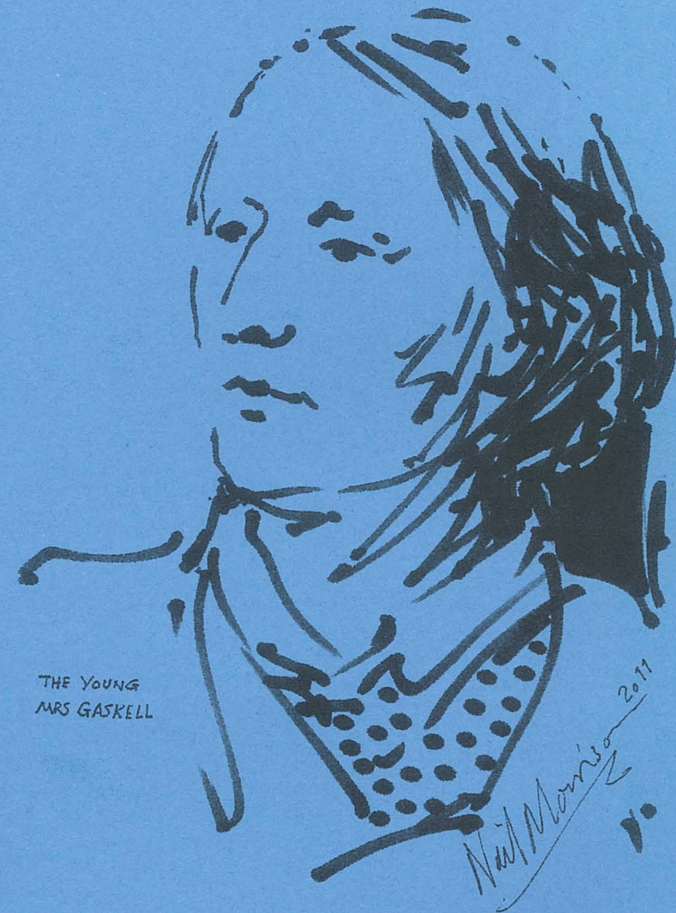


The Gaskell Society



THE YOUNG
MRS GASKELL

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

If you have any material or suggestions for future Newsletters, please contact Mrs. Helen Smith,
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NEWSLETTER
Spring 2015 - Number 59

Editor's Letter

Helen Smith

Welcome to Spring 2015 Newsletter and a Happy New Year to one and all.

It will be one hundred and fifty years in November since the death of Mrs Gaskell. And it is the year of our biennial Conference, to which we hope to welcome many from home and from abroad. Details of this major happening and of the AGM are enclosed with this Newsletter. Please peruse, digest and reply.

Thinking of the home front, we are all thrilled and really excited that Mrs Gaskell's house has re-opened – it really has ... 'It certainly is a beauty.' Congratulations to Manchester Historic Buildings Trust which owns the building and to all who have contributed to this re-creation. Mrs Gaskell would be amazed at the central heating, electric lights, wonderful drains and even a lift. She would probably be deafened by the traffic passing outside and the screeching ambulances with blue flashing lights as they speed to A&E at the nearby hospital.

(See www.elizabethgaskellhouse.co.uk for full details of opening hours and events)

We thank Janet Kennerley for organising the New Year lunch on 14 January, at Cottons, just north of Knutsford, the same popular venue as last year. After an exceptionally fine meal, Rosemary Donaldson recited four choice extracts from Shakespeare which were probably known to Mrs Gaskell. Christine Lingard then entertained us with amusing reminiscences from the Society's first 29 years. Many thanks to Rosemary and Christine.

It has been suggested that the Gaskell Society with its branches and many members world-wide might hold simultaneous (time zones permitting) tea parties on Saturday 14 November 2015 which is the Saturday closest to the actual anniversary of Mrs Gaskell's death on 12 November 1865. Do please bear in mind the Cranford principle of elegant economy, and no vulgarly ostentatious rivalry between branches will be tolerated. Seed-cake and Savoy biscuits should be appropriate fare on these occasions. No further guidelines will be issued.

... all that live must die,
Passing through nature to eternity.

In early October 2014 Marjorie Cox died after a short period in a nursing-home. Marjorie was a fine academic historian who always preferred research to teaching and a talented violinist who greatly enjoyed playing chamber music. Marjorie contributed to the Newsletter in the past. She had long been a leading light in her local history society and was very much liked, and will be very much missed, by all who knew her. Our condolences to her family-in-law as she no longer had any living blood relations.

On 23 October 2014 Doreen Pleydell reached the end of her very long and very active life. I am deeply moved that she dictated the article for this Newsletter only four days before her death in hospital.

Doreen and her husband John were regular attenders at all Gaskell events since the Society began in 1986. Doreen served on the Committee (hosting the meetings), entertained members from home and overseas and had latterly become a regular contributor to the Newsletter. We shall sorely miss Doreen with her pertinent remarks at the Wednesday meetings, and at all times we shall miss her positive, forward- and outward-looking attitude to life. We send our deepest sympathy to John and to the family. We look forward to John's continuing presence at our local meetings.

The words written by William Gaskell for his dear wife's memorial (which survived the air attack in 1940) in Cross Street Chapel (which did not survive) ... [she was] 'endeared by her rare graces of mind and heart to all by whom she was known' could equally be applied to our departed friends.

To all alive or dead who have contributed to this Newsletter, I offer grateful thanks. Please keep writing. Christine Lingard has written an article on Marianne for the Autumn Newsletter and there will also be a report of the Conference. As ever, we appreciate Rebecca's painstaking diligence at iPrint down the cobbles in Red Cow Yard here in Knutsford.

Deadline for Autumn Newsletter: 22 July 2015.

Charitable Works

Doreen Pleydell 19 October 2014

In 1862 it was the height of the American Civil War between the North and the South. As a consequence, the flow of raw cotton supply to England was interrupted. Many people in the cotton industry in the North West of England were without work. With no welfare support, people risked destitution, even starvation, so Mrs Gaskell decided to act. A prolific letter writer, she did not hesitate to ask both friends and acquaintances for help. She approached Charles Dickens with a request to be put in touch with Angela Burdett-Coutts, a famous philanthropist. He duly obliged. She gave generously.

Elizabeth also called upon her friends to assist in more modest ways. They were asked to provide cloth to make cloaks to protect the unemployed workers from the winter chill.

When the American Civil War ended the cotton trade resumed and the workers were re-employed. Mrs Gaskell's attention moved to other pressing social issues.

Editor adds: Doreen was on oxygen in Macclesfield District General Hospital, when she dictated this article to her son-in-law, David Rushforth. Doreen died peacefully four days later. RIP dear Doreen.

Domestic Medicine: with Some Notes about Mercury Treatment

Angus Easson

'There was a tailor had a mouse
(Hi teedle tum tum teedle)
They lived together in one house...
The tailor thought his mouse was ill...
He gave him part of a blue pill...'

So the tailor of Ramsey treated his mouse (who died); so Elizabeth Gaskell treated one of her ducks, which, cured, went 'quacking about like a respectable, well-behaved fowl' (*Letters*, p.188; hereafter, all simple page refs are to *Letters*). What were blue pills and what was another popular medication of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, calomel? Both pills and power are probably familiar names to modern readers of the literature of the period and the present investigation is prompted by Elizabeth Williams's talk on Mrs Frances (Fanny) Trollope, mother of Anthony. Referring to Fanny's husband, Anthony Snr, Elizabeth touched on his treating severe headaches with calomel (described by his son, Thomas Adolphus, in his autobiography, *What I Remember*, 2 vols, 1887) and briefly outlined calomel's nature – based on mercury, as were blue pills. Both were dangerous if taken incorrectly (they were often self-ministered), as Mrs Gaskell observes of a mutual acquaintance, who having been overdosed, passed into salivation (a common result of mercury) and her complexion entirely ruined.

Up until the 1860s at least, when drugs began to be more strictly controlled, many medicines and medical ingredients were readily available and many households prepared their own pills and draughts and lotions and ointments, often with ingredients, which today are unused or regarded with a certain horrid fascination. Domestic Medicine was taken for granted and guides, both medical and domestic, gave directions for preparation and use. Widely known was William Buchan's *Domestic Medicine*, first published in 1769, reaching a fifteenth edition by 1797, though seen as decidedly old-fashioned by the 1850s when Dickens gently mocks it in *Little Dorrit*: when the Meagleses are abroad, their housekeeper sits in

the window with Buchan's volume, but never reading a word (ch.16). For the mid-century, decidedly more reliable was Thomas Andrew's encyclopaedic *Domestic Medicine and Surgery* (1849). How *domestic* such medical aids were is underlined by Isabella Beeton's *Book of Household Management* (1861), which includes sections on nursing and nurses, medical advice ('The Doctor') with a list of drugs necessary to carry out instructions, and what to do in cases of poisoning from such 'domestic' items as arsenic, opium, prussic acid, and mercury.

What was the domestic medicine of the Gaskell household like? And did they resort to blue pills or calomel? Reading the letters, necessarily the main source of information, might well give the impression that the chief enemies were stomach upset and related problems of indigestion, 'liverishness' (William 'not well with his liver'; p.635), and bowels – the results in part at least of diet and a sedentary life. Mrs Gaskell herself refers to taking 'little doses of medecine', pills, and a tonic (all unspecified; e.g. pp.594, 906-7, 938). More particularly she refers to the rum and peppermint given her by a friendly girl in a Mannheim confectioner's shop as good for the headache (p.519), with the subsequent embarrassment of trying not to breathe rum over Charles Bosanquet. Not that she was adverse to alcohol as a remedy or consolation. When Meta was about to have her tonsils out and the doctor had recommended she have 'a glass of sherry at one o'clock' (p.919), her mother adds 'I think Mrs Gaskell will have one too'. Sherry was often used to boost cookery: Mrs Beeton will note that a glass of sherry improves a recipe and Mrs Gaskell in 1865 was pleased Hearn seemed very well: she was giving her sherry every day, twice (p.781). In a different way, Meta's health contributed to Mrs Gaskell's getting a good night's rest, 'owing to Meta's b—y bottle!!' (p.755), a bottle clearly for brandy, Mrs Gaskell thinking she needed more of the 'mysterious fluid' to replace Meta's store. Less heady was Mrs Gaskell's advice to an unknown lady correspondent to take a cup of hop-tea every morning (p.694).

Out and about, visiting, Mrs Gaskell clearly carried supplies, since having some with her, she could dose Mrs Littlewood's daughter with a Gregory Powder: another proprietary medicine of the period – calcined magnesia (compare our Milk of Magnesia), powered rhubarb, and ginger – a gentle laxative and 'stomachic' given in doses of one to four teaspoons 'in a little peppermint water' (Thomas Andrew: entries in *Domestic Medicine* are alphabetical). Specific remedies that Mrs Gaskell used herself sound more disturbing: she and Meta both in 1860 were 'scarified raw' by mustard plaisters (p.603). More disturbing because of poisonous qualities are Mrs Gaskell's use of aconite and of prussic acid. Aconite or monkshood (Andrew has it first in 8 finely etched and hand-coloured plates of poisonous plants), 'virulent as a poison', says Andrew, though used in the cure and relief of several diseases. Mrs Gaskell followed a process that Andrew describes for tic douloureux, she recommending it also for neuralgia in the form of an ointment – attributed by Andrew to Dr. Turnbull – Mrs Gaskell calls it viratria ointment ('viratria' is unknown to Andrew and the *OED*). Mrs Gaskell was recommended it by her

physician cousin, Henry Holland: a pin's head quantity on flannel rubbed externally on the skin where 'the agonized nerve shoots up'; she also had it rubbed on her temple (pp.250-1). The 'pin's head' suggests the caution necessary in using aconite. Yet more disturbing given its reputation is Mrs Gaskell's reference to prussic acid.

In 1860, suffering from a dreadful headache brought on by thunder, she had needed to lie down and have 'my prussic acid medicine made up' (p.912). Prussic acid, or hydrocyanic acid, is 'one of the most powerful poisons derived from the vegetable kingdom' (Andrew), notorious for its use in detective fiction and the smell of bitter almonds by which even the amateur sleuth can identify it. And yet, says Andrew, 'this most virulent poison, in the hands of a skilful physician, may be the means of snatching many a victim from an untimely grave' (Andrew, under 'hydrocyanic acid'). Mrs Gaskell's headache did not place her on the brink, but Andrew has no mention of its use for headaches, though he sets out possible uses in consumption (T.B.), cholera, and a range of less desperate illnesses, as asthma, whooping cough, hiccups, indigestion and tic douloureux. 'Affections' of the nervous system, under which headaches might be classed, could be treated by prussic acid, but no directions are given in Andrew's *'Domestic Pharmacopeia'*, since he insists it should only be prepared for medical use by a professional. Thunder, as a cause of headache, is well known and one might also note Mrs Gaskell's sensitivity, not excessive surely, to paint smells when Plymouth Grove was being redecorated, to the foul drains of the house, and most noticeably to the depressive effect, experienced particularly in Manchester, of darkness and cloudy skies (p. 745), perhaps an early example, under Manchester smoke, of SAD.

Mrs Gaskell was necessarily concerned about her children's health and we find her pressing Marianne to keep up with her steel (or iron) pills (p.297), often recommended as a strengthening pill in cases of chlorosis (the 'green sickness'), associated with female debility, including flatulence and dyspepsia, at the onset of puberty. The pills, which had iron filings as the active ingredient, were clearly preventative for Marianne, rather than cure. Meta was more of a problem or else we have more evidence from the letters. Besides tonsils and the mustard plaisters already mentioned, her mother made her take aloetic pills (p.518), a laxative made up from aloes (the Barbadoes and the Cape aloes were used only by veterinary surgeons and farriers; the Socotorine aloes for humans). By 1865, Meta was suffering severely from a painful back, which constantly threatened to bring on bouts of hysterical crying (p.741). She was prescribed meat and bitter beer, while in late 1864, at Brighton, warm sea-water douches were tried (p.744).

And so back to mercury treatment, in the domestic resources, whether for mouse, duck, or humans. Mercury was widely used and indeed until late in the nineteenth century was the chief remedy for syphilis – Restoration comedy has numerous 'sly' jokes linking spitting and the disease, since mercury brings on salivation. Indeed,

it was often suggested by later observers (no doubt a mark of their boldness!), of anyone recorded to have taken mercury in any form that syphilis was the reason. So Keats was said to be a sufferer, but while he undoubtedly took mercury in some form, it was used for a range of conditions (see W.J.Bate, *John Keats*, 1963, p.219 & fn, for a brisk refutation of the slur). Nor has anyone suggested Charlotte Brontë was syphilitic, though she declared she had a 'sharp medical discipline to undergo', clearly calomel or the blue pills. This was for 'derangement of the liver' (*Life of Charlotte Brontë*, ed. Easson. 1996. p.398) and various stomach disorders. Calomel was commonly used as a 'corrective' or 'alterative' for stomach and bowels: hence the importance of mercury-based remedies in the domestic pharmacopeia.

What then were calomel and the blue pill? In both cases the active ingredient is based on mercury, as an oxide or chloride, since pure mercury, the liquid metal, could not be taken directly. Calomel, as Isabella Beeton notes in her section on the domestic pharmacopeia, was a 'heavy white powder, without taste, and insoluble in water' (para.2658), administered in small quantities, often combined with other purgative medicaments, such as rhubarb. (How small is a small quantity? Andrew recommended, as an anti-bilious medicine, 3 to 5 grains, small indeed when 680 grains make one ounce.) Blue pills were based on mercury beaten (Andrew admits) with conserve of roses, so that the metal oxidises, and the pill then made up with 'pill mass', a variable non-active ingredient to give the pills solidity. Both calomel and blue pill were regarded as 'alteratives' for stomach and bowel disorders, settling disgestion, with mild laxative effects.

In both forms they were in general domestic use (the nearest modern parallel might be aspirin or paracetamol), often presumably with little understanding of their effects, despite warnings. Andrew cautions against the salivation that might result from too frequent or over-dosing, as with Mrs Gaskell's acquaintance. Blue pills, at hand for mouse or duck, were presumably amongst the remedies for stomach and bowels in the Gaskell household. Which leads back to Anthony Trollope Snr and his headaches. Dr Andrew deals, under Headache, with varieties of the condition, including the Nervous. Nervous headaches arise, he suggests, from a sedentary life, particularly amongst advocates, barristers, clergymen, and maiden ladies. For these classes of people, lack of exercise combined with want of a proper diet, often to dire effect. Andrew's various recommendations, apart from exercise and proper eating, include 'mercurials' – calomel or blue pills. Hence the failed lawyer and failed farmer, Trollope Snr, brooding on his wrongs and his sons' educational short-comings, developed nervous headaches and so had recourse to calomel. In what doses he took it or how frequently is unknown, but he is more than likely to have over-dosed, and in the end, without any real occupation, seeing his unreasonable aspirations for his sons frustrated, without exercise, the effects are likely to have been adverse rather than beneficial.

Endnote: A friend, to whom I mentioned this article, said that his mother in the 1940s used to dose him with calomel pills, for liverishness.

Elizabeth Gaskell and Charles Thurstan Holland – another Liverpool connection

AJ Lerner

Elizabeth Gaskell was a descendant of the Holland family through her mother, Elizabeth (1764-1812). The wide ramifications of the Holland family extended to Liverpool, in the shape of her maternal grandfather Samuel Holland (1734-1816), as has been documented by Christine Lingard.¹ It also encompassed relatives qualified in the medical profession, including her maternal uncle Peter (1766-1855) and, perhaps most notably, his son and Elizabeth Gaskell's cousin Henry (1788-1873), later Sir Henry Holland, 1st Baronet,² from whom she may on occasion have received medical advice, for example for the treatment of headaches with sal volatile.³

In my work as a doctor in Liverpool, with an interest in medical history, I was fascinated to learn of Dr Charles Thurstan Holland (1863-1941), whose portrait by Copthall hangs in the Liverpool Medical Institution (where I currently hold the position of Honorary Librarian). Knowing something of Elizabeth Gaskell,^{4,5} and of her Thurstan Holland relatives, perhaps most notably Edward Thurstan Holland (1836-1884) who married her eldest daughter Marianne (1834-1920), it seemed to me inevitable that Charles Thurstan Holland must be related to the author, and so it has proved to be, albeit the relationship is a distant one.⁶

Their common ancestor would appear to be John Holland of Mobberley (1656-1712/3). He was the father of sons, John and Thomas, both born in 1690 and possibly twins. John Holland (1690-1770) was the father of Samuel Holland, Elizabeth's maternal grandfather. Thomas Holland (1690-1753) initiated a line of Thomas Hollands (born 1725/6, 1760, and 1794), the latter being the Reverend Thomas Crompton Holland (1794-1861), who was the father of William Thomas Holland, the father of Charles Thurstan Holland.⁶ Hence, Charles Thurstan Holland's great-great-great-grandfather was the great-great-uncle of Elizabeth Gaskell.

Charles Thurstan Holland was born in Bridgwater, Somerset, and trained in medicine at University College in London, qualifying in 1888. He became a general practitioner in Liverpool, based in fashionable Princes Street, and also worked as one of the senior assistants to Robert (later Sir Robert) Jones (1857-1933), an orthopaedic surgeon who held a free Sunday clinic in Elson Street. It was here that Thurstan Holland's interest in X-rays, which was to shape his whole subsequent career, first developed.⁷

Robert Jones was consulted about a boy who had shot himself in the hand. When the pellet could not be detected on surgical probing, the possibility of using the

new-fangled X-rays was considered, and the help of the head of the physics department at the University of Liverpool, Oliver Lodge (1851-1940), was solicited.⁸ Thurstan Holland was present when the X-ray was undertaken on 7th February 1896, locating the bullet embedded in the third carpo-metacarpal joint, as subsequently reported in *The Lancet* on 22nd February.⁹ From this beginning, Jones purchased X-ray apparatus and asked Thurstan Holland to operate it, initially from quarters in the basement of the Royal Southern Hospital in Liverpool, moving to the Royal Infirmary in 1904 where Thurstan Holland stayed until his retirement in 1923. In 1896 alone, Thurstan Holland undertook 261 clinical radiological examinations, as well as, on 23rd October 1896, that of a mummy bird. This took a three-minute exposure and Thurstan Holland apparently said that it was 'a relief to have something to examine that would keep still and which was not frightened by our apparatus, the sparks, and so on'. This study effectively initiated the application of radiological techniques to the study of ancient antiquities.

During the First World War Thurstan Holland held the rank of Major in the Royal Army Medical Corps, and was Consultant Radiologist to Western Command. His very first radiological experience proved useful, as he developed a depth finder to assist in the radiological detection of bullets in injured soldiers.

Thurstan Holland had a distinguished career in radiology, publishing over 100 papers in the national and international literature, twice serving as president of the Roentgen Ray Society (1904 and 1916) and then of its successor society, the British Institute of Radiology in 1929. He was President of the first International Congress of Radiology in London in 1925. Some of his radiological apparatus is on display at the Victoria Museum, Brownlow Hill, in Liverpool.

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Victorian Women Novelists, Gossip and Creativity

Brenda McKay

In a paper on Elizabeth Gaskell and Gossip, as yet unpublished but delivered to the Gaskell Society, Elizabeth Williams concludes: 'I could never refute the idea of Mrs Gaskell as a gossip – her letters provide far too much evidence to the contrary' (p10). This is a sentiment with which one readily agrees. But, as Mrs Williams also shows, a love of 'news' and 'stories' (though occasionally malicious) is bound up with the art of story-telling. This art of course requires other ingredients, like accurate research and imaginative reconstruction. Mrs Gaskell's female peers also were much addicted to gossip as, arguably, most creative writers are. On hearing that Tottie Fox was about to marry an unknown man in Italy, Mrs Gaskell wrote to her much-loved friend's father: 'My dear Mr Fox,/ ... *Do be a woman* and give *all possible details*...[:] my, our curiosity CAN'T [wait]... [Y]ou can't write enough'.¹

In this letter Mrs Gaskell concedes her passion for unconstrained, easy chat about persons and social incidents, especially about someone well-known to her – all food for the imagination. She also suggests, half-jokingly, that scandal is a female aberration, and that Mr Fox needs to 'be a woman' to relay very detailed information; Mrs Gaskell here nods playfully to the myth of women being, quite simply, gossips – an attitude quite prevalent among many educated men roughly between 1770 and 1900. This bias implied that education should be closed to women, since whereas intellectual men were 'by nature' philosophers, women would taint philosophy and rigorous thought into back-biting.

Heaven forbid that we should buy into this misogynist myth! After all, the pleasures of gossip are hardly altered by gender or cultural background. Nevertheless, this paper – to be presented in instalments due to lack of space – will show that almost all these accomplished Victorian women writers enjoyed 'talk' (just like their male counterparts): George Eliot, Charlotte Brontë, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Jane Welsh Carlyle and Harriet Martineau: and the last two were certainly the most spiteful. We revere certain writers as icons, and don't like mean comments about them. We shall, however, look at some of these, since bitters are said to be wholesome. And why, we might well ask, did Jane Carlyle think, bizarrely, that Mrs Gaskell was actually a 'dangerous' distorter of information?

Of course each wrote many available details about female (and male) writers, whom they would have seen either as role models, competitors, or irritating imitators. But it must be stressed that all these women were also exemplars of 19th-century earnestness, eager to do good and contribute to the wealth of humanity. So far from matching the myth that 'educated' women debased intellectual discourse, I hope to show that lapses into aggressive tongue-wagging was – at times – a process by which scandal, related eagerly, led to guilt and consequently to re-assessment, and a new engagement with details in an attempt at understanding human action.

Gossip could crystallise into art. Or, occasionally, it led simply to guilt followed by retraction, or quarrelling such as happened when Charlotte Brontë fell out permanently with Harriet Martineau over the latter's public criticisms of *Villette* as (frankly) too obsessively erotic – this despite earlier vows of 'eternal friendship' (*G.L.*, p.96). George Eliot could write pleading letters to friends begging for discretion after indulging in gossip – for instance about Agnes Lewes, her beloved partner George Henry Lewes's legal wife. And typically, Mrs Gaskell wrote after a letter containing racy details about the 'very vain' Effie Gray (who took steps to annul her marriage to Ruskin on the grounds of non-consummation; Ruskin himself 'forgave her many scrapes in Venice'): 'Oh! Mr Forster, if you don't burn my letters as you read them I shall never forgive you!' (*G.L.*, p288). This particular letter – which Elizabeth Williams quotes in detail, and shows to be nuanced with shifts in tone and attempts to be fair, and even sympathises with Effie's difficult situation – nevertheless ends thus: 'She [Effie] really is very close to a charming character; if she had had small pox she should have been so. I'm sure you'll not repeat what I've said...' (ibid). This is a *bon mot* worthy of Thackeray's comment that Becky Sharp would have been a good woman on £10,000 a year. As Mrs Gaskell conceded to a correspondent in March, 1860: 'I still consider you as a perpetual fount of literary gossip; for which I feel rather thirsty, having had none for a long time' (*G.L.*, 604). Naturally Mrs Gaskell was aware of the dire consequences of indiscretion – as she shows in *Wives and Daughters*, when Mrs Gibson is found to have been listening behind the door to her doctor husband's confidential discussion with a patient, and doesn't have the intelligence to quite grasp that she has done wrong by repeating what she had heard.

There were times when gossip could be extremely judgemental, in line with narrow, strict 'Victorian morality'. One might wonder who was behaving *least* ethically: the victim or the gossip? Some artists were deeply wounded by cruel talk; but, as Charlotte Brontë commented in her Preface to the Second Edition of *Jane Eyre* after some poison darts had been shot at her by reviewers, 'Conventionality is not morality. Self-righteousness is not religion, [...] and appearance should not be mistaken for Truth'. Gossip is itself on occasion misused in an attempt to whitewash acts of malicious aggression as in the case of Miss Rigby's notorious review of *Jane Eyre*. Certainly, also, scandal could cement friendships between women, especially when they shared the same prejudices; piquant information also bonded people even when it cut across a wide spectrum of social attitudes. Awareness that gossip could stereotype – and only told one version of a story, which in itself was impossibly crude and condemnatory – certainly was an element that sparked creativity in these artists. Bare facts that were rigid and conformist were in fact insufficient to give a rounded picture. Creative thinking and empathy were needed to delineate the whole anecdote comprehensively.

Like Shakespeare himself, many of these women writers also, of course, utilized older histories, or tales in current circulation. That most stately of novels, *Sylvia's Lovers* (1863), was a combination of topographical study, research, interviews,

gossip, and a myth-making project, all going back in historical time, and transmuted by the novelist's fecund imagination into a fine work of art. The narrator intimates as much about the complexity of narrative in the concluding Chapter, 45: '[T]he memory of man fades away. A few old people still tell you the tradition of the man who died in a cottage somewhere about this spot, – died of starvation while his wife lived in hard-hearted plenty not two stones-throw away. This is the form in which popular feeling, and ignorance of the real facts, have moulded the story. Not long since a lady went to the Public Baths ..., and had some talk with the bathing woman; and, as it chanced, the conversation fell on Philip Hepburn and the legend of his fate'.

"I knew an old man when I was a girl," said the bathing lady, "as could niver bide to hear the wife blamed... [H]e used to say as it were not fit for me to be judging; that she had her own sore trial, as well as Hepburn hisself."

To what extent this itinerant narrator is Mrs Gaskell herself, and how factual such pictures are, we can never be certain; they may be disingenuous inventions of the author's, to give her story verisimilitude. What Mrs Gaskell would definitely have heard on her visit to Whitby were details about the 1793 riots in that town – a public outburst of rage at the tragedies caused to families by the harsh practices of the Press-gang. As a consequence, an old man of 70, William Atkinson, was hanged by judicial process at York castle – an event which Gaskell used in *Sylvia's Lovers*. Mrs Gaskell in fact lodged with old Atkinson's descendants while in Whitby. The daughters of the family remembered 'with distinctness their grandmother, Mrs Huntrods,... being closeted day after day with Mrs Gaskell at 1 Abbey Terrace', for the novelist to ascertain all she could about the affair, so certainly some elements of these chats were put into the story: Mrs Gaskell's gregariousness and ability to be class-mobile benefited her greatly in such encounters.² Mrs Gaskell also applied to the Admiralty for accurate information about attacks on the Press-gang's headquarters and did research in the British Museum. She also chatted to a well-known Whitby character, 'Fat old Fish Jane' (ibid). This mixture of gossip, painstaking research, the author's private, unknown and *personal* experiences, and imagination tells us something about the creative process; and the *modus operandi* used here was certainly also utilized for research into Charlotte Brontë's *Life*. Of *Sylvia's Lovers* George Eliot wrote that she hoped it was 'finding a just appreciation. It seems to me of a very high quality, both in feeling and execution'.³

A similar reinterpretation from local narrative, embroidered by the imagination from local myth, came to George Eliot as inspiration for her 'difficult' novel, *Romola* (1863). This historical romance, set in late 15th-century Florence, has a particularly exceptional, even remarkable character, Eliot's 'Macchiavel', Tito Melema, who brings the novel into great vividness whenever he appears. Tito's role in the book is that of a beautiful, amiable young man's psychology – his slow descent into corruption and evil, until he inflicts terrible betrayals on his adoptive

father and everyone else he comes into contact with. The germ of his story derived from a narrative of 'noble vengeance' told to Eliot by an old German general, which she recorded in her Journal:

A man of wealth in Rome adopted a poor boy he had found in the street. This boy turned out a great villain and having previously entered the church managed by a series of arts to possess himself of a legal title to his benefactor's property, and finally ordered him to quit his own house, telling him he was no longer master. The outraged man killed the villain on the spot. He was imprisoned, tried, and condemned for murder. When in prison he refused to have a confessor. He said, "I wish to go to Hell, for he is there, and I want to follow out my revenge."⁴

The novel itself ends where the adoptive son, having been stalked by his betrayed and abandoned father for years, is captured by the old man near the river. Exhausted by age and suffering and intense excitement, the old man himself dies after strangling his son. The two are found dead, inseparable, with the father's hands still clutching his son's throat and neck. In her Journal Eliot wrote: 'Killed Tito in great excitement!'⁵ The Nemesis is here completed.

About 6 years earlier, Mrs Gaskell had been profoundly moved by her reading of Eliot's *Scenes of Clerical Life* (1857) and *Adam Bede* (1859). She experienced disquiet at the news, after much ramification of rumour, that the writer was actually the 'notorious' Marian Evans, about whom there was considerable scandal (as 'a translator of atheistic books from German, the open lover of the already-married George Henry Lewes, and the erstwhile Editor of the radical *Westminster Review*'). But Mrs Gaskell ultimately re-assessed her initial, rather hostile views on Eliot; and, agog for information, wrote to George Smith, lamenting the family's 'isolation from the usual sources of gos[sip]':

Curiosity comes before friendship ... send us PLEASE a long account of what she [George Eliot] is like &c &c &c &c, – eyes nose mouth, dress &c for facts, and then – if you would – your impression of her, – which we won't tell anybody ... Oh! Do please comply with this humble request (G.L., 586-7).

To Eliot, Mrs Gaskell had written a few admiring letters, finally writing:

Since I have heard, from authority, that you are the author of [*Clerical Scenes* and *Adam Bede*], I have read them again; and I must, once more, tell you how earnestly fully, and humbly I admire them. I never read anything so complete, and beautiful in fiction, in my whole life before. I said 'humbly'... because I remembered Dr Johnson's words (G.L., 592).

Dr Johnson's words had been addressed to Hannah More, a writer whose

unremitting, fulsome flattery provoked him: 'Dearest lady, consider what your flattery is worth, before you bestow it so freely.'⁶

Though perhaps writing, in part, tongue-in-cheek to Eliot, Mrs Gaskell still self-effacingly places herself, metaphorically, at the feet of a woman she considered a literary giant. This is too modest. As Barbara Hardy has justly asserted, '*North and South*, *Cousin Phillis*, and *Wives and Daughters* played a part in the making of *Middlemarch*, and stand comparison with it'.⁷ Mrs Gaskell added that she rated Eliot's novella, *Janet's Repentance*, above all – a work of fiction somewhat controversial when it first appeared. In some respects based closely on knowledge of and gossip about people Eliot knew in her youth, it is about a wife-beating, drunken lawyer, and his noble wife's desperate efforts to overcome her own alcoholism – a theme that alarmed Eliot's publisher, Blackwood. The redoubtable Harriet Martineau was pleased to proclaim this work as pervaded with 'a moral squalor as bad as Dickens's ugliness'.

Those familiar with the large-hearted tolerance of Eliot's novels might be surprised at her occasional severity of judgement and mordant wit when turning to her fine journalism, written mostly before she embarked on fiction-writing. Also, the letters written before the self-conscious days of her fame, but after her abandonment of the Calvinist Evangelicalism which blighted her youth, are often extremely lively. To a correspondent she wrote about the novelist, playwright, abolitionist and religious fanatic, Hannah More (who had annoyed Dr Johnson):

I am glad you detest Mrs Hannah More's letters. I like neither her letters nor her books, nor her character. She was that most disagreeable of monsters, a blue-stocking – a monster that can only exist in a miserable state of society, in which a woman with but a smattering of learning or philosophy is classed along with singing mice and card-playing pigs' (G.E.L., 1, 245).

The point made – delineated with more sophistication in her later essay, 'Silly Novels by Lady Novelists' – is that incompetent writings by badly-taught women increased prejudice against female education as well as against women as artists, who in consequence tended to be judged 'incapable by nature' and not quite 'respectable'; worse, 'to have written well – for a woman'. Initially resentful of Calvinist writers like More, who had adversely influenced her when young, Eliot had come to enjoy 'the bracing air of independence', once liberated from being 'chained to the wretched giant's bed of dogma' on which her soul 'had been racked...' (G.E.L., 1, 125, 162). The freed, still youthful Eliot tended to react angrily toward some authors of an extreme religious bent, though she was to gain poise and objectivity after a time.

An excellent and denunciatory article which provoked some talk was written by Eliot in January, 1857, on the 18th-century poet Edward Young, much of whose verse she, as a pious girl, had learnt by heart. We might now call it *tabloidesque* because

of its sensationalist opening, followed by dramatic re-assessment of Young. The imagery is always powerful, and the piece is characterized by considerable depth. It is part of the controversy over religion and agnosticism typical of its time, which preoccupied the Victorians as much as sex has done in our own age, and was a species of gossip despite its finished elegance. It would have interested Mrs Gaskell, who as a Unitarian was tolerant of dissent of various kinds, and she noted that Eliot was the translator of Strauss.

Young's belief that decency ends with the abandonment of religious belief ('virtue with immortality expires') was an idea that infuriated Eliot. She writes: 'If it were not for the prospect of immortality, he [Young] considers, it would be wise and agreeable to be indecent, or to murder one's father; and it would be extremely irrational in any man not to be a knave'.⁸ This article reconsiders, in a spirit of controlled rage, his character: 'an unmistakable poet' with 'a real spark of promethean fire' (*ibid*, 338) – who sees religion as a stepping-stone for worldly ambition: he feels 'something more than private disgust if his meritorious efforts in directing men's attention to another world are not rewarded by preferment in this'; he clothes 'his astronomical religion and his charnel-house morality in lasting verse, which will stand, like a Juggernaut of gold and jewels, at once magnificent and repulsive' (338); he 'believes in cambric bands and silk stockings as characteristic attire for "an ornament of religion and virtue"' (*ibid*). Boswell had thought Young's *Night Thoughts* 'a mass of the grandest poetry human genius has ever produced' (cited in *ibid*, 335); Eliot considered it vicious rhetoric, 'a clay compounded chiefly of the worldling and the rhetorician' – written by a known rake but, exceptionally, 'a pious and moralizing rake' (*E*, 340). The critique of this mixture of the 'sycophant and the psalmist' is interesting alike for its astute analysis of the dark, self-betraying, *unconscious* subtexts in his poetry and, rather unusually for its time, it's a plea for the humane treatment of animals, whom Young refers to superciliously as 'the brutes'. It is a precursor of the self-deceived men in Eliot's fiction whose religious fervour cloaks unscrupulous self-interest. It also anticipates the delightful depictions of 'animals enjoying life' characteristic of the later fiction. According to J.W. Mackail, Eliot's 'able and acrid' essay 'dealt what was for a time a fatal blow to [Young's] reputation' (cited in *ibid*, 335).

On a more mundane level, Eliot had a strong aversion to royalty, and when she mentioned kings and queens it was in a tone of ridicule: Victoria was 'our little humbug of a queen' and George I was simply a 'royal hog', and she is scathing about Young's 'lunatic flattery of George ... , attributing that royal hog's late escape from a storm at sea to the miraculous influence of his grand and virtuous soul...' [*E*, 344]. 'Certainly our decayed monarchs should be pensioned off; we should have a hospital for them, or a sort of Zoological Garden, where these worn-out humbugs may be preserved. It is but justice that we should keep them, since we have spoiled them for any honest trade. Let them sit on soft cushions and have their dinner regularly' (*GEL*, 1, 252-6). Such sentiments were unlikely to inspire high art,

although some rather cruel fun is had at the expense of the invading French King's feet in *Romola*, on both of which he had 6 toes instead of 5, and his soldiers had to wear misshapen shoes and thus run around very clumsily during the 1496 invasion of Florence, to keep the King in countenance, until his curious abandonment of his role as 'the new Charlemagne' and his about-turn back to France. The parallel with Louis Napoleon, described at the opening of 'Brother Jacob' as an 'idiot', is clear. Mrs Gaskell, by contrast, was neutral about royalty.

Thus it can be shown that idle gossip didn't prevent women from 'considering serious deliberations'. They could transmute tales and scandal into fine writing. They certainly, also, acted and wrote generously on behalf of others most of the time. And, via chatter, a little blood-letting was very likely essential to the corporate body's health.

[To be continued. Next time we shall consider, amongst other things, why Jane Carlyle so disliked Mrs Gaskell – why she'd write: '[I] can't usually *be at the trouble* to hate people ..., but... it was with a sensation wonderfully like pleasure, that I heard [of]... a prosecution commenced against Mrs Gaskell [by Lydia Robinson]'.]

Notes:

1. J.A.V. Chapple & Arthur Pollard (Eds.), *Letters of Mrs Gaskell*, p.540; emphasis added. Further references to be noted in text as G.L.
2. I am indebted to the late John Geoffrey Sharps for this information. See also *Mrs Gaskell's Observation and Invention* (London: Linden Press, 1970), 373-8.
3. Gordon S. Haight (Ed), *Letters of George Eliot* (London: Yale U.P., 1954-78), 11 vols, VI, 79. Referred to in the text as G.E.L.
4. Cited in Gordon S.Haight, *George Eliot: A Biography* [1968] (Middlesex: Penguin, 1985), 352.
5. *Ibid*, 365.
6. James Boswell, *Life of Dr Johnson* [1791] (O.U.P., 1980), 1328.
7. Barbara Hardy, 'Elizabeth Gaskell and George Eliot', *Gaskell Society Newsletter*, 55, 2013, p. 16.
8. 'Worldliness and Other-Worldliness: the Poet Young' in Thomas Pinney (Ed.), *Essays of George Eliot* (Columbia U. P., 1963), 338. Referenced as E in the text

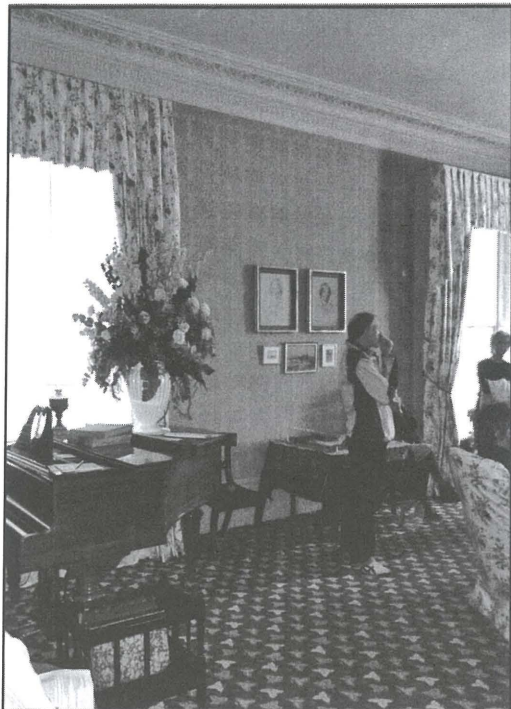
The Gaskell Broadwood Piano of 1853

Tim Austin

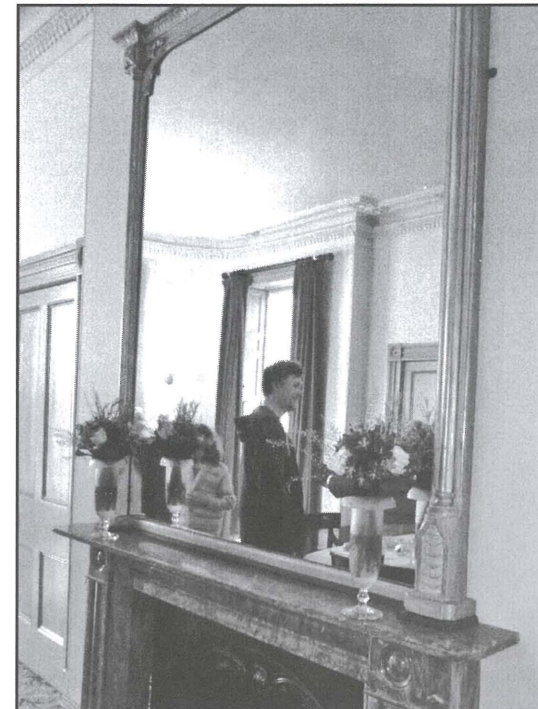
On 22 November 1852 Elizabeth Gaskell wrote to her eldest daughter Marianne, 'Polly':

My dearest Polly,
...we are going to get a piano at Broadwood's. Who are we
to get to choose it? ...

84 Plymouth Grove in 2014



The drawing room

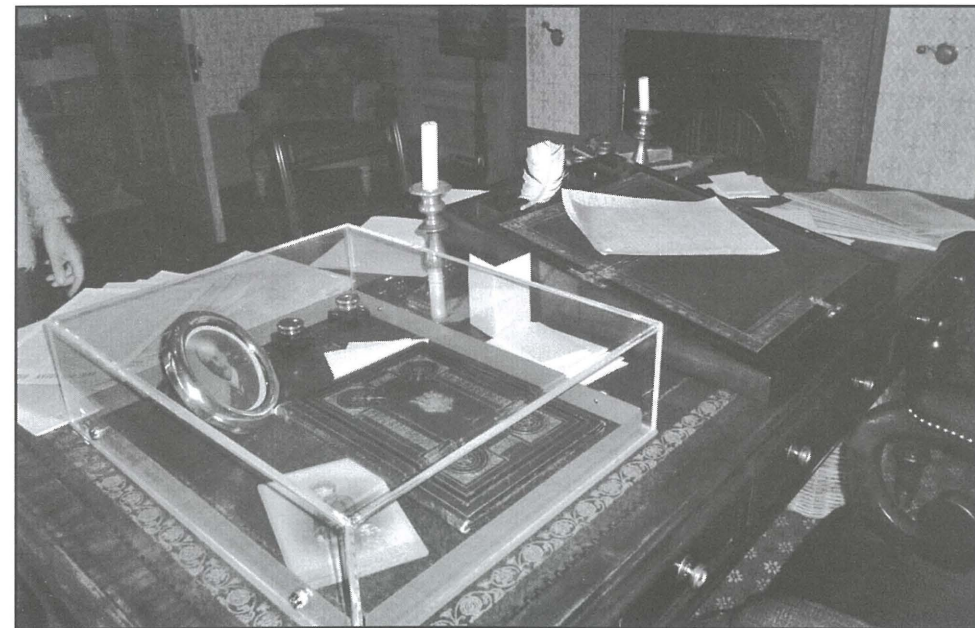


Through the
dining room mirror

A corner of the drawing room



Mr Gaskell's Study



Later, at the end, she writes: '... Papa wishes Mr Bennett wd choose our piano, but as your Uncle Langshaw is to have the trade reduction of price, he might not like to do it ...'

This letter of Elizabeth sets off the order of the Broadwood piano (Boudoir Grand) which, based on the company records, was made soon after. The account record of the trade buyer shows an order entry for 3 January 1853, with the main payment being made on 5 February.

J. & S. Langshaw High St. Lancaster	
1853 Jan 3	Alfred Gaskell cash paid to Broadwood's £84 10s
1854 Feb 5	By Cash £22
Total £106 10s	

Account record

The customer is given as the Revd W Gaskell and the cost to the Gaskells was 110 guineas with an extra £2 10s for a case, with the trade buyer receiving a commission of about 28%, giving an overall income to Broadwood's of £84 10s.

The trade buyer was indeed 'Uncle' Langshaw, James Pearson Langshaw, of Lancaster, then a surgeon, but who was also an organist, and had been an organist at the Lancaster Priory Church, like his father John and grandfather John before him (overall from 1772-1835). The two Johns had been commercial 'friends' of Broadwood's for some time, possibly initially personally when the first John had lived and worked in London from c1745 to 1772, and then later when his son John had trained there from 1778 to 1784. The first surviving record of Langshaw business is on 4 October 1784. The Langshaw account was Broadwood's first dedicated piano business conducted through an individual organist musician outside London (*country friend*). (John Broadwood had joined Burkat Shudi as a journeyman in 1761, becoming a partner in 1771 as 'Shudi & Broadwood'. The firm became 'John Broadwood & Son' in 1795 and 'John Broadwood & Sons' in 1808).

Elizabeth and William were friends with Pearson through his wife Emily Sharpe who was a childhood and long-term friend of Elizabeth from their Knutsford days, and still in the 1850s a regular correspondent. Emily and Elizabeth – by different family branches – were 'nieces' of Dr Peter Holland. Their children were also friends and they all met up from time to time at Manchester, Lancaster and Silverdale. Emily stayed at Plymouth Grove, for example, in April 1851.

Marianne and her family in Worcestershire

Jean Alston

On 20-22 May, 2014, twenty four members and friends of the Gaskell Society visited the areas of Alfrick and Avenbury near Bromyard, where Marianne and her three grown-up children had lived. The details of this visit are reported in The Gaskell Society Newsletter Number 58. Although we were shown a record of Marianne's burial at Alfrick, there was no apparent evidence of the grave. Indeed, most of the graves that remained had little or no legible lettering.

Following the visit, on a morning in August, Mr Michael Hood, Churchwarden, telephoned me to say that the grave had been found. After our visit, Mr David Fowler, Editor of the Parish Magazine had written a report and stated that there was no evidence of Marianne's grave. Mrs Joyce Cooper, David's neighbour, contacted him to say that her mother had shown her the grave and that she was able to locate it. The grave was, in fact, next to the porch where we had all been standing but was obscured by ivy, valerian and other growth, as well as the script being obscured by lichen.

On 18 September 2014, accompanied by Hugh Clow an able photographer, I once again visited Alfrick Church. We were met by Michael and Bridget Hood, David Fowler and Joyce Cooper who had helped to locate the grave. Joyce also possessed several parish magazines which had records of Marianne and her family's involvement in the area. With enlargement and greater contrast of photographs, the lettering on the grave is deciphered as follows:

To the memory of Marianne widow of E Thurstan Holland of Wimbledon and daughter of Rev Wm and Mrs Gaskell of Manchester who died at Alfrick Court on September 17 1920 aged 86.

Thine eyes shall see the king in his heaven

(The Gaskell Society Committee has asked permission to place a commemorative plaque next to the grave, so that the record of Marianne's death will not be lost to future generations.)

The Parish Magazines from the 1890s revealed much further information. They reported that Marianne, William, Florence and Bryan had lived at Grove Hill, Suckley prior to the move to Birchfield, Bromyard and that they were very active and appreciated in the parish.

Christmas 1893 is recorded in the January 1894 magazine as follows:

A very pleasant evening was spent at Suckley School Room on Christmas Day. Mrs Holland kindly presided at the pianoforte and under her able direction her Bible Class sang a number of carols in a very spirited manner, while Mr and

Miss Holland assisted, the first in playing a violin solo and the second in joining in several songs ... The Suckley Brass Band performed several pieces.

William Edward was living at Grove Hill, Suckley when he married Florence Evelyn Blanche Isdell on Wednesday 21 August 1895. There is evidence that the bride was the sister of one of his college friends.

The Parish Magazine records as follows:

... members of the Suckley Cricket Club presented the captain, Mr William E. Holland, Grove Hill, with an electro-plated stand, four cups and spoons and a toast rack.

Hearty cheers were given for Mr Holland and his bride.

The family was to leave Grove Hill in September 1895. The Rector, R. N. Kane, stated the following:

I am very sorry to have to announce that Mrs Thurstan Holland with her family are leaving Suckley at the end of the present month. They will not remove very far off, their future residence being in the neighbourhood of Bromyard, but not the less shall we miss their kind co-operation in all matters for the good of the Parish. Among these we may especially mention the Mothers' Meeting at Bachelor's Bridge, the Bible Class at Grove Hill on Sunday evenings during the winter months, and the Children's Services at the Schoolroom. Many in the Parish have also experienced very great kindness from Mrs Holland and her family in many other ways and I am certain that I am only expressing the feeling of Suckley generally when I say how much we shall all miss them ...

Marianne did not abandon Suckley. On December 30th 1995, although living at Birchfield, Bromyard, she superintended the production of two plays *Silent Woman* and *The Area Belle* and acted as prompt on the evening.

The 1901 Census records Marianne, Florence and Bryan living at Birchfield, Avenbury near Bromyard and William and his wife living at Froome Bank in Bromyard town. However, by 1902, Marianne, Florence and Bryan are recorded through the Parish Magazines to be well established at Alfrick Court. (Alfrick Court is approximately three miles from Grove Hill, Suckley.) In August 1902, at the celebration for the Coronation of Edward VII, Mrs Holland, of Alfrick Court gave ready consent for use of the granary, where there was '... a dinner for men, a meat tea for women and tea for children'. In 1903, Mrs Holland gave a donation of one guinea to the Clothing Club.

In 1905, before Holy Communion in Alfrick Church, a new oak reredos carved by Mr William Holland, a gift of Mrs Thurstan Holland and new altar rails, were dedicated by Rev. L. A. Fisher. The reredos and altar rails were admired during the visit of the Gaskell group in May 2014. However, we were not aware that the splendid carving had been carried out by Elizabeth Gaskell's grandson.

December 26, 1905 'Children at Alfrick School were entertained to tea by Mrs Holland. After tea each child was given a dip in the bran tub for excellent toys and ornaments given by Mr Bryan Holland. A happy afternoon and three cheers were given to Mrs Holland and Mr Bryan Holland.'

December 28, 1905 'Two concerts were given for wiping off the £5 debt incurred in furnishing the club room. Amongst those who gave assistance were Mrs Thurstan Holland and the Misses Holland.' (It is likely that, as well as Florence, the other Miss Holland was William's daughter Margaret (alias Daisy).

In 1909 the 'First Garden Fete was held at Alfrick Court. Miss Holland Secretary (Florence?) Amongst the stall holders, Mrs Thurstan Holland, Mr and Mrs W. Holland and Miss Daisy Holland.' (David Fowler, who is currently assisting us, suggests that the 1909 Garden Fete was the beginning of what is now Alfrick Show and which in 2014 attracted 4,000 visitors.)

Also recorded by the Rector R. H. Kane, 1910 'Mrs Thurstan Holland has become the Ruri-Decanal for the Deanery of Powyke.'

Records show that Marianne died whilst living at Alfrick Court and that she was buried at Alfrick St Mary Magdalene Church. In her will, she left £14,206/4/6d. Probate to her two sons, William and Bryan and to Francis Clayton Forde Esq.

In 1921, after Marianne's death, Bryan and Florence purchased Harrow Cottage, a house built in 1851 as a lodging house for visitors to the area. The views from this western side of the Malvern Hills are extensive and look out across the county of Herefordshire. The address is now 223 West Malvern Road, Malvern.

1927 18 May William Edward died whilst living at 17 Burghley Road, Wimbledon, leaving £15,734/15/7d

1933 20 January Bryan Thurstan Holland died, whilst living at Harrow Cottage, leaving £15,577/18/5d

1942 15 June Florence Evelyn Holland died, also at Harrow Cottage, aged 69, leaving £11,366/11/1d

I am informed that there is 'a small handful' of people living in West Malvern who remember Miss Holland.

There is the beginning of a literary trail in Malvern and surrounding area. The people concerned look forward to adding reference to Elizabeth Gaskell and her family. Boughton House (Worcester Golf and Country Club) was, of course, the home of Elizabeth Gaskell's cousin Charlotte; Elizabeth and her children visited Boughton House quite frequently and part of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was written there.

Italy in the Footsteps of Elizabeth Gaskell

Christine Bhatt

Steps of many kinds there were in abundance for the hardy group of Gaskellians who travelled to the hill towns of Tuscany and Umbria in September 2014; but, if Elizabeth had Mr Charles Perkins (vide letter 541a), we had Anthony Cole. Not only did Anthony shepherd us with firm yet kind efficiency through a packed schedule, but he kept us well supplied with a variety of sweets, including some delicious chocolate 'Bacios' from Perugia, each containing a 'bon mot', like an Italian fortune cookie.

Thanks to Christine Lingard, we all had a copy of the route from Rome to Siena, which William had written out for the family and Christine had transcribed (vide Newsletter Spring 2014 'To Tuscany with Murray'). Elizabeth's itinerary was even more exhausting than our own, though we cannot know in detail everything that she and her daughters saw. We do know she possessed a copy of Charles Eliot Norton's *Notes of Travel and Study in Italy*, which contains quite a long piece on Orvieto, our last port of call. Gaskell's copy of Murray's handbook has marks in the margin of several pages, which may possibly have indicated artists whom Elizabeth was keen to see and include the names of Sodoma, Signorelli, Beccafumi and Pinturicchio. It is impossible, however, to know for certain when these marks were made and by whom.

Including Anthony, 18 of us gathered at Rome airport to take the coach to our base in Assisi. The first part of our journey was via the autostrada, not the old, slow road, which Elizabeth would have taken. We travelled north along the Tiber valley, past Terni, mentioned by William and where St Valentine is buried, then up the mountainside into Umbria, the green heart of Italy. We passed fields of sunflowers, their black heads now drooping in the early autumn sunshine; would Elizabeth have seen them in their bright brilliance earlier in the year, when she was here? She would probably not have stayed long enough to see the hedges of pyracantha with their bright red leaves and yellow berries... and most certainly not the fields of solar panels!

Though small, our group was split, in order to be accommodated in two of the modest hotels of Assisi, but we took our meals together in the large refectory-style dining room of Hotel La Rocca. The food was tasty and abundant, reflecting the fact that we were in Italy (lots of pasta), near Trevi, (a centre of olive oil production) and Norcia, (famous for salami). We needed such hearty sustenance in order to be ready to set off each morning at 8.00 or 8.30am into the surrounding regions.

The second day of our visit we explored Perugia, where William recommended spending a day at least. Regrettably, we had only half a day, since in the afternoon we took a local bus from Assisi to the nearby Basilica of Saint Mary of the Angels, mentioned by Elizabeth, where St Francis and his friends first lived for a time.

Our very efficient guide to Perugia, Rita, enabled us to make the most of our short visit: we marvelled at the deep Etruscan well, the Etruscan gateway, the wonderful stone fountain, surrounded by sculptures depicting seasonal activities throughout the year and the Piazza Italia where a fine sculpture of Vittorio Emanuele II looked down on us from horseback. We even found time for a brief visit to the Galleria Nazionale dell'Umbria, where one of the richest collections in Italy is housed. We made a point of viewing Duccio di Buoninsegna's 'Madonna and Child', Duccio being a favourite of Elizabeth's (vide Newsletter Spring 2014, 'To Tuscany with Murray').

Anthony had arranged a particular treat for us in the evening. A short walk brought us to the home of Roy Grant, a retired Englishman, living in Assisi, whose interests are medieval history and art. In his wonderful grotto of a home, built into the city walls, we listened to his telling of the story of St Francis, with a glass of wine in hand and exotic canapés on the table. Then we were allowed to examine the artefacts and paintings cramming his small dwelling. Many were suitably 'pre-Raphaelite', including a simple wooden crucifix, dating from 12th century.

On our way to Siena on the third day, we travelled along roads bordered by lavender and rosemary, passing by Lake Trasimeno, the fourth largest in Italy. Siena is one of many well-defended hill forts built by the Etruscans. Our enthusiastic guide to Siena, Maria Alberta Cambi, was a native of the city and keen to show us as much as possible. We learnt that Siena was famous for its banking families. We admired the vast and beautiful square, the Piazza del Campo, where the Palio takes place twice a year. Siena was a republic from the late eleventh century until 1555 and governed by the leaders of nine companies, each of whom had their own symbols. Everywhere one could see the flags and symbols of these companies, including the rhinoceros, porcupine and eagle, and there is still great rivalry between them. Maria took us to the Church of San Domenico, which holds the relics of St Catherine. We saw the fresco by the Siennese artist Francesco Vanni, who had met St Catherine around 1380. Was this the painting recommended by William? We also saw a painting of the Virgin and Child by Matteo di Sienna, dating from 1479. Maria explained that his work showed the first signs of a more natural style. Matteo is also mentioned by William. Our next stop was the Duomo, where we were very fortunate to find the beautiful marble floor uncovered. It is only open to view for two months of the year, since the building is very much in use as a church for the rest of the year. The magnificent carved pulpit, supported by lions, is by the same Nicola Pisano who carved the Great Fountain in Perugia in 1278, which we had already seen.

We could not, however, view the Maesta nor the stained glass window by Duccio, which Elizabeth would surely have seen, as they have now been moved to a museum. We did see the music books or 'choir books', large enough to be seen by many singers in the choir at once, and the frescoes by Pinturicchio. At the end of a very full day, we were somewhat revived by an almond 'dolce Toscana', distributed by Anthony in the coach on our way back.

After breakfast the next day, we walked through Assisi to the Basilica of Saint Francis, where one of the friars, our wonderful American guide, Michael, pointed out the main features of the lower and upper basilicas. The lower church was completed in 1230 and its side walls were frescoed in about 1270 by the so-called Master of St Francis. It was built in the Romanesque style and richly decorated with pictures or designs covering every inch. It was hard to take it all in, but Michael drew our attention to the famous picture of the Madonna and Child with St Francis standing to one side, by Cimabue. Climbing from the lower into the upper basilica with its soaring roof, high Gothic windows and a rose window facing almost due east to let in more light, we could imagine the wonder early pilgrims must have felt. After such spiritual delights, we were free to spend the rest of the morning wandering around Assisi to find excellent shops selling pastry, leather goods, wild boar salami and items made from olive wood, or to visit other churches or museums in the town.

After lunch our coach drove us to the church of Rivortorto, built over the site where St Francis first tried to settle. Nearby was the beautifully kept Commonwealth War Cemetery, its graves separated by marguerites in full bloom, which were attracting delicate blue butterflies. Elizabeth Gaskell's coach would have followed this, the main road in her time.

We travelled us on to Spello, one of the smaller towns, where we were to visit the church of Saint Maria Maggiore to view the recently restored fresco cycle of 1501 by Pinturicchio. There was an interesting floor in the chapel, laid with tiles from Deruta, but an unusually large throng of visitors meant we had little time to take it all in.

In the evening, we were treated to a pizza supper at the Pizzeria Il Duomo in Assisi, where there seemed to be an inordinate amount of cream on the desserts. Some of us may well also remember the deep fried olives.

On Wednesday, our coach took us to the ancient Tuscan city of Cortona, one of the most important city states of the Etruscans. Important for us too, as it was the home of Luca Signorelli, whom we know the Gaskells admired. Our guide, Lisa Bidini, took us first to the church of St Margaret, where the body of the saint in her funeral sarcophagus was on display. The solemnity of the occasion was broken by the appearance of a small dog running into the church and watering the altar flowers, before running out again, obviously completely at home. Our final visit was to the Diocesan museum where we saw the painting of the Deposition by Signorelli and a beautiful Annunciation by Fra Angelico.

Our planned ferry trip to Isola Maggiore on Lake Trasimeno was abandoned since it had begun to rain in the afternoon. This gave us further opportunity to explore Assisi or time to prepare for our evening entertainment. After dinner, the group presented Anthony with a card and a leather document case, with our thanks for a wonderful tour of this beautiful region. Some of us then contributed readings, mostly

with an Italian theme. Janet Kennerley began with an appropriate extract from *A Dark Night's Work*, relating to the heroine's visit to Rome. Carolyn Lambert gave us a very enticing preview of her new book on the meanings of home for Elizabeth Gaskell. Gwen Clarke had already read the book and heartily recommended it. Gerard McCreesh amused us with three of his own poems and Christine Bhatt recited Wordsworth's poem 'On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic'. Jacqueline Tucker quoted the beginning of *Where Angels Fear to Tread* (Cortona is mentioned here). Finally Helen Shay recited her own expressive and lyrical poem dedicated to 'dear Scheherazade'.

Our final day dawned and we had yet to see the Duomo of Orvieto. 'With the exception of the Cathedral of Siena, there is no church in Italy in which the Italian Gothic appears in freer development of beauty than in this' (*Notes of Travel and Study in Italy* by Charles Eliot Norton). Our guide to the Duomo was Chiara Furiani, who explained the story of the miracle of Corpus Christi in 1263, which led to the building of the first structure in 1290. We had come to see the Cappella di San Brizio, the chapel which Fra Angelico was commissioned to decorate. In 1447 he had completed two of the eight sections of the vault, he was then summoned to Rome and did not return to Orvieto. In 1490, Luca Signorelli was called in to complete the work. Chiara pointed out to us two figures in black in the frescoes, depicting Fra Angelico and Signorelli. Artists were, for the first time, beginning to include themselves in their work.



Gaskell Society members in front of the Orvieto Cathedral, Umbria

After our visit to the Duomo, we enjoyed a convivial lunch, sitting under large umbrellas, fortunately, as there was a sudden heavy shower before the meal had ended. This gave us a good excuse to linger over our pork and truffles or shrimps and calamari, washed down with fine Orvietan white wine.

On our return to Rome airport, while trying to find the centre of Ronciglione so that we could follow Elizabeth's route more closely, our helpful coach driver found himself well and truly stuck. He had to reverse uphill, guided by two local men. We held up the traffic for some time, though no-one seemed to mind. ECG would have approved!

North and South: an Experience

Helen Shay

Please forgive the informal and personal tone of this, my first article for the Newsletter. (For the next Newsletter, I have been asked to write upon the legal situation regarding copyright in the nineteenth century, for which I shall don my lawyer's hat and – given the nature of the topic – am likely to be apologising instead for being over-turgid.)

The impetus for offering this account arose from conversations during last autumn's excellent tour 'In the Footsteps of Mrs Gaskell' to Assisi, when it was suggested that it might be of interest to members. I have been in the Society for nearly twenty years (having a lifetime love of Elizabeth Gaskell's work, being originally a student of Alan Shelston at Manchester University when I took English as my first degree and fell in love with her writing). It therefore seemed natural to offer to present an event for York's inaugural 'Festival of Ideas' in 2013 – which happened to be on the theme of 'North and South' – based on Mrs Gaskell's book which ultimately took that title and which has always been my favourite novel. It is with as much delight that I now recount the experience – a sheer labour of love – to members.

The initial approach for this came through the University of York, where I currently work, via its Centre for Lifelong Learning, with whom I teach some drama-writing and who are keen to see their tutors represented in the Festival. In 2014 for the 'Order and Chaos' theme, I presented an evening featuring women's WW1 poetry. The Festival is a mixture of renowned speakers and smaller events, such as my own. At the 2013 Festival our President, Dr Shirley Foster, was amongst the former, alongside Heidi Thomas who dramatized *Cranford* for the recent TV series, and it was good to see the work of Elizabeth Gaskell featuring so prominently.

Because I have worked with several local actors around York, I knew that there was a pool of very able readers available and also a talented director, with whom I

had worked before. Therefore I decided to present a dramatized 'nutshell' version of *North and South*. Whilst I do not profess to be an Andrew Davies, it was hard to resist the temptation of an opportunity to work with Mrs Gaskell's wonderful text, which has in any event an insuppressible dramatic quality of its own, especially in her dialogue. Unfortunately Richard Armitage was unavailable to reprise his role as John Thornton, but I knew I would be well-served by my group of local actors.

I therefore set about telling the basic story of the book through several pivotal scenes, which especially illuminated the theme. One which had to be included was Margaret Hale's initial meeting with John Thornton and details such as the concern over the wallpaper at the family's new home in Milton Northern, which Gaskell uses so tellingly to convey character and environment. Similarly the tense first meeting with Mrs Thornton and the climactic scene at the mill during the strike had to be featured, along with other major incidents. I connected each scene read by the actors with interlinking narrative which I delivered in order to give an overview and also to touch upon relevant biographical links to Elizabeth Gaskell, until we reached the final happy ending, when Margaret's love for John can no longer be held back.

One of the most difficult aspects in the process of scripting this event was deciding on elements from the novel which had to be left out, when they are all deserving of dramatic exploration. However, 'Poor Frederick' had to be kept to one side, along with his troubles during his naval career, due to time constraints. I was loathe to do so, as it's a fascinating part of the novel and the theme of the lost brother seems so essential to the author. Having read with great interest and enjoyment recently Carolyn Lambert's *The Meanings of Home in Elizabeth Gaskell's Fiction*, I have come to realise even more the importance of this theme. However, as the event was to span no more than two hours, it was a case of needs must.

I was also keen to add an addendum to the presentation in the form of a completely new scene written by me, which looked at how a modern-day Margaret Hale and John Thornton might meet. In this, my own Margaret was transformed into a social work student from Hampshire, studying at a northern university, who goes on placement and meets her supervisor, the more older and more experienced John Thornton – a tough northerner who is a little cynical and taken aback at her idealism and outspoken vigour. This scene was used to touch upon modern issues relating to the north-south divide and to contrast with the situation in Victorian times. As the Festival happened to take place just after the demise of Margaret Thatcher (whose legacy in the North still causes controversy), the scene had an additional contemporary resonance.

The event concluded with an audience discussion session, in which many salient points were raised, such as the reversed situation today where the north is seen to lack the amenities of the south whereas in Mrs Gaskell's time it became the wealth engine of the country at the forefront of technology. The changing role of women

was also discussed, particularly regarding social attitudes to Margaret protecting John from the angry strikers and also in relation to the relationship between Margaret and Bessie Higgins.

Great feedback was received, perhaps also helped by the handing round of Pontefract cakes (to represent the North / John Thornton) and Parma Violets (which seemed appropriate for the South / Margaret's softer influence). The event had a form of dress rehearsal in that it was first presented at a dinner in Langwith Senior Common Room at York University, and then later to an audience of about a hundred at the Festival. (It might be possible to restage it in future, if anyone could suggest a suitable event.)

Book Notes

Christine Lingard

Gli Innamorati di Sylvia, Jo March, 2014. A new translation of *Sylvia's Lovers* into Italian by Mara Barbuni, with an introduction by Francesco Marroni (Vice-President of the Gaskell Society.)

Novel craft: Victorian domestic handicraft and nineteenth-century fiction by Talia Schaffer, (Professor of English at Queens College and the Graduate Center of the City of New York) Oxford University Press, 2014 originally published 2011

A collection of essays exploring how the handicraft movement serves as a way to critique the rapidly emerging industrial capitalism of the nineteenth century taking as its examples Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford*, Charlotte Yonge's *The Daisy Chain*, Charles Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, and Margaret Oliphant's *Phoebe Junior*.

Odd women? Spinsters, lesbians and widows in British women's fiction, 1850s-1930s by Emma Liggins. (Senior Lecturer in English, Manchester Metropolitan University). Manchester University Press

A comparison of representations of spinsters, lesbians and widows in British women's fiction and autobiography from the 1850s to the 1930s, who previously had been marginalised. Women writers such as Charlotte Brontë, Elizabeth Gaskell, Ella Hepworth Dixon, May Sinclair, E.H. Young, Radclyffe Hall, Winifred Holtby and Virginia Woolf, began to feature such women as central characters.

Learning how to feel: children's literature and emotional socialization, 1870-1970. Ute Frevert [and others]. Director at the Max Planck Institute for Human Development Oxford University Press A collection of essays by twelve authors, which explore the ways in which children and adolescents learn not just how to express emotions that are thought to be pre-existing, but actually how to feel.

Chapter 1 is entitled 'Mrs Gaskell's Anxiety.'

The informed air: essays by Muriel Spark; edited by Penelope Jardine. New York: New Directions

A new collected edition of the essays of the distinguished Scottish novelist who died in 2006. It includes her essay on Mrs Gaskell and several essays on the Brontës – Emily Brontë — The Brontës as teachers – and My favourite villain: Heathcliff.

Book Review

Helen Smith

Aventurine, by Edwin Stockdale (Red Squirrel Press, 2014, £6)

Aventurine is a slim volume of poems skilfully crafted by our young member Edwin Stockdale.

Mr Stockdale writes in unrhymed stanzas and uses the present tense. His language is minimalist but beautifully picturesque. He captures an atmosphere of serenity in his verse which we need in the bustle of the 21st century.

The essence of the opening of *Sylvia's Lovers* is contained in 'Monkshaven'.

'Snowdrops' distils *Ruth* into deeply moving vignettes. As in the original novel, nature colours the stanzas which vary in shape and number of lines. This is the saddest and longest of the poems.

'Stile' glimpses the beginning of *Mary Barton* and the sense of foreboding hangs over the whole poem

Weighted clouds loom over the indigo sky.

'Corrections' (published in the last Newsletter) pinpoints the different writing modes and very different lives of Mrs Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë.

Jane Eyre is recreated in a charming and powerful sequence of verses set in landscapes of northern England. The crisp choice of language sharpens our senses:

Jane takes the night air,
black as a murder of crows.
A nye of pheasants skulk
in the bushes.

The concluding verse in this collection 'Gardens of Menabilly' links the Brontës, and Daphne du Maurier as the ghost of Rebecca emerges through the rusted gates of Menabilly (Manderley).

This is an enthralling volume for lovers of poetry and the nineteenth century authors whose works feature in the verses. Without prior knowledge of the works, the lines could almost stand alone as poetry of nature. I most warmly commend this volume to all our members and congratulate Edwin on this enchanting, engaging and moving volume.

~ Forthcoming Events ~

Gaskell Society Annual General Meeting

Saturday 18 April 2015, Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, Manchester
Please see enclosed leaflet for details and application form.

Conference

Friday 17 – Monday 20 July 2015, Cober Hill, YO13 0AR
Please see enclosed leaflet with details and application form

Autumn General Meeting

Saturday 26 September 2015, Knutsford Methodist Church
President Shirley Foster will deliver the Joan Leach Memorial Lecture on Elizabeth Gaskell and American Friends. Further details TBA

North-West Group

Manchester Meetings

These are held in Cross Street Unitarian Chapel, which will open at 12 noon for a bring-your-own lunch, followed by talk at 1.00pm.

The next two meetings 3 February (Karen Laird: *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*) and 3 March (Elizabeth Williams: *The Fallen Woman in Literature and Life*) will complete the winter season.

The Manchester meetings will resume on Tuesday 6 October. Thereafter on the 1st Tuesday of November, December, February 2016 and March 2016) Speakers and subjects TBA

Knutsford Meetings

These meetings are held in St John's Church Centre on the last Wednesday of the month, ending on 29 April and resuming on 28 October.

Buffet lunch available from 12.15. Elizabeth Williams will speak and lead the discussion afterwards. *The Moorland Cottage* is the work to be studied.

The Gaskell Society South-West

Saturday, 21 February 2015, 2.15 pm: We will hold our discussion group on *Cranford*, and there will be only the one session. It will be held at Bren Abercrombie's house, 12 Mount Road, Lansdown. The cost will be £3 per person, and we ask that the fee be brought on the day. Numbers will be limited to 12 participants. Please phone Bren on 01225 471241 to book your place.

Sunday, 22 March 2015, 3.00 – 5.00 pm at St Mary's Church Hall, Bathwick
By popular demand, we will have another literary quiz with homemade cake and tea. The quiz will cover the years 1800 to 1920, and as last year, there will many many categories and much fun! The cost will be £7.50 per person, and we request that you bring the money on the day. Parking will be available. Please phone Elizabeth Schlenther on 01225 331763 if you would like to book a place.

April Meeting: There will be a meeting in April, but the date and talk are still being organised. More details TBA

Summer Lunch: Details TBA

Queries about any of our events to: Elizabeth Schlenther, 14 Vellore Lane, Bath, BA2 6JQ, Tel: 01225 331763 or via email: eschlenthert@googlegmail.com

London and South-East Group

Saturday 7 February 2015

Dr Ann Brooks and Bryan Haworth: 'The other side of Manchester'. Ann and Bryan put Manchester in a social context. Their research has focused on Manchester so they are knowledgeable about the city in Mrs Gaskell's time.

Saturday 9 May 2015

Dr Irene Wiltshire: The Letters of Mrs Gaskell's Daughters 1856-1914. These letters have been collected and edited by Irene and were published in 2012 by Humanities – Ebooks.

Venue: Francis Holland School, Graham Terrace, London
Domestic arrangements as usual.

Alliance of Literary Societies Annual General Meeting

The ALS AGM will be hosted by the Trollope Society in York, 30-31 May.

All Gaskell Society members are welcome.

(See website www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk)