

# The Gaskell Society



**Miniature portrait of Elizabeth in 1832,  
by William John Thomson of Edinburgh**

*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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## Editor's Letter

Helen Smith

2010 has been an exciting and eventful year for the Gaskell Society. Exhibitions, entertainments, feasts and festivals have all contributed to the junketings throughout the year. Elizabeth Gaskell entered Poets' Corner in time for her 200<sup>th</sup> birthday.

Knutsford celebrated 29th September with traditional sanding, bell-ringing, lecture at Brook Street Chapel followed by lunch at the Belle Epoque Brasserie beneath the Gaskell Memorial Tower and then a Gaskell walk.

On the following morning, Joan Leach died. Tributes appear in this Newsletter and have been published elsewhere. Our founder, Joan, has been the galvanising force behind the Gaskell Society for 25 years. In November 1865 The Manchester Guardian ended its obituary of Elizabeth Gaskell with the sentence: "Her death leaves a blank that will not easily be filled." In some respects these simple words could be applied to our dear friend Joan.

To end on a more positive note, 84 Plymouth Grove has now replaced the "pestilential drains" and continues to improve. The biography of Elizabeth Gaskell (in Hesperus Brief Lives series) by our President Alan Shelston was published in late November: ECG in a delightful nutshell, a fitting grand finale to the bicentenary year.

And so now, in this year of 2011, it's back to "pairritch and auld claes" as they say in Scotland. (Ask ed. for translation if required).

Many thanks are due to all who have contributed to the Newsletter. I personally should especially like to thank Mary Syner for her helpful advice and encouragement as well as her most useful and expert keyboard skills.

## Joan Leach

*Our Honorary Secretary from 1985 - 2010*

Joan Leach founded the Gaskell Society in 1985, following celebrations for the 175th anniversary of Elizabeth Gaskell's birth. Many people had thought that Elizabeth Gaskell deserved to be better known as a writer, but typically Joan acted on this thought, and called a meeting. From that first Knutsford meeting with thirty-three people present, she built the society up into an worldwide organisation with almost six hundred members.

The success of the Society was to a large extent down to Joan's knowledge, energy and hard work. Newsletters were produced, then a journal, and the first conference was held in conjunction with the Brontë Society in Ambleside in 1990. Fired with

her usual ambition, Joan organised a conference exclusively for Gaskell Society members the following year. This was in Scarborough, and it was so successful that more were arranged, and now conferences happen every two years, attracting members from all over the British Isles, as well as from overseas. Typically, Joan knew them all, and was concerned for their welfare, and generally they responded to her concern and took care of each other. An eminent academic once described the society as 'The very *niciest* of literary societies', and if that was the case, it was largely due to Joan. But as well as some highly respected academics, Gaskell Society members include ordinary readers who simply enjoy the books, and some who have just enjoyed *Cranford* on the television. Joan managed to cater for them all.

Her knowledge of local history was unrivalled, and she was always quick to pick up interesting links between the books and the area, to do the necessary research and to lead walks and trips around places with Gaskell associations. As the Society grew in numbers, and branches were established in London, Bath and York, the scope for trips grew. Joan, like Mrs Gaskell herself, was an intrepid traveller, and eventually led groups who followed their writer not just to locations all over Britain but also overseas, to Heidelberg, Paris and Rome. On her return she would instantly start planning the next event. Her energy made some of her younger committee members feel tired, but it was impossible not to respond to her enthusiasm.

In 1987 she went to Kansas, to participate in a conference in commemoration of Queen Victoria's jubilee, promoting the Society in the process. In 1988 the Gaskell Society of Japan was inaugurated, following a visit to Knutsford by Professor Yamawaki, and in 2006 Joan travelled to Japan as a guest of this society, giving talks and enjoying wonderful hospitality. Links were also established with Italy. Jenny Uglow's excellent biography of Elizabeth Gaskell, published in 1993, is dedicated in part to the Gaskell Society. In the *Cambridge Companion to English Literature*, published in 2007, Susan Hamilton describes the success of the Gaskell Society as 'staggering'. She adds, 'The society initiated the BBC's 1999 production of *Wives and Daughters*, the success of which led to the BBC's production of *North and South* in 2004'. Since then, of course, we've had the major success of *Cranford*. And this all happened because of Joan's determination, persistence and perceptiveness. In 2005 her hard work was acknowledged by her being awarded the MBE, in recognition of her services to literature and to Knutsford.

It was a great sadness that she was unable to get to Westminster Abbey, to join two hundred other members of the Society in the dedication of the window in Poets' Corner on September 25th. A member from overseas who was there wrote: 'How beloved Joan was was very clear to me when so many of those I met expressed their concern about her and sadness that she was not able to be present... I heard of the Gaskell Society in 1987 and visited Manchester and Knutsford where she met and showed me round with all the warm friendliness and enthusiasm which obviously characterised her life. I joined the Society there and then, and have ever

since enjoyed the journal and newsletter, often with more than a touch of envy that I was not able to participate in the astonishing array of activities recorded therein.'

Amazingly, Joan's determination enabled her to share in some of the celebrations in her beloved Knutsford on the actual bicentenary of Elizabeth Gaskell's birth — 29th September. With the aid of a wheelchair and the new lift at Brook Street Chapel she was able to attend a talk in the morning. She entered to a round of applause and left to a standing ovation. As she drove away, she was able to hear the bells of the Parish Church ringing in celebration of the bicentenary, something which she herself had arranged. She died early the next morning. She will be desperately missed.

Elizabeth Williams

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*From the Rev Jean Bradley, minister at Brook Street Chapel:*

#### **Joan Leach, her final weeks.**

I have only recently moved back to Knutsford, for I was born and bred in what then seemed to be an unassuming market town with its family bakers, butchers and clock repairers. I can remember the local characters and the feeling that we all knew everyone else in the town. When I cast my mind backwards and forwards over the years, thinking first of my childhood and then of the occasional visits to see family, I realise how many changes have taken place in the town. There have been changes in property, in the ownership of shops or businesses and a great increase in the number of people living in Knutsford. However, one thing never seemed to change — and that was the sight of Joan Leach on her bicycle. In the early days the traffic cannot have been too bad but almost to the end of her life Joan determinedly continued to cycle through the dreadful traffic of the twenty-first century. She was as much a part of the Knutsford scene in her day as any of the characters in *Cranford* were in theirs.

Joan had contacted me through her sister to say that she wasn't well and would like to see me. As Minister of Brook Street Unitarian Chapel, I was aware of Joan's passion for Knutsford in general and Elizabeth Gaskell in particular and I knew she was very fond of our 'ancient chapel'. So when I visited Joan at her home, I was very saddened to hear that she had been diagnosed with a terminal illness. Joan was incredibly brave and logical. She didn't know how long she would retain her mental faculties and asked me if I would help her in planning her funeral.

Although this was a rather distressing experience for Joan in some ways, I think it also gave her peace and helped her to accept her situation. So for eight weeks (with the exception of one week when I had a cold) I visited her every week, firstly at her home and then at Tabley House where she was so wonderfully cared for. We planned both the crematorium service and the Service of Appreciation of her life, the latter of which was held at her beloved Brook Street Chapel. She chose seven

people whom she wished to speak, as well as the hymns and music. She was a truly courageous woman.

While Joan was so poorly, all the celebrations for the two hundredth anniversary of Elizabeth Gaskell's birth were taking place, many of which Joan herself had helped to organise. Unfortunately she was too weak to attend many events but she managed to come to the celebration of Elizabeth Gaskell's birthday at the Chapel. I believe that somehow she found strength for that occasion, for only hours later she died, recalling what a happy day she had had.

Joan wished to have the crematorium service first, which gave her son Martin and the family some privacy for their own personal mourning. Joan was so well known through the Gaskell Society and elsewhere that the family might have felt overwhelmed if they had entered the Chapel first, to find so very many people who loved Joan and yet were unknown to the immediate family.

As one would expect, the Chapel was full when we gathered to celebrate her life. It was a time of sadness but also of sincere appreciation of all that Joan meant to us. She was a good wife and mother, a loving sister, an enthusiast for all things to do with the Gaskells, who encouraged and created new enthusiasts, and a dear friend to so many people throughout the world. For my own part, I was privileged to help Joan at a very difficult time and to be able to facilitate all the kind offers of help towards the preparation of her funeral. For this I feel truly blessed.

Rev Jean Bradley

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*Happy Memories of Joan from Katharine Solomon of Wimbledon:*

Durham Conference, 2003: Joan keeping her audience spellbound with the story of the four little robins, part of a presentation about conduct-books.

Manchester Conference, 2005: Joan proudly showing us Tabley House Chapel; later, remaining cheerful when the coach broke down on the return journey.

Canterbury Conference, 2007: Joan masterminding a complex dramatic presentation about the Holland family.

Scottish trip to Peebles, 2008: at Altrincham bus garage, Joan telling a bus-driver to move his bus so that the Gaskell Society coach could get through. In Edinburgh, studying Elizabeth Gaskell's original manuscript letters in the Scottish National Library.

Penrith Conference, 2009: Joan bringing to life the beautiful church of St Kentigern at Crosthwaite; the next day, at Lake Coniston, coping seamlessly with the non-appearance of our chartered boat to Ruskin's house, and enjoying the Brantwood hillside garden.

*From George Hauton*, a former member of the Society from Lincolnshire, author of *Where the Wild Wind Blows*: he expressed his 'sadness and shock at the death of Joan', adding: 'Joan was always so kind to me on my visits to Knutsford, and even though I was an "outsider" to your unique society, she always found the time to chat to me, no matter how busy her schedule'.

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*From Janie Briggs of Heathwaite* (Aunt Lumb's house and childhood home of ECG), recalling Joan:

"What a gracious lady — whom we had the pleasure of seeing conducting tours round our garden."

The Gaskell Garden Party was held in this fairytale garden on 5 June 2010. Our thanks to Janie and her family for sharing the magic of the garden with us on such a happy sunny day.

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*From Pam Griffiths: Knutsford Memories*

Joan on her bicycle or conducting her Cranford walks was a common sight in Knutsford over the past 25 years. Her enthusiasm for her subject was infectious and her knowledge on all things Knutsford was unsurpassed. Her determination to achieve her goal, whether by enlisting the assistance of a passing policeman or, in the early days, by striding out into the main A50 Toft Road, to halt the traffic herself, for the safe passage of her walkers, was so typical of Joan. It was so very Cranford and so very Joan. She will be sorely missed.

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*From Dudley Green:*

It was through my interest in Mrs Gaskell's *Life of Charlotte Brontë* that I first came to the Gaskell Society. At that time Joan Leach was virtually the only member whom I knew. She was very kind to me and would ensure that I was not left on my own. This was one of her great traits and she did it for every newcomer. When, on my retirement from teaching in 1995, I decided to take advantage of my new-found freedom and come to the Knutsford lunch meetings, she told me that there was a gentleman from Liverpool who was thinking of attending, who would be very glad to see another man! On my arrival she introduced me to Brian Hechle and we became inseparable friends until Brian's sudden death at Easter 2004.

As I got to know more about the Society my admiration for Joan's qualities increased. The time she devoted to its activities seemed unbounded. If one wished to go on any event the instructions invariably were: 'write to the Hon Secretary, Joan Leach, Far Yew Tree House, Over Tabley, Knutsford, Cheshire WA 16 OHN.' I got to know that address better than my own! How richly Joan deserved her MBE! But, although she was the chief organiser of most events, she never appeared dictatorial and seemed to me to be a born leader. She had the gift of creating

a friendly atmosphere at any meeting, making all feel welcome. Her sweet personality, however, concealed a firm determination that everything should be done in the best way possible. If she felt that some course of action was right, she would quietly but determinedly ensure that that was what was done.

I have many happy memories of the foreign tours which she arranged. My first trip was to Paris in 1998, where she ensured that we marked the opening stage of our pilgrimage by visiting the grave of Madame Mohl in the remarkable Père Lachaise Cemetery. Later I recall a small group of us enjoying a delightful outdoor lunch with Joan in a quiet corner of a Paris square. I also remember the Italian restaurant just round the corner from the hotel, which we visited on more than one occasion, where the waiter showed his appreciation of our custom by his extravagantly amorous advances to Joan — all of which she took in good part! Other trips were to follow — Brussels, Brittany, Rome — these I look back on as some of the happiest holidays of my life. Joan was always great company and such fun to be with. Other members helped in the organisation of these trips but I think all would agree that Joan was the centralising force, who made the experience so enjoyable. On any visit Joan always shouldered responsibility for all the party. I well remember her waiting at Manchester Airport until almost the last minute before departure for a member who had been unavoidably delayed.

In all her activities Joan was motivated by a deep love of Mrs Gaskell and her works. She was a keen researcher and determined in her approach. When I wrote my biography of Patrick Brontë I was concerned whether she might be upset by my critical account of the rather unfavourable letter which Mrs Gaskell wrote after her last meeting with Mr. Brontë. Joan did not say much at the time, but later she came back to me and drew my attention to a subsequent letter Mrs Gaskell had written which showed considerable sympathy for Mr Brontë, one which I had missed in the *Further Letters of Mrs Gaskell*. I am very glad that I was able to put the record straight by inserting a reference to this letter in the notes of the paperback edition of my biography.

It was always good to get a phone call from Joan. She occasionally rang me up to get a Brontë perspective on some matter. Although I mainly saw her at Society events, I was delighted when she accompanied my brother and myself to a recording of *Mastermind* at the BBC Studios in Manchester. I also felt very honoured when she inscribed my copy of her history of Knutsford: 'For Dudley, from a fellow historian, Joan Leach'. That was an accolade which gave me a feeling of great pride. I treasure the last card I received from her, discussing the dramatic presentation which she had written for the Westminster Abbey ceremony. She had asked me to read the part of A.E. Housman. She told me to feel free to alter it in any way and ended: 'See you at the Abbey. Love, Joan'. Sadly that was not to be.

Joan devoted many years of her life to the founding and running of the Gaskell Society and she was integral to its success. She meant so much to all of us that since her death I find that, whenever I attend a Society function, I instinctively look out for her and then come sadly to the realisation that she will not be there. Others

are now carrying on the work which she began and it is a great tribute to her that she has left the Society in such good shape. Her greatest memorial is surely the Gaskell Society itself. I think that it can be said of Joan Leach, as of Sir Christopher Wren and St Paul's Cathedral, '*si monumentum requires, circumspice!*' — 'If you are looking for her memorial, look around you!'

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*From Shirley Foster, reminiscences of Joan:*

Writing about Joan is difficult, if only because it is almost impossible to say anything that others have not already said. Joan, as we all know, was not only the instigator of the Society, but its life-blood, producing the Newsletter, arranging events and outings, liaising with other organisations, contributing to meetings. The list is endless, as is our debt of gratitude to her.

But I'd like here to mention a couple of things which have a more personal resonance for me. Joan's willingness to help in all kinds of ways was notable, and I myself experienced this on two particular occasions. The first was when I participated in the 'culture' portion of the TV antiques show, *Flog It*. I was interviewed on Gaskell, in the garden of her Knutsford residence and in the Unitarian chapel, and spoke about her experiences connected with the town. Joan took the trouble to come over on her (battery-operated!) bicycle — which impressed me greatly — to fill in details about Knutsford, little known to me, for the BBC producers. She took no credit for this and was not mentioned in the programme, but her unobtrusive help and support was typical of her self-effacing generosity.

The other instance of this — rather more trivial, but still characteristic — concerns a question I raised at one of our Gaskell meetings. I commented on how many characters in Victorian novels died of 'brain-fever' and remarked that I'd never really known what this mysterious ailment was. A few days later Joan sent me an e-mail attaching a Wikipedia entry on the disease (apparently an inflammation of the brain). Again, her readiness to assist, unasked, was typical of her. It is these small personal touches, as well as the more obvious achievements, that we will all miss so much.

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*From Christine Bhatt, former committee member who organised the trip to Brittany in 2002, fond and lasting memories of Joan:*

A year or so after moving to Knutsford in 1984, I joined the Gaskell Society, on the basis of a vague memory of having read *Cranford* in my school days. My leisure reading in the intervening years had mainly comprised French, or occasionally German, literature. I began to take my mother to the Gaskell meetings. Her interests were not literary, but rather more practical: she loved visiting stately homes and gardens, flower arranging and painting. We were two unlikely members of the Gaskell Society and may well have dropped out, but for one thing, or rather, one person: Joan. Everyone knows what a phenomenal memory was hers and how

generously she shared her knowledge, but I shall always remember how she used her gift to give a warm, personal welcome to every member of or visitor to the Gaskell Society.

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*From Pat Heath:*

I first met Joan over 30 years ago through our love of local history. For a long time we worked together at Knutsford Heritage Centre (Joan was involved with my appointment as Manager in the late 1990's) and then as volunteers at Tabley House Museum. Joan loved Tabley — both she and her husband Chris had taught there when it was a school. She also chose to spend her last days at Tabley House Nursing Home.

Contacts with Joan have been many and varied; she involved me in numerous activities over the years, including sanding and helping with her local history walks and talks. Several members of Knutsford Lions, myself included, worked with Joan on the development of the "Lions Museum in the Street" project — her knowledge of local history as always was invaluable.

Involvement with Joan also led to my membership of the Gaskell Society and the Literature Festival. She will be greatly missed by numerous Knutsford organisations and the local community as well as her many friends.

(Ed: We should like to thank Pat Heath, who has been tending and adorning the Gaskell grave with flowers and plants supplied by her daughter Meryl, who is a florist.)

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*From Masuko Adachi, of the Gaskell Society of Japan:*

On the morning of 29th September 2010, it was raining in Knutsford. In rain I left the hotel for Brook Street Unitarian Chapel to listen to the memorial talk by Elizabeth Williams, Chairwoman of the Gaskell Society, on 'The Life and Works of Elizabeth Gaskell'. On the way I dropped into a bookshop, and bought a book by Mrs Joan Leach, Honorary Secretary of the Gaskell Society, entitled *Knutsford: A History*. I had really wanted to get one during my stay in the UK this time.

The pews were full on the ground floor of the Chapel. I took a seat on a pew close to the Communion Rail. Just before the talk began, Joan came into the Chapel in a wheelchair, accompanied by her son and her nurse. All the members and I, too, welcomed her with great applause. Joan's wheelchair reached the pew in the inner part of the centre of the Chapel, looking up to the high pulpit. Involuntarily I stood up and went up to her. Fifteen years had passed since I had seen her last. "Masuko!" she said in a low voice. She recognized me! I put my hands on hers. The old strength had gone but was replaced by a gentle softness.

At the beginning of her talk, Elizabeth, turning her eyes upon Joan, praised and

thanked her for her amazing achievements in founding and developing the Gaskell Society, calling her, like Gaskell, 'a remarkable woman'. I, seeing Joan replying to it with a tender smile during a second round of applause from the attendees, had an impression that she, in ill health, looked pretty well.

Listening to Elizabeth's talk, I returned in my reflections to the summer of 1995, fifteen years before. During that summer vacation, I visited places noted in connection with Gaskell. Five years had passed since I had begun to work on her and her literature seriously. I had come to feel like confirming with my own eyes the places where she had lived and walked, and the places which she had used for models in her novels. In addition, I had wanted to join the Oxford Conference at St Hilda's College for the celebration of the tenth anniversary of the Gaskell Society, which was to be held on 25-28th August that year. I wrote Joan a letter, explaining my plan. She sent me back a very kind reply immediately.

Joan gave me so much generous advice by letter, fax and telephone: "Stay with Mr Barlow and Howard in London, with Mr and Mrs Pleydell in Knutsford, with Mr and Mrs Sharps in Scarborough, and at the Silverdale Hotel in Silverdale. This member will guide you around in Wales, another in Manchester. . . ." She mentioned so many names of helpful members of the Gaskell Society.

Thanks to Joan and the other members, I could visit all the places that I had wanted. In truth, I went to more places than I could have imagined! In Knutsford, Joan herself guided me to 'Heathwaite' where Gaskell had been reared by her aunt Lumb, and its backyard, where as a child she had read and played under the big cedar in summer. Joan also took me to Tatton Park, the model of the huge garden owned by the family of the Earl of Cumnor in *Wives and Daughters*, then to Sandlebridge, where Gaskell's grandfather had run a farm, and lastly to Dunham Park, one of the scenes in "Libbie Marsh's Three Eras." I also joined the Sunday Outing led by Joan, and saw Over Peover Hall, which is thought to have been the model of Squire Hamley's family Manor House in *Wives and Daughters*. I used some of the photos that I had taken at that time for the sixth volume of *The Complete Works of Elizabeth Gaskell, Wives and Daughters*, which (then) Professor Hidemitsu Togo, of Keiogijuku University, Tokyo, and I co-translated into Japanese.

In Scarborough, Heather Sharps guided me to the grave of Anne Brontë and to Whitby, the model of Monkshaven in *Sylvia's Lovers*. I could understand well the situations of the three main locations featured in the novel, namely, the fishing harbour, the shopping streets and the farming land. In Windermere, I entered Briery Close with its front gate unbolted by chance at that time, and was enjoying a walk alone in the beautiful spacious garden overlooking Lake Windermere, when I was suddenly talked to by an elderly woman. She turned out to live in the part of the mansion where Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë had met for the first time. The drawing room she invited me to enter had an air of Victorian substance but a warm atmosphere around, too. Here Elizabeth welcomed Charlotte with the kind of fondness one might show a younger sister. Charlotte took to Elizabeth immediately,

not influenced by the world's view of her. Picturing to myself the two women feeling thus for each other, my heart filled with deep emotion.

In Silverdale, the mistress of Gibraltar Farm happened to be at home, and I was allowed to enter Lindeth Tower, and climbed the steep narrow staircase to the second floor. There I imagined Gaskell writing *Ruth*, sometimes looking out of the window, now hidden from the sight of Morecambe Bay by tall trees, but which used to overlook the shining, silver sea. I felt a mysterious connection between this woman farmer and Ruth when I heard from a neighbour that she was rearing her daughters by herself, in a sense, in a situation partly resembling Ruth's. On the way back to the hotel, I happened to ask a couple whether they knew anything about Gaskell. They responded, "Actually, friends of ours live in 'The Sheiling.' Do you want to see it?" Immediately I answered, "Yes, of course", because I had learned that Meta and Julia, Gaskell's unmarried daughters, had had the house built for friends of their mother to stay and enjoy their holidays. The couple drove me there. The resident couple showed me all around the inside, including the drawing room with a fireplace surrounded with William Morris ceramic tiles, and served me tea and cookies in the Victorian-styled, old-fashioned kitchen. When I shared these experiences with Joan, she said in great surprise, "Such lucky things rarely happen to us in the UK. But you, from Japan, have seldom come here, and were blessed with such luck!"

The last part of my tour in the UK was to attend the Oxford Conference at St Hilda's College. On the final day, I participated in the Cotswold tour visiting Dumbleton House near Evesham. This house which was owned by Gaskell's cousin, Edward Holland, is now used as a hotel. We saw the inside of this gorgeous house, and took a walk in the huge garden, then enjoyed afternoon tea in the tea room.

After coming back from my trip to the UK, I decided to write a biography of Gaskell from my Japanese perspective and in the Japanese language. At that time Gaskell was not so well-known in Japan as she is now. The famous book written by (then) Professor Yuriko Yamawaki at Jissen Women's University, Tokyo, had become difficult to obtain. It was also hard for me to present orally about Gaskell in all her glory, from birth to death, during my class of English Literature at Notre Dame Seishin University, where I work as professor. How often I wished there were a biography of Gaskell which could help students know her with pleasure and ease!

However, it did not take me much time to realize that writing a biography was not an easy task. Every day I fought with voluminous materials, nearly giving up many a time! It was Joan's great help offered to me at that time and the unforgettable remembrances of the members I had met during my trip that supported me, and kept me from the depths of despair. It took me six years to complete the book, and finally it was published in April 2001, after the change of centuries. I gave my book the title *Elizabeth Gaskell: Her Life and Work*. In this book I used many photos I had taken during my trip so as to have it understood visually as well. Professor Toyohiko Tatsumi formerly of Sophia University, Tokyo, to whom I owe much in the study of English literature, commented, "You have taken rare photos, haven't you? Especially, the ones of The Sheiling and Dumbleton House."

Listening to Elizabeth's talk, I was also reflecting on those things, when her talk came to the end. Elizabeth, having finished her paper, came up to Joan, held her hands and sat down beside her. I took a photo of Joan, Elizabeth and the other members sitting on the pew, never dreaming that it would be Joan's last portrait on earth.

Afterwards, I joined the dinner at La Belle Epoque, and then the 'Knutsford Walk'. When I paid my first visit to Knutsford 15 years ago, I was given a booklet Joan had written called *Sanding: a Knutsford Custom*. The booklet states: "It was only in Knutsford that sanding was part of the wedding celebrations and other special occasions." It also mentions that people in Knutsford celebrated the marriage of the young couple, William and Elizabeth Gaskell, by strewing coloured sand on the ground before the houses on their wedding day in 1832. One of my purposes for my trip this time was to witness the sanding custom. Joan was going to lead the 'Knutsford Walk', but she was replaced by another member. We came to 'Heathwaite', and saw sanding done on the road all along the hedge of the front yard. You could read "HOME OF ELIZABETH GASKELL" drawn in white sand, and see six big lilies drawn in red, white, blue and yellow sand round the white letters. The rain had stopped and I stood there for some time, flipping the pages of Joan's booklet in my mind, and thinking that it had also been Joan who had led me to the good fortune of my encountering the phenomenon of 'sanding' on Gaskell's 200th birthday.

It was on the next day, 30th September, that I received the sad news of Joan's passing. On this day Ann Waddington and Ann O'Brien showed me around Manchester. In the evening Ann O'Brien invited me to supper at her house. After supper we relaxed on the sofa. She opened her personal computer on her lap and checked emails. One of them communicated Joan's sad news. I repeated the question "why, why, why?" in my mind, remembering her figure in the Chapel.

Joan had written to me in her email dated 22nd May, 2010, "The events on 29th September will be popular. We hope to have sanding done in the town as it was for the Gaskells wedding and the church bells will ring out at midday." (sic) Her spelling perhaps expressed how tired she was. Nevertheless, she sent me many emails, and saw to it that I contacted Janet Kennerley and Helen Smith in Knutsford, and the two Anns in Manchester.

In spite of her illness Joan realized her resolution to share the talk in Brook Street Chapel on the actual bicentenary of Gaskell's birth. In this Chapel, Gaskell had worshipped in her childhood, and learned a firm belief in God, then practised love by modelling after Jesus, and the lessons of service and hope. Joan went on a journey to heaven where Gaskell is in peace, after seeing the sanding and hearing the church bells ringing for Gaskell's bicentenary celebration.

Mrs Joan Leach loved Gaskell very much, and Knutsford so much as to be called "Mrs Knutsford". What do you suppose Joan and Elizabeth, those two "remarkable women", are talking about now, resting in the same graveyard?



**Joan Leach and Elizabeth Williams with Society members, enjoying the Garden Party at Heathwaite on 5 June 2010**



**Gaskell Society members congregate outside Westminster Abbey on 25 September**



**Time for tea at Plymouth Grove, July 2010.  
Front row (l. to r.): Sarah Prince (née Dabbs), Mrs. Dabbs, Janet Allen  
Back row: Andrew Prince, Christine Lingard, Gloria Gaffney, Joss Hill**



**Before the Dedication at Westminster Abbey.  
Vivienne Young, Pam Griffiths, Janet Kennerley, Lynda Stephens**



2010 was the year in which everything happened: the celebration of Elizabeth Gaskell's bicentenary; the completion of the restoration of the exterior of 84 Plymouth Grove, and then, desperately sadly, the death first of Mrs Rosemary Dabbs, a lady in direct line of descent from Elizabeth Gaskell's daughter Marianne, and whom many of us had the pleasure of meeting at the exhibitions at the Portico and John Rylands Libraries, and then of Joan Leach, co-founder and inspirational member of our Society for the quarter-century of its existence.

Rosemary Dabbs had always taken an interest in the Society's activities. I first knew her through her generous response to the requests John Chapple and I needed to make from time to time to publish material of which she held the copyright. I used to be concerned about troubling her, but her replies were always kind and positive. In 2010 she readily provided precious family mementoes for display. That she should make the long journey from Devon to Manchester twice during the year was remarkable, but when you met her, anxieties on that score disappeared. To lose her was a great sadness: we send our sympathy to Sarah Prince and her family. Sarah stood in for her mother at the Westminster Abbey ceremony, thus carrying on the family tradition of working with the Society.

Joan Leach did so much to ensure the success of the bicentenary year that it was a double tragedy that her illness meant she could not be at Westminster for the crowning moment. Joan died on the day following the annual Knutsford celebrations of Mrs Gaskell's birthday. She had made what can only be described as a triumphant appearance in the town on that day and her death in a room that overlooked the Cheshire landscape at Tabley somehow sealed a life given in large part to Gaskell and to Knutsford. Of Joan it is really very difficult to say more, but mention of Tabley brings back a personal memory. Some years ago I was invited to speak there about the estate's associations with Elizabeth Gaskell. Apart from an extended chapter in *Mr Harrison's Confessions* these are fairly slight, but I remember Joan's taking me to see the site of the old hall at Tabley, just visible as we peered through the trees. It was a history lesson, as walks in Cheshire with Joan invariably were, and I remember so well both the range of her knowledge, and her affection for an environment that she had known since childhood. Joan's great achievement lay in the Society that she created: a society held together by friendship and by knowledge.

\* \* \* \* \*

It was of course both a demanding and a rewarding year: events after all do not organize themselves and it was remarkable to see how it all came together. As well as the Society's own programmes we had the Exhibitions, already mentioned, lectures at the Rylands, and events at Plymouth Grove where the work done by Janet Allan and her team might in itself have seemed tribute enough. There were day schools and garden parties, and Gabrielle Drake's one-woman show and then, attracting members world wide, the dedication of the memorial window at Westminster Abbey on the 25th September. The week-end devoted to this allowed

us to renew our friendships from overseas, notably from the United States and Japan.

Elizabeth was taken to Chelsea, to Sheffield, to Huddersfield, to Bath, and to Brussels, and to Pescara, where Professor Marroni, our vice-president, devoted a research conference to her work which will result in a collection of essays on the tales and stories (all in English); well, she was always an enthusiastic traveller. Meanwhile I was urging my publisher to bring out my long-delayed 'Brief Life' before the year ended. If as a man I sometimes felt, as Joan's favourite Gaskell quotation puts it, 'so much in the way', I can only pay tribute to the commitment of all of our members: I can think of no other similar group that could have achieved so much. I have some experience of literary societies, all of them testimonies to the fact that literary scholarship and indeed the love of books, does not lie only in the domain of the universities. But I have to say that I know of no other society quite like our own.

\* \* \*

A propitious year then, despite our sadness. And the date of the bicentenary year reminds us that Elizabeth Gaskell, invariably referred to as a Victorian, was born under the reign of George III in the year when Jane Austen was completing her first published novels, and grew up during the period of their publication. The connection is to the point since our summer conference this year is to be held at Winchester, a city with many Jane Austen associations, and in whose cathedral she lies buried. The subject of the conference is 'Elizabeth Gaskell and women writers', and Jane Austen is just one of the writers who will come under discussion. So no sooner had we said good-bye to 2010 than we realized that 2011 would need to be organised. And with a number of new appointments to our various posts, the AGM promises to be an active one. We shall be breaking new ground by holding it in the public rooms of Manchester Cathedral: we shall hope to see you there.

Alan Shelston

## Una Box, who died 14 November, 2010, aged 71 years

Una was born and grew up in Childwall, Liverpool. She trained as a nurse at the Liverpool Royal Hospital, qualifying in 1961. She came to work in Manchester and to reside in Hazel Grove in 1964, where she lived for the next 46 years. She spent her working life devoted to patient care and was still registered with the RCN and was an NHS employee when she died. She had four sons and fourteen grandchildren.

I came to know Una when she joined a U3A walking group in 1999. She loved the great outdoors and the bonhomie that walking together engenders.

When Una realised in 2005, or so, that she was affected by Rheumatoid Arthritis,

knowing that walking was going to become difficult and that she was a reader, I suggested that she should join the Gaskell Society. Little did I know that she would become so committed to the Gaskell Society. She attended Manchester meetings whenever possible and became an active worker for the Plymouth Grove house, being described, on occasion, as "always in the kitchen".

Una went to Rome with the Gaskell Society and particularly appreciated the friendship of Ann O'Brien and Joan Leach. She was devastated to hear of Joan Leach's illness, only to have the same diagnosis for herself a few weeks later. By September, when we travelled to Westminster Abbey, Una's cancer was very advanced. However, with great tenacity, she participated in all activities and was delighted to be sitting with Hilda Holmes in seats at the front of proceedings during the dedication. When Ann, Hilda and myself visited her in St Ann's Hospice, Una's almost final words were "Didn't we have a great time in London". She made her mark but her contribution is also a tribute to members of the Gaskell Society who made her so welcome.

Jean Alston

## A glimpse into the preparations for the memorialisation of Elizabeth Gaskell in Poets' Corner, Westminster Abbey on 25 September 2010.

In 2002 an approach was made to the then Dean of Westminster by the Gaskell Society requesting a place in Poets' Corner to coincide with the bicentenary of the author's birth. Unfortunately, due to the illness of the Dean, this approach did not get beyond the initial application. In 2008 Elizabeth Williams, Chairman of the Society, asked the Committee to consider another application and following the formation of a sub-group of fellow Committee members — Ann, Christine, Elizabeth, Janet (Allan), Joan and Pam — I telephoned the Personal Assistant to the 38th Dean of Westminster, The Very Reverend Dr John Hall.

I could not have received a warmer response, which resulted in exactly the expert advice and guidance we needed. The honour of a place in Poets' Corner is the gift of the Dean and each Dean has his own requirements. A letter providing the reasons for the request was required. I was advised that there was no need to name supporters of the application and it was confirmed that Dr Hall would carry out all his own research. The letter was needed as soon as possible to ensure that if the Dean agreed to consider the request it was important not to miss the next meeting of the Abbey's Fabric Committee which oversees all additions to the magnificent building and only meets twice a year.

The letter — which included an appeal for Elizabeth Gaskell to join her great friend Charlotte Brontë, her editor Charles Dickens and her contemporary George Eliot

— was sent in August 2008, and a reply from the Dean was received the following month from which we were delighted to learn that our request would be carefully considered. The Dean stated that '*I feel it incumbent on me to be absolutely sure, in view of the length of the history of the Abbey and the hopes we all have for its continuing existence over many hundreds of years, that the people who are memorialized will continue to invoke positive reaction from our visitors*'. There was also an offer that should the outcome not be a positive one the Dean would allow a celebration in the Abbey to mark the bicentenary.

The sub-group concentrated its activities during the waiting time on making tentative plans regarding a suitable hotel in London which could meet the needs of the estimated number of members of the Society who would want to attend. An application was made to the BBC about their programme, *Songs of Praise*, as it seemed an appropriate opportunity for it to visit Knutsford and Manchester. Another member of the Society — Pat Barnard — agreed to approach the National Portrait Gallery regarding the Gallery marking the bicentenary by mounting a special display. On 28 February 2009 a reply was received from the Dean in which he confirmed his agreement to the addition of Elizabeth Gaskell's name to the window overlooking Poets' Corner. The preparations, including those for hotel accommodation, were able to be stepped up following the wonderful news and the date of Saturday 25 September 2010 agreed by the Dean. An approach was made to have a link from the Abbey's website to the Gaskell Society's website. This was agreed and also permission given to use the image of the window. Within the Abbey, further details of the actual Service moved to become the responsibility of the Receiver General under whose authority the Minor Canons oversee the details. An example of a previous Ceremony was provided and based on this, the sub-group considered commissioning a piece of music for the occasion. Unfortunately we were later informed that no music would be allowed on 25 September 2010 and we concentrated on approaching those who could be available to take part in the Ceremony. We were particularly delighted that Mrs Rosemary Dabbs\*, the author's great-great-granddaughter, agreed to lay the wreath.

During this time we were informed that the BBC had not agreed to the inclusion of Elizabeth Gaskell's bicentenary in a *Songs of Praise* programme and the National Portrait Gallery declined to mount a special display. However, Pat Barnard continued her efforts to persuade the Gallery to mark the bicentenary in time for the memorialisation in Poets' Corner. She was rewarded by the Gallery's confirmation that from 6 September 2010 the delicate 1851 chalk drawing of Elizabeth Gaskell by George Richmond would be returned to display alongside Richmond's 1850 portrait of Charlotte Brontë.

As the length of the Service was now known to be approximately thirty minutes, consideration was given as to how the special occasion could be extended either before or after. From the wonderful response from the Members it was clear that a location would be needed for over 100 people. In this connection an approach was made to Westminster School to see if there was any remote possibility they could

agree to hire out a room where we could meet after the Ceremony. I happened to telephone with the unusual request during their half-term but instead of being rejected it was suggested that I telephone the Secretary to the Bursar in the following week. Once again the request was received with great interest by the Secretary who told me that she had just finished reading one of the author's novels. It was agreed that the Bursar would be approached and on behalf of the Head Master gave his agreement. The wonderful outcome allowed almost 200 of the Society's members to meet after the Ceremony in another historic location and enjoy refreshments and readings from Elizabeth Gaskell's letters given by Miriam Margolyes.

During the preparations it was clear that Elizabeth Gaskell's name acted like a passport which allowed entry to uncharted areas. I am confident that the Dean's condition will be met and that her place in the window in Poets' Corner will continue to "invoke positive reaction" from visitors to Westminster Abbey.

Ann Waddington

\* *Editor's note: Mrs. Dabbs was in hospital on 25th September and her daughter Sarah (now Mrs. Prince) laid the wreath.*

## London Weekend, 24-26 September 2010

On the morning of Friday 24 September, we left a very blustery and overcast Knutsford. We were expertly driven through rain on the motorway to reach the recently refurbished (for its centenary in 2009) Strand Palace Hotel in an even chillier London.

Before dinner we were able to visit the National Portrait Gallery to view Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë in the George Richmond portraits (thanks to Pat Barnard for arranging this), and also many oil paintings of their literary and artistic friends in the same gallery.

Saturday dawned, much as Wordsworth had viewed it eight years before ECG was born:

"The beauty of the morning...

All bright and glittering in the smokeless air."

After breakfast our coach drove us round Regency London (the area where Florence Gaskell lived after her marriage to Charles Crompton). Christine Lingard pointed out many sights of architectural and literary interest.

We returned to our hotel for lunch and re-assembled at 2 p.m. to be driven to Westminster Abbey. Gaskellians were seated in the South Transept within sight of the Window. Choral Evensong was an uplifting and moving experience with afternoon sunshine flooding the Abbey. Elizabeth Gaskell was mentioned in the course of the service.

The Dedication of Elizabeth Gaskell's window in Poets' Corner was immediately

after Evensong. The Dean spoke of Elizabeth Gaskell; Elizabeth Williams read from the New Testament and Jenny Uglow, biographer of ECG, made pertinent remarks with light touches of humour. Sarah Prince, great-great-great-granddaughter of ECG laid a wreath of carnations and, appropriately, lilies.

After the brief ceremony we tripped through the cloisters to Westminster School for refreshments and chatter. Alan Shelston introduced Miriam Margolyes who very entertainingly read from *The Letters of ECG*. We left the Abbey with the West Front basking in the evening sun.

About one hundred and forty people gathered for an excellent dinner at the Strand Palace Hotel. Afterwards, in an entertainment devised and largely written by Joan Leach, ECG's companions, Kit Marlowe, Robert Herrick, Oscar Wilde, A E Housman and Fanny Burney came to life to welcome ECG (Sarah Prince sporting her great-great-great-grannie's shawl) to her new lozenge-shaped home in the window.

Sunday was again rather damp, chilly and blustery as we set off for Chelsea. Christine Lingard pointed out ECG's birthplace, formerly Lindsey Row, now 93 Cheyne Walk, with its memorial plaque obscured by a fig tree and vine leaves. We sauntered through blue plaque-land and visited 24 Cheyne Row, the home of Thomas and Jane Carlyle, (now National Trust) with original furniture, very early photographs and remarkably fertile garden. Some of us lunched on the King's Road and observed yet more blue plaques en route back to our coach and long return journey to the North.

Our sincere thanks are due to the very many society members who were able to step in and take over when Joan was no longer able to continue her preparations for our celebratory visit to London. Special thanks to Christine Lingard, Pam Griffiths, Ann Waddington and Ann O'Brien for their unstinting efforts for the success of this week-end.

We very much appreciated that so many of our distant members from as far afield as Tokyo and San Francisco were able to join us for the London celebrations of the ECG bicentenary: "a real doings" as they say out West, according to our Californian member. Our grateful thanks to all.

(A north-westerly perspective on the week-end's proceedings by country cousin, Helen Smith of Knutsford.)

## CAN YOU HELP?

### 1. Our Treasurer wishes to stand down at the end of 2011.

Brian Williams has held the Society's purse strings since 1994 for which we are eternally grateful.

Would someone be willing to undertake this role?

**2. We are looking for space to store several boxes of Society literature (comprising back numbers of The Journal, Newsletter, books).** Does anyone (preferably living in the North-West) have spare space and willingness to accommodate these boxes?

Please contact a member of the Committee if you are able to help with either or both of these problems.

**3. We are looking for a Web Manager to maintain and develop the Society's website and to provide information for the technical consultant to keep the site updated.** Anyone interested in this role should be computer literate, as well as having good administrative skills and a keen interest in developing the website with a view to widening the appeal of the Gaskell Society.

If you feel that you can help, please contact Judith Rees on juditharees@yahoo.co.uk or by telephone 0161 941 3001 for more information.

**Thank you.**

## Corrigenda to Autumn Newsletter 2010

### **1. "Such happy days as my schooldays were": Elizabeth Gaskell and Warwickshire'**

Our sincere apologies to Dr. Elizabeth M. Cox. The numbers linking the text to references at the end of the article (pp.5-6) were inadvertently omitted.

If any readers who cannot work this out would like to see the correct version, Dr. Cox will be happy to supply this in a Word document. Contact blaina@tiscali.co.uk

### **2. 'Archibald Stanton Whitfield 1899-1974'**

Philip Ray is the fourth cousin of Archibald Stanton Whitfield and not the great-nephew, as we stated. Philip Ray was Academic Registrar at King Alfred's College, Winchester (now the University of Winchester) until he retired in 1987.

Our apologies for incorrectly relating these two gentlemen.

## Friends of Plymouth Grove: Update

**Janet Allan**

Work is continuing on our application to the Heritage Lottery and we have received the detailed reports and budgets which help us to envisage the house as it will be when opened to the public, with a recreated garden, restored interior, and all modern facilities. It is a wonderful, but expensive, vision, and we now need to turn it into reality with some serious fundraising.

Open Days continue on the first Sunday in the month, from 12-4; those on 3 April and 1 May will include a special exhibition on William Gaskell presented by

students from Manchester Metropolitan University. Knutsford Library has now kindly presented us with their excellent exhibition on Gaskell's illustrators (prepared by Cheshire Record Office) which is also on show. We have many other group visits at other times and the Friends are extremely busy. The AGM of the Trust will be held at the house on Sunday 10th April at 2 p.m., the day after the Gaskell Society's AGM. A Summer Soirée will be held on Wednesday 25th May at 7p.m., when our excellent presenters Delia Corrie and Charles Foster will be joined by the harpist Anna Christensen with her golden harp. Cost £12 including refreshments. Do please join us! Bookings through Margery Schofield, 202 Moston Lane East, M40 3QH, cheques payable to Friends of Plymouth Grove.

## Book Notes

**Christine Lingard**

*The Moorland Cottage*, London: Hesperus, 2010. £7.99

One of Gaskell's earliest but lesser known novellas, originally published as a Christmas book in 1850. The publisher describes it as 'The precursor to and arguably the template for George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*'.

*The Penguin book of ghost stories: from Elizabeth Gaskell to Ambrose Bierce*, edited by Michael Newton. Penguin Classics, 2010. £10.99

A new selection including the most popular of Gaskell's short stories, 'The Old Nurse's Story'. This book also includes stories by some very unfamiliar authors such as Fitz-James O'Brien, Mary Wilks Freeman and Lafcadio Hearn, as well as more familiar names such as Dickens, Stevenson, Kipling, Edith Wharton, Amelia Edwards, Margaret Oliphant and W.W. Jacobs.

*The Cranford Companion*, by Sue Birtwistle and Susie Conklin. Bloomsbury, £20.

An account of the making of the recent BBC television series, lavishly illustrated with photographs from the programme. It includes pictures of all cast members, some taken informally behind the scenes. Jenny Uglow has written a chapter placing the book in its historical setting, and Heidi Thomas, the screen-writer, contributes a chapter entitled 'Miss Pole's Advice to a Lady Living Abroad'. Posy Simmonds has provided an illustrated map of the village.

*Tuberculosis and the Victorian literary imagination*, by Katherine Byrne, lecturer in English at the University of Ulster. Cambridge Studies in Nineteenth-century Literature & Culture, no 74. Cambridge University Press. £55.

A discussion of the depiction of one of most deadly and devastating diseases in a number of nineteenth-century literary works, especially *North and South*, Charles Dickens's *Dombey and Son*, and Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*, as well as some neglected works by Charles Reade and Mrs Humphry Ward. Another chapter suggests that the vampire myth of Bram Stoker may have had its origins in consumption. There are appendices quoting contemporary factual publications on the disease and its gender distribution.

Two new translations of 'Mr Harrison's Confessions' are now available - in French: 'Les confessions de Mr Harrison', translated by Béatrice Vierne. L'Herne [Paris], 2010, and in German: 'Mr Harrison's Bekenntnisse: Erzählungen'. Manesse Bibliothek [Zurich], 2010. Alice Reinhard-Stocker (Afterword), Andrea Ott (translator).

For those of you interested in the international reputation of Elizabeth Gaskell there is a notable following in Poland, especially since the screening of the TV serialization of North and South. There are two sites: <http://forum.northandsouth.info/index.php> which contains translated extracts, and <http://gaskellnorthsouth.blogspot.com/>, which includes an article on some nineteenth-century magazine translations.

## THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

Janet Kennerley

The 2010 AGM and Literary Weekend of The Alliance of Literary Societies (ALS) was hosted by The Gaskell Society last May in Knutsford; it included a trip to Plymouth Grove. It was good that so many representatives from other societies were able to attend and that there was plenty of support from our own members – grateful thanks to all those who were willing to lend a helping hand. There was an excellent report by Helen Newman, a member of the Richard Jefferies Society, who also serves on the ALS Committee, which appeared in the Gaskell Newsletter No. 50 – Autumn 2010. I am pleased that the ALS Committee members recorded that they thought the Gaskellians had done a wonderful job of making the weekend a success.

This year it is another Society's turn to organise the annual event. The 2011 AGM and Literary Weekend will be held on 21st and 22nd May and will be hosted by the Johnson Society of Lichfield. This beautiful cathedral city in Staffordshire was the birthplace in 1709 of the great lexicographer, author and wit, Dr Samuel Johnson. The Johnson Society was established in 1910, but he is far from the only literary highlight that Lichfield has to offer. The city also has links with Erasmus Darwin (grandfather of Charles), David Garrick and Philip Larkin, to name but a few.

The Alliance of Literary Societies Newsletter of Winter 2010-11 contains further details of the weekend's programme, accommodation list and a booking form. In addition to the annual meeting and lunch on Saturday 21st May, there is to be an afternoon tour of Philip Larkin's Lichfield, or free time to explore the city, followed by an evening reception at the Johnson Birthplace Museum prior to Dinner at a local restaurant, then a short talk by the new ALS President, Jenny Uglow. The next day, Sunday 22nd May, further tours in Lichfield have been organised for those members who are able to stay for the weekend. If you have not already received an electronic copy of the ALS Newsletter and would like to have this information, please contact Janet Kennerley who will send it to you – [janetkennerley@hotmail.com](mailto:janetkennerley@hotmail.com)

You may also like to visit the ALS website as follows:  
[www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk](http://www.allianceofliterarysocieties.org.uk)

## The Annual General Meeting 2011

The Gaskell Society AGM will be held on Saturday, 9th April from 10.30 a.m., in the Manchester Cathedral Visitor Centre (10 Cateaton Street, Manchester M3 1SQ). All members are welcome.

### North-West Group

Knutsford meetings are held at St. John's Church Rooms on the last Wednesday in the month. Buffet lunch (cost £8) is available from 12.15pm. The short stories continue to be the focus of our studies:

30 March, 2011: 'Morton Hall'

27 April, 2011: 'My French Master'

### Yorkshire Group 2011

I am sorry to announce that there will be no further meetings of the Yorkshire Group. Support for the group has fallen to such a degree that meetings were running at a financial loss. Reluctantly therefore it was decided that there was no choice other than to close the group.

On behalf of Dudley Barlow, Howard Gregg, Teresa Smith and myself I would like to thank those members who have attended meetings in the past and also to thank the members of the National Committee who were a constant support to us.

Thank you and Best Wishes,  
Kate Smith, [shepleysmiths@tiscali.co.uk](mailto:shepleysmiths@tiscali.co.uk)

## The Gaskell Society South-West

**Saturday, 19 February 2011, 2.30 p.m.:** Discussion group on *Ruth*, at Elizabeth Schlenther's, 14 Vellore Lane, Bath, BA2 6J (Tel: 01225 331763). £3 per person. Tea and Coffee to be provided.

**Saturday, 19 March 2011, 2.30 p.m.:** Discussion on *Ruth* to continue at Bren Abercrombie's, 12 Mount Road, Lansdown, Bath, BA1 5PW (Tel: 01225 471241). £3 per person. Tea and Coffee to be provided.

**Saturday, 9 April, 2011, 2.30 p.m.:** at BRLSI, Queen Square, Bath. Prof. Peter Skrine, Chairman of the Gaskell Society South-West, will speak on: "We are so comfortable and the place is so lovely": Elizabeth Gaskell in Germany". £2 to members of BRLSI and the Gaskell Society South-West. £4 to all others. Refreshments will be available at an additional cost of £1.

**Sunday, 4 September 2011.** Gaskell Summer Social event. Place and time to be announced.

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

## The London and South-East Group

Saturday May 14th 2011: Professor Barbara Hardy will lead a discussion on 'Elizabeth Gaskell: Dreams and Visions'. Barbara Hardy is Emeritus Professor of English Literature at the University of London.

A sandwich lunch will be provided from 12.45pm onwards and tea and cake is available after the meeting that begins at 2pm and usually lasts in the region of an hour or so. A bring and buy bookstall is available so please bring and buy. Proceeds go to the restoration of the Gaskell House. We meet at Francis Holland School for Girls a two-minute walk from Sloane Square. The Tube station is served by the District and Circle lines or it is not a long walk from Victoria Station. Access is via a doorbell in Graham Terrace please press the bell that is marked 'Reception' and someone will open the door for you. There are security reasons for this type of access.

Please come feel free to bring friends who might be interested, membership of the society is not a prerequisite for attendance at meetings. We charge £4.00 in these days of austerity and endeavour to provide lunch, tea and some intellectual stimulation for the afternoon!

Any enquiries to Dr Fran Twinn, 85 Calton Ave, Dulwich, London SE21 7DF;  
phone: 0208693 3238; fax 0208299 4088.

## Autumn Meeting

The Autumn Meeting will be held in Knutsford, at the Methodist Church, on Saturday 24 September 2011. Further details to be announced.

## A Notice from the President of the Gaskell Society of Japan

"Dear our Gaskell members

Thank you so much for your deep sympathy and concern over to our disaster; earthquake, tsunami and the explosion of nuclear reactor which might have bereaved over ten thousand lives. Pandemonium was reigning over Japan for a while as we have never experienced such a huge disaster before. But it is very lucky to tell you all Japanese Gaskell members are safe and some members, living at the disaster area, could escape safely.

We are regaining our calmness little by little, however, we are facing difficult situation...aftershocks, the explosion of nuclear reactors, or power cut, in a disaster area and the northern part of Japan and Tokyo area, as you might know by news report. However, we will help one another and accept every difficult situation calmly as Cranford ladies did. I do believe we will surmount this hard situation soon.

We appreciate your encouragement by various ways- on internet or mail soon after this earthquake. We could have much comfort by your warm encouragement.

Again I'd like to express my gratitude to your deep sympathy to Japanese members for our disaster.

President of the Gaskell Society of Japan

Mrs Mariko Tahira"

***We thank Mariko for this message.***

***We are continuing to think of our friends and their compatriots in Japan, and send our condolences and sympathy at this tragic time.***

***Ed.***