

## THE GASKELL SOCIETY

### **Minutes of the 34<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting held at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester on Saturday 6<sup>th</sup> April 2019.**

President - Shirley Foster

Chair – Libby Tempest

Shirley welcomed everyone to the meeting.

**1) Apologies:** Gill and Ken Hill, Patsy Stoneman, Ann Artymiuk, George Hauton, Lynda Stephens, Jane Wilkshire, Margaret Watkins, Jackie Stevenson, Val Salisbury, Linsey Parkinson, Lea McGee, Dorothy and Alan Shelston Christine Grocott, Anne Higgins, Ruth Segal, Rebecca Styler, Nicky Clark, Gordon and Veronica Walker, Janet Allan, Carolyn McCreesh, Albert Crew, Elizabeth Williams.

### **2) Minutes of the 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting held on 14<sup>th</sup> April 2018**

As there were no corrections the minutes were signed as a correct record. Proposed by Pam Griffiths seconded by Christine Lingard and carried by the meeting.

### **3) Secretary's Report, Pam Griffiths:**

The 33<sup>rd</sup> Annual General Meeting of the Gaskell Society was held at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester, on Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> April.

Shirley Foster was re-elected as President.

Francesco Marroni and Jenny Uglow were re-elected as Vice- Presidents.

Libby Tempest and Ann O'Brien were re-elected as Chair and Vice- Chair.

The Officers and committee members were re-elected en-bloc. Diane Duffy was elected and welcomed to the committee.

Grahame Nairn was elected as Independent Examiner of Accounts.

The Daphne Carrick Memorial Lecture was delivered by PhD student, Lucy Hanks, who took as her title " Whose line is it anyway? William Gaskell's revisions of *The Life of Charlotte Brontë*." Lucy's detailed research made for a most thoughtful and interesting talk. After lunch, Joanna Williams spoke about " The People's Champion, Abel Heywood, Mayor of Manchester." This was another delightful talk, beautifully presented and of particular interest to its local audience.

The Autumn meeting was held in Knutsford on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2018 when The Joan Leach Memorial Lecture was delivered by Marie Moxon taking as her title " The Sounding Cataract, and the Tall Rock: from William Wordsworth's *Tintern Abbey* to Elizabeth Gaskell's *Ruth*". We learnt how Romanticism influenced Elizabeth Gaskell and how it was through nature that Ruth earned her rehabilitation. After lunch Geoff Scargill spoke about " Edward Elgar- the Real Enigma", illustrated by beautiful extracts from Elgar's works.

The annual Gaskell service held at Brook Street Chapel on 23<sup>rd</sup> September 2018 used the theme of Family. Four members read a selection of Gaskell's letters which made for a moving service in her memory.

The New Year Lunch was again held at Cottons hotel, Knutsford and organised by Carolyn McCreesh. We were delightfully entertained after lunch by Libby Tempest, Ann O' Brien and Rosemary Donaldson reading three of Philip Watts's monologues. We chose Elizabeth Gaskell, William Gaskell's mother and Charlotte Brontë as William's monologue had already been published in the Newsletter. The Manchester Histories Festival took place in March at Central Library. Thanks to Jackie Tucker, John Greenwood and Margo Singer for promoting the Society's activities and publications. Our new pop-up banner was also on display.

In a busy week in May, the Gaskell Society, together with the Friends of Elizabeth Gaskell's House, visited Shibden Hall in Halifax, the home of Anne Lister, also known as Gentleman Jack. We had a detailed guided tour, luckily fitting in this visit just prior to the house's closure for the filming of a major BBC/HBO series about Anne Lister.

Margo Singer organised our second event of that week, which was a " Women in Textiles" Study Day, held at Elizabeth Gaskell's House. The speakers were excellent and the whole day was a huge success.

Several members represented the Gaskell Society at the Salford University Festival of Research sharing a stall with Elizabeth Gaskell's House, using the theme of Women. This event was not a huge success but our presence helped to raise awareness of the Society.

Gaskell members were again invited to read extracts from the novels and letters at the RHS Show in July at Tatton, suitably attired in 19<sup>th</sup> Century costume, it is a lovely Summer event.

In September, Knutsford was busy over the Heritage Weekend. A play was performed at Brook Street Chapel in the Amazing Women theme – “Alison Uttley meets Elizabeth Gaskell in modern day Knutsford.” Both had previously lived in the town. It was an interesting idea and well performed. It was also performed and enjoyed on the local train and at Piccadilly Station in Manchester.

Linda Clarke, the archivist at the Cheshire Record Office, gave an informative talk on the Whitfield Collection, which is housed in Knutsford Library. A Whitfield exhibition was staged in Brook Street Chapel for the whole month.

Later in September, 20 members visited Venice following in Elizabeth Gaskell’s footsteps. With a full programme and an excellent guide it proved to be an enjoyable and worthwhile tour.

In October, as part of the Manchester Literature Festival, our Chair, Libby Tempest, was asked to host an interview with Nell Stevens to discuss her novel *Mrs. Gaskell and Me*. This sell out event was held at Elizabeth Gaskell’s House and helped to raise awareness of the Gaskell Society.

Throughout the year, Janet Allan has represented the Society at the Alliance of Literary Societies meetings.

Branch meetings continue to be well supported. Northwest meetings were held at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester and Brook Street Chapel Hall Knutsford. Cross Street meetings included Sherry Ashworth’s talk/seminar on *Lois the Witch* and Rebecca Milner, Curator of Fine Art at Manchester Art Gallery, on “Annie Swynnerton – Painting Light and Hope”. This talk tied in with the retrospective exhibition of her work being staged throughout 2018. Knutsford meetings continued the study of *North and South* in the Spring months led by Dr. Diane Duffy and concluded in the Autumn with two of the short stories. London and the South East branch had a change of leadership following Fran Twinn’s retirement in May and it continues to thrive under the leadership of Jenny Keaveney and Marie Moxon. At Fran’s last meeting in May, Dr. Anna Koustinoudi spoke on “Elizabeth Gaskell: The Biographer as Biographee.” The South West Branch, organised by Elizabeth Schlenther, Kate Crawford, Bren Abercrombie and Veronica Trenchard enjoys its programme, including a lecture by Dr. Mary Summers on “The Governess in 19<sup>th</sup> Century Literature.”

The Journal continues to excel under the editorship of Dr. Rebecca Styler and John Greenwood is doing a good job with the Newsletter.

The website continues as a most useful source of reference under the guidance of Linsey Parkinson, our Website Manager.

Finally, many thanks to all who play their part in running the Gaskell Society and to our wonderful membership for their continued support.

#### **4) Treasurer’s Report, Clive Heath:**

The accounts for 2018 have been examined and approved. Copies have been put out today.

The top section shows a breakdown of all the income and expenditure during 2018 and these totals are used for our annual submission to the Charities Commission.

The figures are largely similar to 2017 but there are a few items I wish to mention:

**INCOME** – Overseas subscriptions vary slightly from year to year because of payments being received in different financial years.

**EXPENSES** – I have now split the journal and Newsletter costs as requested last year. The journal item includes postage and packing by the printer (cost is lower than 2018 because there is an outstanding payment of £1000 which will appear in 2019 accounts). The *postage* item is largely the cost of mailing Newsletters. So the total cost of Journals and Newsletters for 2018 was actually about £6,500 (a major part of the Gaskell Society’s expenses). In 2018 we assembled a full set of Newsletters and Journals and arranged for these to be professionally bound into several volumes at a cost of £460. These are now available for reference at Elizabeth Gaskell’s House.

The Conference costs in 2018 are payments that have had to be paid up front for the 2019 Conference (mostly Hotel and Coach deposits).

The balance sheet underneath is a summary of the total assets held by the Society at the end of each year.

In order to give an indication of the health of the operational finances it is necessary to take account of any significant outstanding liabilities or outstanding income relating to 2018. These current liabilities are listed at the bottom.

The net result is a reduction in available assets of £437. However if the one-off payment for the special binding of the Newsletters and Journals is taken out there would have been a small surplus so there will be no change to the subscriptions in 2019.

Acceptance of the Treasurer's Report and the accounts was proposed by John Greenwood and seconded by Helen Smith. All in agreement.

#### **5) Membership Secretary's Report, Christine Lingard:**

There is a thriving interest in the Society in the United States, mostly academics. Interest has declined in Japan; they need someone who is very enthusiastic to build the branch up again.

Membership numbers:-

2015	2016	2017	2018
515	509	534	541

#### **6) Journal Editor's, Rebecca Styler:**

1. The 2018 Journal demonstrated how Gaskell studies can shed light on a wide range of Victorian cultural issues; her writings were considered in relation to debates on architecture, aesthetic theory and American politics and a possible portrait of her was discussed in relation to the conventions of Victorian portraiture. Two of the articles emerged from talks given at the 2017 conference.

2. The 2019 Journal should include the winning and runner up essays submitted to the biennial Joan Leach Memorial Graduate Essay Competition 2018. The Competition will run again in 2020.

3. It is good to report that the Gaskell Journal cumulative index 1987-2017 has been published as a stand-alone volume which can sit nicely on shelves along with the annual Journal. Many thanks to all involved in producing this.

4. Dr. Cheri Hunter, who served as reviews editor in 2018, has moved out of academia and is replaced by Dr. Ben Moore of the University of Amsterdam (whom some of you will know from his talk at the 2017 Gaskell Society Conference and his authorship of an article in the 2018 Journal).

5) Given that the 2019 Gaskell Society Conference features a number of talks focused on Gaskell's connections to working-class politics and culture, the editor would like to make the 2020 journal a special issue on the subject and will be inviting the speakers to submit articles for this.

6) Usage of on-line Journal - with thanks to Nancy Weyant for supplying the statistics from Proquest. There is an increase in total usage from 2,189 (2017) to 2,496 (2018). As was the case last year, half was from UK/Ireland, a quarter from USA. The vast majority of usage is by academics since it is mostly university libraries that subscribe to Literature Online and the Periodical Archive Online databases which house the Journal. It is intriguing to wonder which governments are consulting the Journal and for what purpose! Additional stats supplied for January- February 2019 show a total usage of 515 which suggests a similar usage is likely in 2019.

Unfortunately we have no news of progress in Proquest's plan to merge the two databases so that libraries subscribing to either of them can access the full range of the Journal. (Periodical Archive Online contains the pre-2006 Journals, Literature Online contains 2006 onwards).

Shirley Foster thanked Rebecca for her work on the Journal to maintain such a high quality and well thought of publication.

#### **7) Website Manager's Report, Linsey Parkinson:**

Views and visitor numbers have again seen a decline unfortunately. There are hundreds of factors that might affect a site's views and visits but numbers are remaining relatively steady. A strategy for increasing numbers in 2019 would be useful. The site remains largely static apart from events, so additional content such as blog posts, features from the Newsletters etc. would not only drive additional traffic (with promotion through our social media channels), but also cement the Society's position as a source of expert knowledge. This can be easily achieved if the content is available and I'll be happy to assist.

The most popular pages in 2018 were Biography and Welcome.

#### **8) Report on Elizabeth Gaskell's House, Ann O'Brien:**

Now that the HLF funding has finished we have to work towards being self funding. The recent award of a National Lottery Resilient Heritage Grant has allowed the House to appoint two part-time members of staff: Ellie Algieri, as Weddings and Room Hire Coordinator and Dympna Gould as House Assistant. The award of an HLF Sharing Heritage Grant will enable the House to mount an exhibition to commemorate the bicentenary of John Ruskin's birth. Work has already begun on this

and the exhibition will open in July. There are many regular events at the House and the Friends have a number of special events in the near future, including a performance of a musical *The Sound of Servants* on Saturday afternoon April 27<sup>th</sup> especially for the Friends which has been funded by the Arts Council. Then there is another Friends Open Day on 2<sup>nd</sup> June and a trip to Ruskin's former home, Brantwood, on Tuesday 2<sup>nd</sup> July.

**9) Election of President:** Libby took the chair. Pam Griffiths proposed that Shirley Foster should continue as President; this was seconded by Christine Willgoose. Agreed by the membership.

**10) Election of Vice-Presidents:** The Vice Presidents Professor F. Marroni and Jenny Uglow are prepared to stand again. Proposed by Helen Smith and seconded by Jackie Tucker. Agreed by the membership.

**11) Election of Officers:**

i) It was proposed by Pat Heath and seconded by John Greenwood that Libby Tempest should be elected as Chair. Duly elected.

ii) Pam Griffiths proposed that Ann O'Brien should be elected as Vice-Chair. Seconded by Jackie Tucker. Duly elected.

**12) Election of other Officers:** The Officers were elected en bloc. Proposed by Christine Willgoose and seconded by Pat Barnard. Agreed by the membership.

Secretary: Pam Griffiths

Treasurer: Clive Heath

Minutes Secretary: Celia Crew

Membership Secretary: Christine Lingard

**13) Election of committee members:** Janet Allan, Anthony Burton, Diane Duffy, John Greenwood, Carolyn McCreesh, Margo Singer and Christine Willgoose were elected en bloc. Proposed by Pam Griffiths and seconded by Jackie Tucker. All agreed.

**14) Election of new committee members:** Linsey Parkinson and Jane Wilkshire were elected to the committee. Proposed by Helen Smith and seconded by Libby Tempest. Agreed by the membership.

**15) Election of Independent Examiner:** It was proposed by Christine Willgoose and seconded by Pat Heath that Grahame Nairn should remain as independent examiner. Agreed by the membership.

**16) AOB:**

i) Ann Peart reminded everyone about the launch of a book, which she has edited, about Unitarian Women- *Unitarian Women: A legacy of Dissent*, which includes a short chapter on Elizabeth Gaskell. The Manchester launch is on 29<sup>th</sup> April. The cost of the book is £10.

ii) Helen Smith said thank you to everyone who worked so hard to keep the Gaskell Society going. Shirley Foster said we might not be a very large Society but we are very vibrant.

iii) We have someone new in charge of printing the Newsletter and there have been one or two hitches. John was particularly disappointed with the reproduction of the photographs in the last issue and wondered if anyone had any advice he could give to the printer. Ann O'Brien suggested that maybe Linsey Parkinson was the person to ask about this.

iv) Jackie Tucker reminded everyone that the deadline for booking the Conference was fast approaching.

Shirley closed the meeting and thanked everyone for their attendance.