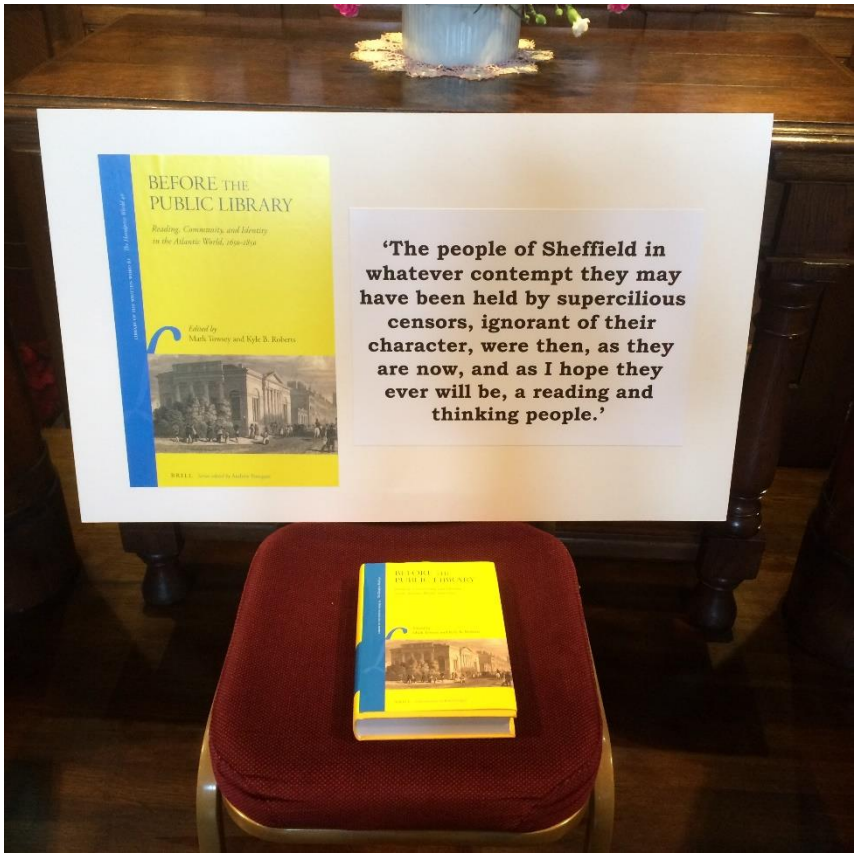
Sheffield Reading History: Unitarians, Book Societies and some Extraordinary Women

A talk by Sue Roe and Loveday Herridge of Reading Sheffield

Here is the second part of the talk, by Sue Roe, given on Sunday 9 September 2018, at the Upper Chapel Norfolk Street, Sheffield, as part of the Heritage Open Days Festival 2018. Loveday and Sue have researched the history of Sheffield's first libraries for Reading Sheffield. Their findings are published in Before the Public Library: Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850, which explores the emergence of community-based lending libraries in the Atlantic World in the two centuries before the public library movement of the mid-nineteenth century.[i]



The Sheffield Book Society

As Loveday has already pointed out, Unitarians had a longstanding interest in education and reading, so it is not surprising that they were involved in the establishment of one of the first book groups in Sheffield. The Sheffield Book Society was formed in 1806. There were six men at this first meeting, and five were Unitarians including three ministers; at least nine of the twenty-five founder members were Unitarian. Several also served as trustees of the Upper Chapel, the main place of Unitarian worship in Sheffield. One difference from the 1771 Subscription Library described by Loveday was the mode of obtaining the books: the Subscription Library had its own building but the Book Society did not: it relied on members circulating books from one to another. Books were sold every year at the Annual Dinner.

The founder members were men familiar to students of Sheffield's cultural history. Chief amongst them has to be Thomas Asline Ward who was involved in most aspects of Sheffield Life: social, cultural, political. He was secretary and librarian of the Book Society for over fifty years and was a founder member, later president, of the Sheffield Literary and Philosophical Society. He also had municipal duties: there were meetings of the Town Trustees, the Company of Cutlers - he was Master Cutler in 1816 as his father and half-brother had been. He was one of the Overseers of the

Poor, and later a West Riding magistrate. He was involved in the setting up of a Lancastrian School. In 1833 he led the petition to create the Botanical Gardens.

Thomas Asline Ward

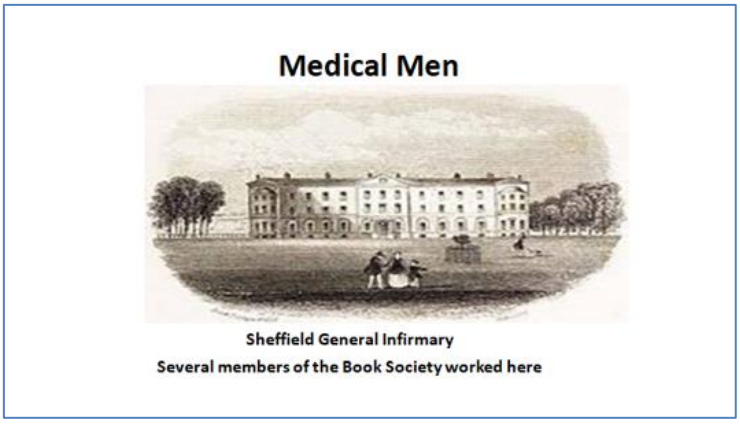
Dr Nathaniel Philipps

Another founder member was the Reverend Nathaniel Philipps, quite a contentious figure, both on theological grounds and also more practical: there were disagreements about who should pay for repairs to the Upper Chapel. The trustees thought it should come from his stipend - he didn't. In fact in 1828 there was a secession to the Music Hall which lasted till 1834. Services were taken by Reverend Wright from Stannington, and Reverend Henry Hunt Piper of Norton. There were strong ties between Ward and the Pipers: Ward had married the sister of Piper's wife. The Pipers lost their

home and Norton its Unitarian chapel in the banking crash of 1843 when Offley Shore had to sell off his Norton estates.

The Book Society was not insular: other denominations were represented. There were: Roman Catholics like Dr Arnold Knight and Michael Ellison and his son, both land agents for the Duke of Norfolk; the Methodist Thomas Holy; and the Congregationalist Joseph Read, partner of the Unitarian Samuel Lucas; and Hall Overend, a Quaker.

Medical men featured strongly in the Book Society. The early nineteenth century was a period of change in the medical profession: the old tripartite hierarchy of physician, surgeon, apothecary was breaking down. Physicians were seen as socially superior – they had been to university. In Sheffield, many doctors had often trained in Scotland, for instance in Edinburgh, as they were Dissenters and so were not allowed to attend English universities. Surgeons were breaking free of the old stigma of barber-surgeon and were becoming more like GPs. These were the 'Marginal Men', as Ian Inkster calls them, trying to establish themselves socially through membership of the cultural institutions of the town.



One such was Hall Overend, a surgeon. He had a practice in Church Street and did his rounds on a donkey. He had his own anatomy museum where he demonstrated dissection. He was suspected of using Resurrection Men to provide the bodies as dissection was only allowed on bodies of people who had been hanged. Hangings took place in Wakefield, not Sheffield. The School of Anatomy in

Eyre Street set up by his son Wilson Overend was burned down in the 1830s by a mob who thought that Resurrection Men were active there.

Several members of the Book Society worked at the Sheffield General Infirmary, such as William Staniforth Senior and Robert Ernest. You may be familiar with his memorial – initially at St Philip's Church but moved to the front of the Hallamshire Hospital when St Philip's was knocked down.

The minutes of the Sheffield Book Society do not give much indication of the reason for the founding of another book club. They merely say 'that the gentlemen present and those who have signified their intention of joining, do form a society for the circulation of books and that it should consist of 20 members'. (In 1817 this was raised to 30). As Unitarians, several would probably be members of the Vestry Chapel Library formed in 1793, so it seems odd that they should form another book group. However the Vestry Chapel's purpose was, as we have been told, the religious improvement of its members, and as such, novels and poetry were initially excluded. This could explain the high percentage of poetry purchased in the first five years of the Book Society.

The Sheffield Book Club

It seems as if the Sheffield Book Society was not meeting the needs of the reading public, including some of its own members. In 1821 yet another group was formed 'by twenty four gentlemen of the town and neighbourhood': the Sheffield Book Club (1821-1869). This was similar in some respects to the Book Society and the Subscription Library. Certainly some of the same names appear: Read, Shore, Lucas, Rimington, Ellison, though only the last two were members of both simultaneously.

The rules sound familiar: the time of the meetings (nearest to full moon), fines for late return of books and for absence from meetings.

However, there are differences: many of the members of the Book Club were never in the Book Society though they do figure in the lists for the Subscription Library: Wake, Wheat and Younge. The ministers do not seem to be Unitarian, and several come from outside the town, from Aston, Thrybergh and Wortley. There were no female members in the Book Club whereas there were in the Society, albeit few in number (one or two in any one year, usually a wife or daughter or even a neighbour of a member). The books were accessed differently to both the Book Society and the Subscription Library: they were available to borrow and return on Club days. Unlike the Book Society, a secretary was employed to support the president 'in the more laborious duties of his office'.

I suggest another difference: the Club seems a bit more convivial. It met monthly in the King's Head and later in the Tontine Inn, whereas the Book Society decided at its annual meeting in 1809 to discontinue monthly meetings. 'A committee was elected for the purpose of meeting at each other's houses to choose books.' This could be a reflection of the increasing affluence of the middle class and consequently their more spacious and comfortable homes.

SHEFFIELD BOOK CLUB

Met in The King's Head or the Tontine (pictured) until 1851

Initially the Sheffield Book Club members dined monthly in the King's Head, then the Tontine Inn but lack of attendance led to a change to quarterly. One reason was given in 1848 for the decline in attendance at monthly dinners: 'The reception and the wines supplied at the Tontine, both of which have by no means infrequently complained of'. This led to a move to the Corn Exchange, then the King's Head in 1851 and in 1859 a permanent move to Sheffield Club House in Norfolk St. This was also used by the Book Society in the twentieth century.

One distinctive feature of the Club, and another illustration of its convivial nature, was the number of wagers made at the monthly meetings. Usually the wagers were modest: a bottle of champagne, port or wine although on one occasion, a dozen bottles of champagne were involved. The wagers did not involve horses or games of chance but issues of national, local or even personal interest. Examples include:

> Would 10 000 people fit into Paradise Square? (August 1830, at the time of demonstrations for the reform of Parliament)

and my particular favourite:

> 'Mr Wake bets Mr Sayle a bottle of wine that he does not purchase a Kaleidoscope in any shop in Sheffield before four o clock tomorrow.' (January 1829. Kaleidoscopes became an overnight sensation after 1816, similar to Rubik's cubes in the later twentieth century.)

Wager: 31 August 1830

Mr Sayle bets Mr Hounsfield a bottle of wine that Paradise Square will contain 10,000 people. Mr Hounsfield loses ***[this was at the time of agitation for parliamentary reform]***

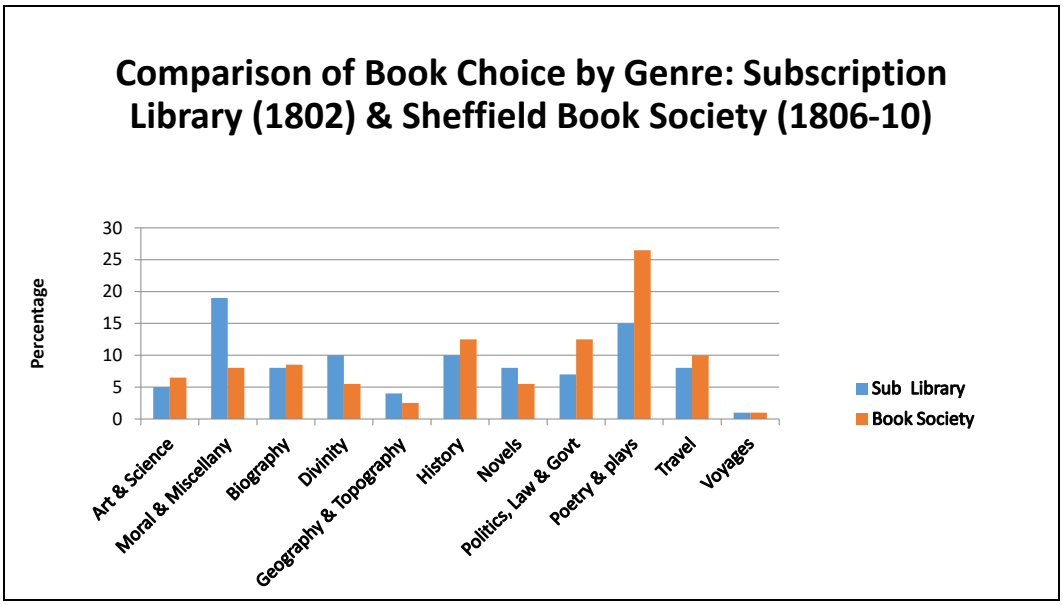
Choice of books

First 16 Books of the Sheffield Book Society

Marmontel, Jean-Francois	Memoirs of Marmontel
McKinnen, Daniel	Tour through the British West Indies
Periodical	Edinburgh Medical Journal
Nicholson, William	Nicholson's Philosophical Journal
Payne Knight, Richard	[An Analytical Enquiry into the principles of] Taste
Turner, Sharon	History of the Anglo Saxons
Johnson, Samuel	The Life and Works of Dr Franklin
Hutchinson, Rev Julius	[Memoirs of] The Life of Colonel Hutchinson
McDiarmid, John	On National Defence [in Great Britain]
Periodical	Monthly Review
Cogan, Thomas	An Ethical Treatise on the passions
Smyth, William	English Lyrics
Hamilton, Elizabeth	Memoirs of [theLife of] Agrippina
Malthus, F R	On Population
Thompson, Dr William	Military Memoirs
MacNeil, Hector	Poetical Works

The members of the Book Society had quite eclectic tastes, as can be seen from the first 16 books selected e.g. history, poetry, economics, travel.

An interesting comparison can be made with the Sheffield Subscription Library.

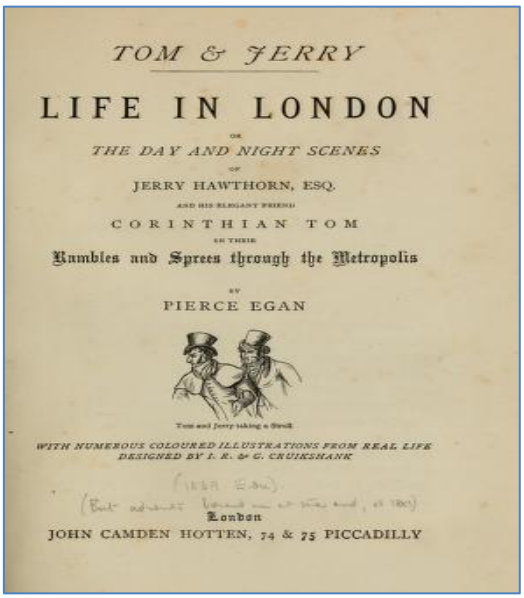


The Library ordered more books in the moral and miscellanies genre and divinity, whereas the Book Society preferred history and poetry and drama.

Certainly the members of the Book Society kept up with topical issues: books on Bonaparte and the Peninsular War were popular in 1810 and after his death in 1821; works on slavery and the abolition campaign; Parliamentary reform, with Thomas Attwood's book purchased in 1820 (he was the founder of the Birmingham Political Union); at least four books on cholera were purchased during the cholera epidemic in Sheffield in 1831; the Bridgwater Treatises of 1833-40, on natural theology, were popular, with three out of eight purchased; and works on phrenology in the 1820, '30s and early '40s.

What is also significant is the popularity of books by Unitarian writers including not just famous figures such as American minister and preacher William Channing, the English Unitarian minister and writer Lant Carpenter and Rammohan Roy, but also lesser known Unitarians. These books were often, but not exclusively, on theological issues & debates such as the Trinitarian Controversy in Glasgow (1817) or biographies of leading figures such as Joseph Priestley.

The only book to be voted in but returned to the bookseller without being circulated, in December 1821, was Life in London, Or, The Day and Night Scenes of Jerry Hawthorn, Esq. and his elegant friend Corinthian Tom by Pierce Egan. This was probably because it was a bit too racy.



In the Sheffield Book Club the attitude to books also seems different: Club Rule 23 stipulated no reviews should be purchased, though this could have been on the grounds of cost. The Book Club favoured more works of history and travel than the Society, while the latter had more works of biography and also morals and miscellany.

Choice of books: Female Unitarian writers

Works by female Unitarian writers also feature in the books proposed by the two book groups, especially by the Sheffield Book Society.

Our fourth extraordinary woman, Harriet Martineau

Works by Harriet Martineau were purchased by both book groups. The Book Society proposed ten works by her, one each in 1832, 1833, 1837, 1839, 1843 and 1848 and two each in 1838 and 1841. The Sheffield Book Club nominated one of her travel books in 1848.

Harriet Martineau was a prolific writer, journalist and seasoned traveller, producing books, pamphlets, reviews, magazine articles and letters for over forty years. Her works cover a wide range of topics, including education, the history of British rule in India, political economy, Mesmerism, a translation of Comte's Positive Philosophy, and her travels in the USA and the Middle East. She has been described as one of the early sociologists, with her focus on the workings of societies and their political, religious and social institutions, especially on the lives of women; and also her research methodology.

A Radical, Harriet Martineau supported the abolition of slavery and also educational and factory reform. Her whole career was didactic: she wrote in order to teach. She spoke authoritatively on economics, wages and trade unions. She was aware of the problems assailing the working class: lack of education, overcrowding and insanitary living conditions. Thus she supported the work of Edwin Chadwick, the reformer.

She came from a distinguished Unitarian family in Norwich, of Huguenot extraction; her father was a cloth manufacturer. Her younger brother James became a leading Unitarian divine. The sixth of eight children, she was a delicate child and highly strung. She had problems with hearing from the age of 12 and by the age of twenty she relied on ear trumpets.

As we have seen from Loveday's talk on Anna Barbauld, there were extended links between the leading Unitarian families through marriage, worship and business. At the age of eight Harriet learned Barbauld's Hymns by heart. She was one of the many 'daughters' to Barbauld, who made an annual journey to Norwich; the Martineau family always got a day with her. She was also friends with Elizabeth Gaskell.

The Martineau household was an intellectual one with respected visitors and lively discussion. The culture of Norwich, her family background, and their Unitarian religion helped to form her views although she ultimately rejected the last. In her childhood she played at preaching sermons and

when she was older, she was deeply interested in theology. Her parents made sure their children had an excellent education; she had varied interests: metaphysics, politics, economics, literature, poetry, the classics. In 1815 she was sent to stay with an aunt in Bristol who ran a school for girls. She met Dr Lant Carpenter, a Unitarian minister and teacher who had a major influence on her. He inspired her reading of Priestley and the Bible. She returned home 15 months later full of religious zeal.

Her brother James encouraged her to write. Her first published writing was published in the Monthly Repository in 1820. Initially she wrote pious devotional works such as Devotional Exercises, Prayers Addresses and Hymns, and little moral tales. From the mid-1820s, after her father's business declined, she wrote for a living.

In 1826 John Worthington, a minister and friend of James Martineau, proposed marriage but concerns about his mental health led to a postponement of acceptance for six months. Sadly his health deteriorated and he died insane. She remained unmarried.

In 1830 the Unitarian Association offered prizes for essays to convert Catholics, Muslims and Jews to Unitarianism: she won all three!

As you can see her works covered a wide range of topics. The ones in bold were ordered by the Sheffield Book Society and the Book Club bought the 1848 book.

Martineau's Major Works

- Illustrations of Political Economy (1832-4) (9 vols)
- **Society in America** (1837)
- **A Retrospective of Western Travel** (1838)
- **How to Observe Morals and Manners** (1838)
- **Deerbrook** (1839)
- **The Hour and the Man** (1839)
- Household Education (1838)
- **Eastern Life: Past and Present** (1848)
- The History of the Thirty Years Peace, 1816-1846 (1849)
- Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development (1851)
- The Positive Philosophy of Auguste Comte (translated) (1853)

Her breakthrough work was Illustrations of Political Economy in 1832; Harriet used fiction as a vehicle to explain the principles of economics and how the free market works. There were 25 tales in total, on a variety of topics e.g. Tale 12 was entitled French Wines and Politics; Tale 4, Demerara, focussed on slave labour on a sugar plantation. It was an instant success and made her name well known in illustrious circles at home and abroad. Even Queen Victoria read this work. Similar works followed suit: Illustrations of Taxation & Illustrations of Poor Laws.

In 1834 Martineau visited America; after reading the Declaration of Independence where all men were declared free and equal, she was shocked to find this did not apply to the black population, and in practice, also to women. She also regarded American politicians as corrupt. She was however impressed by the factories with their new machines and the feelings of optimism. She was feted on her arrival, dining with President Jackson at the White House. However when she publicly identified herself with the abolitionist cause, she became the most hated woman in the USA. She was attacked in the press and received abusive letters and threats. William Channing pressed her not to go on a projected trip to the West on grounds of safety. Nevertheless she still managed to visit schools, factories, prisons, hospitals, asylums, even cemeteries. She spent two years there; on her return she wrote Society in America and A Retrospect of Western Travel, a travel book, both of which were successful, especially the latter.

While considering the writing of a novel, she produced How to Observe Manners and Morals: which has been hailed as a sociological treatise on the methodology of social research. It was followed by a

series of Guides to Service, e.g. The House Maid, The Dressmaker etc. Her first novel Deerbrook (1839) had a mixed reception partly because it was too didactic. Her second novel The Hour and the Man, based on the life of the Haitian leader Toussaint L'Ouverture, was more successful. She was prevented from writing for several years by illness and became a celebrated medical case. She was apparently cured by Mesmerism, which led to her to write Letters on Mesmerism.

In 1845 she moved to Ambleside in the Lake District; she had a house built to her own specifications and spent most of the rest of her life there, even writing a travel guide to the Lakes.

In 1852 she began working for the Daily News and wrote over 1,500 articles over 16 years. She also contributed to other journals like the Edinburgh Review, the Cornhill Magazine and Dickens' Household Words.

The work that led to a storm of protest was her Letters on the Laws of Man's Nature and Development (1851). It was based on her correspondence with Henry Atkinson, whom she had met in 1844 and who was to prove a decisive influence over her. The work was in the form of a series of questions from Martineau, and answers from Atkinson, which ranged over the mind, the brain, phrenology, God and the quest for the ultimate truth. It was seen as a rejection of Christianity and her own religious beliefs, with its denial of the Deity. Her brother James wrote a scathing review of the work, not only attacking Atkinson's scientific and theological assertions but also his grammar and syntax. His sister wasn't spared:

> ... nothing in literary history more melancholy than that Harriet Martineau should be prostrated at the foot of such a master; should lay down at his bidding her early faith in moral obligation, in the living God... .

Even then Harriet was contemplating new work, translating and condensing Auguste Comte's Positive Philosophy which was published in 1853. It was said that Comte read her version in preference to his own and recommended it to his students.

Her health deteriorated and she felt she was dying from heart failure, so she put her affairs in order. She made her will and wrote her autobiography at speed, finishing it within three months. She then lived for another 21 years. Her memoir, completed in 1855, was published posthumously in 1877. She spent the last years of her life writing letters and articles. Her last public work was agitation for the repeal of the Contagious Diseases Act. Her disbelief in God and the immortality of the soul persisted to the end. She died 27 June 1876.

Our fifth extraordinary woman, Elizabeth Gaskell

Mrs Gaskell is probably the most well-known of all our extraordinary women, and was also popular with the Sheffield book societies.

She was born Elizabeth Cleghorn Stevenson in 1810 in Chelsea. Her parents were Unitarian; her mother's family, the Hollands, were linked via business and family alliances to the Wedgwoods, Darwins and Turners. After the death of her mother when Elizabeth was only 13 months old, she went to live with her aunt Hannah Limb in Knutsford, Cheshire. He father married again and his second wife was not that interested in her stepdaughter. Elizabeth was close to her brother John, twelve years older than her, but he disappeared en route to India.

Unitarians believed in education, for girls as well as boys, and Elizabeth was educated at home and then at boarding school run by Dissenters. After leaving school and the death of her father and brother, she was cared for by the Hollands, and then by the Turners, in Newcastle.

On a visit to Manchester she met William Gaskell, the assistant minister at Cross Street Chapel, Manchester. They became engaged the following spring and married at the end of summer. He became her valued critic and strong support; however she did not believe her time belonged to the congregation. She was more interested in Unitarian education programme and was happy to help with the Sunday School. Manchester was a thriving city and their circle was varied and cosmopolitan. Her acquaintances and friends reveal the complex and overlapping circles of Victorian literature, religion and family, business and philanthropy.

Thus her early life provided experiences which fed into her work. Themes appear regularly include: motherless children, stern fathers, unfriendly stepmothers, absent brothers and, of course, the women who were immortalised in Cranford, a thinly disguised Knutsford. She frequently wrote of single, self-sufficient women, earning their living and often caring for a child. The death of her own child of scarlet fever at nine months had a lasting effect, and again can be seen in her work: there are several infant deaths in Mary Barton, including one, Mary's brother, from scarlet fever. In fact William encouraged her to write this novel to distract her.

The pressure of change also often figures in her work e.g. Cranford: losses and gains, looking back but also forward to the future. Change, like the coming of railways, is depicted as painful but not necessarily bad. The snobbery of the eighteenth century with its unwritten rules of precedence were giving way: a titled widow marries the local doctor

Her work

Mrs Gaskell published six long novels, a major biography of Charlotte Bronte, dozens of short stories and hundreds of letters: she couldn't stop writing. She made notes, kept diaries, collected tales,

customs, traditions which she later worked into her stories. In her letters she asked correspondents to tell her everything that was going on.

She is probably best known for Cranford – the recent TV series helped to introduce to a new generation of readers (hopefully). Thus she is often dismissed as a writer of charming stories; her fiction may appear to be just telling simple stories. However she developed into a professional writer, conscious of her craft and willing to experiment e.g. the use of vernacular speech. She was an inventive and innovative short story writer. Her stories varied in subject style and setting: moral tales, Gothic mysteries, comedies.

Some of her other novels and short stories address darker themes. Mary Barton (1848) was one of the first 'industrial novels' and documented the industrial troubles of Manchester and the terrible living conditions of the poor. It was the time of the Hungry Forties, of Chartism. It was not just the homeless who were affected but the 'respectable poor' like John Barton, Mary's father. It was not well received by local manufacturers, some of whom were the Gaskells' friends.

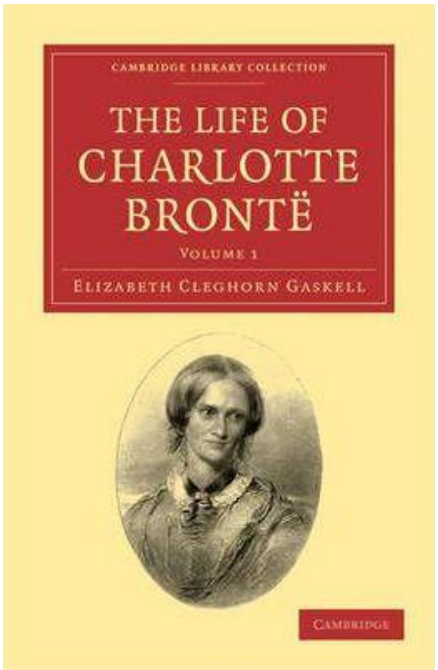
Ruth was a daring story of a 'fallen woman'. Unlike Esther, another fallen woman in Mary Barton, she is the subject, the heroine even, though she has had an illegitimate child. Gaskell did worry about its reception; many refused to read it and banned their womenfolk from reading it. It was withdrawn from Bell's Library in London as unsuitable for family reading. Harriet Martineau thought it a poor book – feeble and wrong.

A series of stories were published between December 1851 and May 1853, that eventually became the novel, Cranford. Her novel North and South was initially published monthly, between September 1854 and January 1855. Her other novels were Sylvia's Lovers, Cousin Phillis and Wives and Daughters (the last two were serialised in the Cornhill Magazine, with Thackeray as editor).

Relations with Dickens

Charles Dickens asked Mrs Gaskell to contribute to his new weekly journal, Household Words. She was flattered and the journal, with its emphasis on improving 'our social condition', appealed to her social conscience. From 1850 Dickens was the chief publisher of her shorter works. At first he was a thoughtful editor and their relations were courteous, with him addressing her as his 'Dear Scheherazade'. He was not keen on her fondness for accidents and deaths: 'I wish her people would keep a little firmer on their legs!'

Later there were disagreements over episodes of Cranford and some of her short stories, and more serious clashes over the serialisation of her novel North and South. Dickens was exasperated by her unwillingness to cut her articles and her lateness in delivering them. A measure of this can be seen in his outburst to William Henry Wills, the acting editor of Household Words, in 1855: 'Oh, Mrs Gaskell, fearful - fearful! If I were Mr G., oh Heaven, how I would beat her.' In turn, she resented his cuts to her work and his suggested changes to plot and title. Their relationship deteriorated and, after publication of North and South (she felt it was 'deformed' by him), she determined never to write for him again. (In fact she did, in his new journal, All The Year Round.)



Patrick Bronte asked her to write a biography of his daughter Charlotte. This fell into the pattern of Gaskell's fiction: suffering daughters, stern father, dissolute son. She had been firm friends with Charlotte and had visited Haworth. She concentrated on Charlotte's private life, relationships and

character rather than her achievements. It had as a central theme the conflicting lives of woman and artist, something that was a continual concern for her. She often felt frustrated with her role as wife and mother; she yearned to 'fly away'. First reactions to the biography were good but Lady Scott (formerly Mrs Lydia Robinson, whom Gaskell credited with Branwell Bronte's dissolute life) threatened a libel action and demanded a retraction. Also the founder of Cowan Bridge School (Lowood in Jane Eyre) was angry at the way the school was depicted. As a result the later editions were cut or amended.

Elizabeth was an engaging personality – she sparkled in company. She loved travelling, usually with her daughters; William holidayed alone or with his brother. She was often desperate to get away from Manchester: the poverty and misery were depressing and so over the years she spent more and more time away. Increasingly she had to write to fund her holidays.

She was a great supporter of new writers including George Eliot. They dealt with similar themes: the power of love, egalitarianism, intellectual and personal freedom for women. She felt she was not as intellectual as Eliot but according to Harriet Martineau, she hid her cleverness: she claimed not to have read economics.

Unlike Martineau, she kept her Unitarian faith to the end: its principles of tolerance, justice, equal worth of rich and poor, the importance of conscience and the search for truth were reflected in her work. She used her writing as a vehicle for her beliefs: the moral function of art, the duty to speak the truth and expose the evils of society. Her anger at inequalities never left her; she was concerned that religion should have practical effects.

Also, unlike Harriet Martineau, she was suspicious of Mesmerism; she was fascinated by those who prided themselves on being rational but who fell under its spell. She was influenced by Harriet's brother James Martineau: he argued for emotion and intuition, as well as Priestley's emphasis on rational thought. This chimed well with her belief in toleration and forgiveness, personal contact and reconciliation. She died suddenly at the age of 55 in the middle of a sentence extolling the beauties of Rome – her favourite place.

Reading Sheffield

I have to say that this talk would not have happened without the existence of the Reading Sheffield project. This came into being in 2011 and involved a group of us interviewing Sheffield people about their reading habits between the 1920s and 1950s. In total over sixty people were interviewed. There have been various spin-offs from the original project: an art exhibition by Lizz Tuckermann in October 2017; a book of poetry based on the interviews by local poet Eleanor Brown which will be published next autumn. Mary Grover is writing a book on reading based in part on these interviews. There is also a Reading Sheffield website with a blog detailing our research.

Inspired by the interviews, Loveday and I both embarked on research into Sheffield's earlier reading history which involved the four book organisations we have talked about today. We wrote a paper on our findings which was delivered at a conference in London in 2015. We then worked on this paper to produce a chapter in an academic work Before the Public Library, on transatlantic reading groups which was published last year was and launched at an event in the Lord Mayor's Parlour, Sheffield Town Hall, in April of this year**.** This year we were invited to contribute something to the Heritage Open Day events and the Upper Chapel was kind enough to allow us to use their premises.

Who knows where we go next? The Reading Sheffield effect is like throwing a pebble in a pond – the ripples just keep on and on, getting wider and wider.

[i] Before the Public Library Reading, Community, and Identity in the Atlantic World, 1650-1850. Edited by Mark Towsey, University of Liverpool, and Kyle B. Roberts, Loyola University Chicago (Leiden, Brill, 2017).