wollstonecraft's *Maria, or, The wrongs of woman*; Catherine Crowe's *Susan Hopley, or, The adventures of a maid servant*; Emily Brontë's *Wuthering Heights*; Elizabeth Gaskell's *The old nurse's story*; Wilkie Collins' *The moonstone*; and R.L. Stevenson's *The strange case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*.

*The widow and wedlock novels of Frances Trollope* general editor, Brenda Ayres Pickering & Chatto, the collected novels of the early nineteenth novelist who is often said to have influenced Elizabeth Gaskell, by the publisher of her own collected works.

*Mary Barton*; Cover to Cover, read by Juliet Stevenson, £22. Unabridged audio recording on 14 CDs, released in July.

## Alliance of Literary Societies AGM 2011

May 21st - 22nd

Hosted by The Samuel Johnson Society, Lichfield

Lynda Stephens

The venue for this year's AGM and literary weekend was the Cathedral city of Lichfield, birthplace of the lexicographer, author and wit, Dr Samuel Johnson who was born in 1709.

When we arrived at the Guildhall we were greeted by Marty Smith of the Johnson Society who directed us up to the oak-wainscoted hall. Delegates were busy setting up their author stalls with promotion leaflets and books for sale or just for reference. Around 30 societies were represented by their enthusiastic advocates. These included Gaskell, Dickens, Jeffries, Beddoes, Walmsley, Thirkell, Bennett, Carroll, Caldicott, Brontë, Pym, Sassoon, Trollope, Larkin, Clare, Austen and more.

We saved our seats by putting some belongings on them only to find our friends from the Arnold Bennett Society sitting there on our return - we didn't react as Samuel Johnson did on his visit - he left his seat for a moment and returned to discover someone had taken it. Without a word, he picked up the chair and its occupant, threw them into the pit of the theatre and went on calmly watching the performance. We just sat on the row behind!

The meeting was preceded by a welcome from the Mayor and then an introduction to the Johnson Society by their Chairman, Peter Barrett.

The new ALS President, Jenny Uglow was welcomed. There were two changes to the committee: Janet Kennerley resigned and Janet Allan was elected.

The subject of the next issue of the ALS Journal is 'Fashion in Literature'. Anyone considering writing a piece should contact Linda Curry at [l.j.curry@bham.ac.uk](mailto:l.j.curry@bham.ac.uk).

We enjoyed a buffet lunch in the hall, meeting old friends and new before going on a guided tour of Philip Larkin's Lichfield with Don Lee of the Larkin Society.

At 6pm there was a reception; we had a glass of wine and we met up with members of the Johnson Society, who entertained us with readings at the Birthplace Museum and bookshop. We had a photo session with the Town Crier who doubles as Samuel Johnson and then left for our dinner venue.

After an excellent meal Jenny Uglow talked about the importance and enjoyment of bringing the different societies together and we were treated to readings by several of our party, and it was perfectly ended by Janet Kennerley of the Gaskell Society reading from the first chapter of *Cranford* in which Captain Brown championed Dickens and Miss Jenkyns preferred Dr. Johnson!

At 11am on Sunday we met again for a very interesting tour of the Birthplace Museum by local playwright, David Titley. After lunch we went to the Cathedral Close and the Bishops Palace, which now houses the Cathedral School, and here we heard about the life of the poet Anna Seward.

Afternoon tea was served at Chapters, and we all said our 'goodbyes' and promised to meet up again next year on the 12th May in Nottingham, when the AGM will be hosted by the Dickens Fellowship.

## Summer Evening Meetings of The Gaskell Society in Knutsford

May & June 2011  
Janet Kennerley

During May and June we held two summer evening meetings at Brook Street Unitarian Chapel Schoolroom. These proved popular. Members and guests enjoyed reading and listening to excerpts from Gaskell's works and letters. During the interval, when drinks and light refreshments were served, we were able to view the recently opened Upper Gaskell Room. This contains display panels of 'Gaskell's Cheshire' from last year's Bicentenary event at Tatton Park, and other items of interest reflecting her childhood in Knutsford. During May, some members and guests were able to look round the old Unitarian Chapel, thanks to Rev Jean Bradley bringing her key. At the later meeting, members were able to see the newly laid memorial stone to Joan Leach, now at the foot of Elizabeth Gaskell's grave, in the beautiful garden surroundings.

My thanks to all who participated and assisted in any way, especially to Brook Street Chapel members for allowing us to use their splendid facilities.

There will be a third and final evening meeting for this year at Brook Street on Wednesday 14th September at 7.15pm with the theme 'Crime, Cops and Courts' in Mrs Gaskell's writing. Please do come along with a suitable reading or just listen if you prefer. For catering purposes, it would be helpful if you would let me know beforehand if you will be attending - email: [janetkennerley@hotmail.com](mailto:janetkennerley@hotmail.com) or telephone: 01477 571525.

### Forthcoming Events

#### Autumn Meeting to be held at Knutsford Methodist Church 24 September 2011:

- 10.15 Coffee
- 11.00 Dr. Craig Thornber: Uncle Peter and Cousin Henry
- 14.00 Professor James Drife: A Gynaecologist looks at Mrs. Gaskell (Joan Leach Memorial Lecture)

**25 September 2011:** 11.00 Harvest Festival at Brook Street Chapel, Knutsford, preceded by laying of wreath at Gaskell grave.

### AGM

**AGM 14 April 2012:** Cross Street Unitarian Church, Manchester

## The Gaskell Society South-West

Our summer social event will be held on Sunday, **the 4th of September**, at Boyd and Elizabeth's home, 14 Vellore Lane, Bath. It will begin at 12.30 and will be a 'bring and share' lunch. Veronica Trenchard will organise arrangements as to what to bring, and members are welcome to invite a friend or partner.

Our next meeting will be held on **Saturday, 15th October**, at 2.30 pm at BRLSI, Queen Square, Bath. Elizabeth Williams, past president of the Gaskell Society, will speak to us on Elizabeth Gaskell and Dickens' *Household Words*. We look forward to welcoming her back to Bath. The event will cost £2 to members of BRLSI and the Gaskell Society, £4 to all others. Refreshments will be available for an extra £1.

Our discussion groups will again be held in February and March next year. Details will be available closer to the time.

**Any queries to Elizabeth Schlenther, 14 Vellore Lane, Bath, BA2 6JQ, Tel: 01225 331763.**



## London and South-East Group

As usual there are four meetings this year. In November, instead of the usual meeting we shall join King's College, London for a Gaskell Day conference.

### **Saturday, 10th September.**

The Gospel according to Gaskell: The Ideal family as flawed: a father's sin in *Lizzie Leigh*. Tracy Vaughan.

### **Saturday, 12th November.**

Victorian Afterlives. A day conference at Kings College London KCL Strand Campus in The Council Room. 9.45am to about 4.30pm.  
£12.00 to include coffee lunch and tea.

### **Saturday, 11th February 2012.**

Science Liberality and Good Taste: The Manchester Botanic Garden and its founders. Dr Ann Brooks.

### **Saturday, 12th May 2012.**

Domestic Arts in *Mary Barton* and *North and South*. Alison Lundie.

The meetings will take place at Francis Holland School, Graham Terrace SW1.

- 2 minute walk from Sloane Square tube station (District and Circle Lines).
- 10 minute walk from Victoria.

The formal meeting begins at 2pm but you are welcome to join us for a sandwich lunch anytime from 12.45pm onwards. *Please ring the bell marked 'Reception' by the main door in Graham Terrace and someone will let you in.* After the talk, tea and cake.

In addition there is a Bring and Buy bookstall in aid of The Gaskell House, Plymouth Grove, Manchester. I would urge you to bring books in September please so we can refresh the stall.

You are warmly invited. We ask for a contribution of £5.00 for the afternoon to include everything.

### **Further details from:**

**Dr Fran Twinn, 85 Calton Ave, Dulwich, London SE21 7DF;  
phone 0208 693 3238. Email [frantwinn@aflex.net](mailto:frantwinn@aflex.net)**

## The North-West Group

### **14 September, 7.15pm**

Brook Street Chapel: 'Crimes, Cops and Courts'

### **28 September**

To Warrington: Cairo St. Chapel, Art Gallery, Police Museum

Knutsford meetings are held at St. John's Church Rooms on the last Wednesday of the month. Buffet lunch available (£8) from 12.15pm.

We continue to study the short stories:

**26 October** Half a life-time ago

**30 November** Manchester Marriage

**11 January 2012** New Year lunch at The Cottons (on A50 just north of Knutsford)

Manchester Meetings: to be held at Cross Street Chapel on the 1st Tuesday of the month from October to March, excluding January. Lecture at 1pm.

**4 October** Howard Gregg on Trollope

**1 November** Anita Fernandez-Young on Dickens

**6 December** Shirley Foster and Jo Pryke discuss The Moorland Cottage and The Mill on the Floss.