



Welcome to the first Bulletin of 2008, which comes with all of our good wishes for a joyful and successful year. It also comes with our thanks for your kind Christmas greetings, which I have shared with my colleagues and thank you very much.

One of the pre-Christmas highlights was the BBC's dramatisation of Elizabeth Gaskell's books, all combined under the series title of *Cranford*. In what turned out to be a celebration of nineteenth-century gossip we were treated to the sight of a specially constructed lock-up in the main street and numerous follies at Lady Ludlow's ancestral home, Gosford Park. In celebration of this popular series, this edition of *Foll-e* takes a look at Mrs Gaskell's memorial tower in central Knutsford. It also looks at a little known folly that will feature in Jonathan Holt's forthcoming tour of Somerset Follies, details of which are given at the end of his article. Like all of our events, early booking is recommended if a place is to be secured.

Full details of all of this year's excursions will be published in the Spring edition of our *Follies Magazine*, which is due to be sent out in March. Details will also be announced in the Bulletin in the usual way, together with a snap-shot of what you can expect to see.

One event that has been confirmed is this year's Annual General Meeting, which will take place at 3.00 pm on Saturday, 08 March 2008, and not as previously stated. It will be held in the Corn Exchange at Faringdon in West Oxfordshire, and be preceded by a tour of Lord Berners' fabulous folly tower and some of the hidden follies built by the late Robert Heber-Percy at the Faringdon House estate. Further details will be sent out shortly, and are included at the end of this Bulletin.



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Cranford's Follies

The BBC's latest costume drama, *Cranford*, received rave reviews and rightly so given that it contained a veritable Who's Who of British film and television. It also contained scenes packed with follies, all shot at West Wycombe Park in Buckinghamshire. The real Cranford, however, was very different to the rustic ideal portrayed by the series and filmed in the National Trust village of Lacock. Using her experience of living there, the author, Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell, based Cranford on the Cheshire town of Knutsford and used Tatton Park as the model for her Cumnor Towers (called Gosford Park in the series).

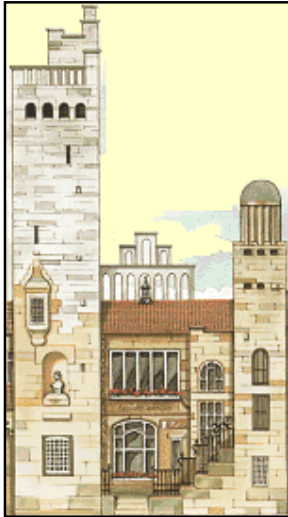


Elizabeth Gleghorn Gaskell (née Stevenson) was born on 29 September 1810 at what is now 93 Cheyne Walk in Chelsea, London. Her father was a Unitarian Minister and Treasury Official who had married the daughter of Samuel Holland, a farmer in the Cheshire village of Sandlebridge. When her mother died on 29 October 1811, the 13-month-old Elizabeth was sent to Cheshire to be brought up by her mother's sister Hannah, who at that time lived in a house called 'The Heath' (now 'Heathwaite House') on what later became Gaskell Avenue, in Knutsford.

In 1832 Elizabeth married William Gaskell, who was then Assistant Minister at the Cross Street Unitarian Chapel in Manchester. During the early days of their marriage they settled in central Manchester with Elizabeth first spending her time supporting her husband in his work, and helping to feed and clothe the poor. They had four daughters and a son, also William, who died in infancy from scarlet fever. To help relieve her grief, Elizabeth's husband encouraged her to use the experience in

her writing, leading to the publication in 1848 of her first novel *'Mary Barton: A tale of Manchester Life'*. It was a success and even attracted the attention of Charles Dickens who helped in the publication of her subsequent work. Her popularity as an author allowed Mrs Gaskell to develop friendships with many famous people of the day, including John Ruskin, Charles Kingsley, the Carlyles and Florence Nightingale, but her greatest friendship was with her sister author Charlotte Bronte.

To mark her connection with Knutsford, the local glove making entrepreneur Richard Harding Watt commissioned a building in centre of town,



part of which was used as a coffee house and the remaining tower section named after 'Mrs Gaskell'. It was completed in 1907 using second-hand stone taken from Manchester's newly demolished Royal Infirmary and Church of St. Peter, hence the change in colour on the external walls. It provided an unusual addition to the half-timbered houses in King Street, but also had a social function

providing newspapers and serving as a library and concert hall in which the working men of Knutsford could be 'weaned from the pub'. It must also have served as a public baths because an early sign signalled that "a warm bath may be had at any hour for sixpence".



To reinforce his dedication to Elizabeth Gaskell, Watt included a bust of her in a niche and had carved in the stonework the titles of most of her books. He omitted her last and previously best known work *'Wives and Daughters'*, because it was not completed during her lifetime. However, thanks to the popularity of the BBC's Cranford series, the Gaskell Society is seeking listed building consent to correct the omission and add

the missing novel title to the list. It is understood that Macclesfield District Council is likely to grant consent provided that the cost of the carving is met by the Society, but will itself meet the cost of restoring the grade II listed building.

To erect his coffee house and tower, Watt had to first demolish a derelict lodging house and a run-down pub called the Hat and Feather. It was not a popular move, causing Watt to declare at the dedication ceremony that "I feel somewhat on my defence today and I hope you will forget and forgive". He continued by saying that any guilt he felt was from having completed the work alone because he found the best and most unanimous committee comprised one person.



On his death in 1913 Watt's wife donated the building to the town council who still own it.

Folly of the Month: Turnly's Tower at Cushendall, Co. Antrim

Cushendall is a relatively new town set on a curve in the Rival Dall. At first glance it is similar to many other towns in Co. Antrim, with buildings erected using the local reddish-pink sandstone but rendered to help keep out the driving rain. Its development was due chiefly to the work of Francis Turnly during the nineteenth century, who was described as 'an eccentric Nabob of the East India Company'. As is often the case, however, it is hard to see how he deserved the title 'eccentric', given the clarity of his vision and wish to improve the character and setting of the town. Among his many achievements Turnley

diverted the course of the river to make the town's setting more romantic and erected many notable buildings to make it look more important.

Although many of Turnly's buildings have been lost or been altered beyond recognition, one remarkable survivor is his Curfew Tower at the end of Mill Street. It was erected in 1809 and measures 20 feet square on plan with tapered walls that rise four storeys to a height of 50 feet and are topped with battlements. Bay windows are set centrally on each of the four elevations, with a 'murder-hole' set in the base of the lowest window, and a small drinking fountain in the east elevation. The main door is sheathed in iron, held in place by wrought iron coach bolts, and betrays the tower's primary purpose as a centre for civil defence and a lock-up in which to incarcerate 'idlers and rioters'.

Turnly was obsessed with civil defence and gave instructions that the tower should be guarded day and night by Dan McBride, a retired soldier who was living on an army pension, and who was to be 'provisioned for a year' every year and be 'armed with one musket, a bayonet, a case of pistols, and a pike, thirteen feet long, having a cross of wood or iron on its handle, so that it could not be pulled through the hole guarding the doorways'. When McBride died he was replaced by Mr Stewart, who was a World War I naval rating. Although he had a wooden leg, which might normally suggest he was ineffective as a guard, he must have been active because he was a regular and enthusiastic tree climber. In addition to raising a large family in the Tower, he rang the curfew bell religiously and flew the Union Jack from the flagpole. That tradition was carried on by Bob Hume who was the last to hold the office of Town Guard.



For some reason the tower was seen as something rather odd. In 1835, James Boyle wrote

that "It is not at all ornamental in its structure and is said to have been built after the model of some Chinese tower". Irrespective of his obsession with civil defence, it seems clear that Turnly wanted his tower to be an eyecatcher at the centre of the town that he created, and as such it is correct to regard it as a folly.

In 1992 the tower was bought and restored by the Hearth Revolving Fund, and subsequently sold. The current owner is the writer Bill Drummond, who allows artists to stay there in return for one of their art works. It is managed by the In You We Trust.

Hearth is managed by a voluntary committee nominated by the National Trust and the Ulster Architectural Heritage Society, and saves historic buildings in Northern Ireland which are at risk of dereliction or loss. Its Revolving Fund generally restores buildings for re-sale, but manages others. Further details are available from www.hearth-housing.org.uk

The Monmouth Tower at Chard, Somerset

Standing a couple of miles east of Chard, the *Monmouth Tower* is a new find by Andrew Swift who discovered it while surfing the Images of England website. Located on Whitemoor Hill, just to the east of Avishays House, the 30 feet high tower is part of an eighteenth-century park that also includes a lake and a grotto.



The Tower (ST 354 092) is not all as old as it looks, apart from the base, which once took the form of a sham castle and had fallen into ruins. Now a square single-storey building of rubble stone with some flint and Ham stone dressings, it

served as a water-tower and eyecatcher from the house. There is a simple doorway on the west side, and windows on the north and south. An embattled parapet runs round the top of the walls.

Despite what it says in my book about Edward Clarke being the likely builder, the upper part of the tower was in fact designed by a Mr Jeeb for David Cavender who owned Avishays only between 1779 and 1789, but had enough time to have the clock-tower built by Taunton builders Spiller & Webber. Above the base rises a leaded, bell-hipped roof to a wooden turret, recessed in the corners, with a ball finial. A clock on the west side faces the house, its hand-wound clock mechanism dating from 1873. The clock face was made by Gillett & Johnson of Croydon who also created an attractive and rather unusual chime.



Immediately below the Monmouth Tower stands a former ice-house which may date from the eighteenth century. It is octagonal in plan, has a slate roof with ball finial and two high walls stretching either side of the white door which opens into a chamber with arched niches. There are names inscribed in the niches, but these are hard to distinguish. Ice was stored here in times when the estate had a lake, now filled in.

The Monmouth Tower derives its name from the narrow escape experienced by Elias Sealy who owned Avishays in 1685 when the Duke of Monmouth landed his troops at nearby Lyme Regis and laid claim to the English throne. The rebellion failed, and troops loyal to James II scoured the region for his supporters, who included Mr Sealy. He was informed just in time that he was about to be arrested, and so he hid in a tree in his grounds. The officers could not find him in the house, so

they searched the grounds. As they approached the tree, an owl flew out, and for some reason they concluded that Mr Sealy was not there. Thus they left the estate empty-handed, and for many years servants of the Sealys were instructed not to harm owls as the bird had saved the family. A building in the grounds (the sham ruin?) was even used as an Owlery for them to nest in.

Southern Belles: Sunday, 13 April

To coincide with the publication of his *Somerset Follies* Jonathan Holt will lead a tour of some of South Somerset's most intriguing follies on the estates at Montacute (The Pavilions, or *Pudding Houses*, and St Michael's Tower), Avishays (The Monmouth Tower with its distinctive chime) and Cricket St Thomas (The Admiral's Seat). Tickets cost £5 for members, £4 for children and £7 for non-members. In addition, an entrance fee to Montacute of £5 for the garden and £8.80 for house and garden will be payable by non-members of the National Trust.

Please send cheques with SAE, payable to the Folly Fellowship, to Jonathan Holt at Sheridan House, 7 Grosvenor Bridge Road, Bath BA1 6BB, by 15th March 2008. Further information from jm.holt@virgin.net or 01225 319333.

Somerset Follies by Jonathan Holt is published by Akeman Press (01225 310364) at £10 incl. P+P. ISBN – 10: 0954613872.

Gobbets

- This years AGM will take place at 3pm on **08 March 2008, at Faringdon Corn Exchange in Oxfordshire**, preceded by a tour of local follies. Details of the meeting and copies of the Minutes and accounts will be sent separately to all paid-up members. Full details from woodcocki@yahoo.com

Note: CHANGE OF DATE ... CHANGE OF DATE

- For all folly enthusiasts, and especially those who are keen on modern follies, there is a brilliant blog at <http://follyfancier.wordpress.com>. It includes details of many new and amazing follies that are not documented elsewhere.
- The Painshill Park Trust is offering free entry to the gardens on Wednesdays throughout January and February (www.painshill.co.uk) but if you can wait Iain Gray will be taking us there on a formal visit later in the year.

Picture credits: Lord Berners' Tower – Neil Hanson; West Wycombe Park with Walton Bridge by William Hannan – Government Art Collection; Gaskell Tower drawing – www.virtual-knutsford.co.uk; Cross Keys, Gaskell Memorial Tower and King's Coffee House – Craig Thornber (www.thornber.net); Turnly Tower – Hearth Revolving Fund; Monmouth Tower and Ice House (x2) – Jonathan Holt.