

The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter



Issue No 19

June 2007

PATRICK BRONTË'S 230th BIRTHDAY St Patrick's Day 2007



On Saturday 17th March Catherine Barker gave us a wonderful talk on the Reverend Patrick Brontë. (She has kindly allowed the text of the talk to be published in our journal, the Brontë Thunderer, at the end of the year.)

Following the talk we celebrated with a special birthday cake before many of us adjourned to the P.J. O'Brien's pub. Here we are, drinking our Guinness and waiting for our Guinness and Beef Pie, in the poet's corner beneath a portrait of Oscar Wilde. There are some more photographs of this event on the back page.

BRONTËS IN THE DUNGEON

On Friday 13th April a few brave members allowed themselves to be incarcerated in a dungeon to hear a number of Brontë poems that have to do with dungeons and prisoners. Sometimes the dungeons are actual dark, damp prisons. Sometimes they are figurative and are symbols of separation. Sometimes the prisons are the graves where loved ones are buried.



Marloesje Valkenburg read one poem by Charlotte, two by Emily and six by Anne. It is perhaps a little surprising that Anne, commonly regarded as the most normal emotionally, should be much more preoccupied with imprisonment than her sisters.

Charlotte's poem is *A Wretch in Prison*. The prisoner was Murry, one of the members of the Duke of Wellington's staff in *The Twelve Adventurers*. The reason for his imprisonment is not given. Here there is no window in the prison cell and the prisoner wishes he could glimpse the sun's rays or the stars at night.

*Oh, for the song of the gladsome lark,
For the morning sun's fair beam,
Instead of this dungeon, deeply dark,
Where ne'er its light doth gleam!*

.....
*Oh, that the glad stars through my dungeon-bars
Would shed their lustre clear;
That the solemn moon would lighten the gloom
Which reigns in silence here!*

One of Emily's two dungeon poems is *The Prisoner*, written for the Gondal saga.
*Silent is the House – all are laid asleep;
One, alone, looks out o'er the snow-wreaths deep;
Watching every cloud, dreading every breeze
That whirls the 'wilderer drifts and bends the
groaning trees.*

*Cheerful is the hearth, soft the matted floor;
Not one shivering gust creeps through pane or door;
The little lamp burns straight; its rays shoot strong and far:
I trim it well to be the Wanderer's guiding-star.*

One imagines that it an unusually comfortable dungeon until it becomes clear that the speaker is not the prisoner.
*In the dungeon-crypts, idly did I stray,
Reckless of the lives wasting there away;
'Draw the ponderous bars! open, Warder stern!
He dare not say me nay – the hinges harshly turn.*

*'Our guests are darkly lodged,' I whispered,
gazing through
The vault, whose grated eye showed heaven more
grey than blue;
(This was when glad spring laughed in awaking
pride;)
'Aye, darkly lodged enough!' returned my sullen
guide.*

*Then God forgive my youth; forgive my careless
tongue!
I scoffed, as the chill chains on the damp flag-
stones rung:
'Confined in triple walls, art thou so much to
fear,
That we must bind thee down and clench thy
fettlers here?'*

But the captive was not some dangerous insurgent who must be kept in the strictest confinement lest he escape and wreak havoc on his enemies. It was a sweet maiden.

*The captive raised her hand and pressed it to her brow;
 'I have been struck,' she said, 'and I am suffering now;
 Yet these are little worth, your bolts and irons strong,
 And were they forged in steel, they could not hold me long.'*

The jailor has no mercy for her, but the visitor feels compassion for her. Then he discovers that he knows the maiden.
*She knew me and she sighed, 'Lord Julian, can it be,
 Of all my playmates, you, alone, remember me?
 Nay start not at my words, unless you deem it shame
 To own from conquered foe, a once familiar name –*

By now the jailor is getting impatient and allows Lord Julian to take over.
*'We have been two hours good!' he muttered peevishly,
 Then, loosing off his belt the rusty dungeon key.
 He said, 'You may be pleased, Lord Julian, still to stay
 But duty will not let me linger here all day;
 If I might go, I'd leave this badge of mine with you
 Not doubting that you'd prove a jailor stern and true.'*

If you wish to know whether Lord Julian did prove to be a jailor stern and true you will have to read the complete poem.

In Anne's poem *A Voice from the Dungeon* the dungeon appears to be more figurative than literal.
*Long have I dwelt forgotten here
 In pining woe and dull despair;
 This place of solitude and gloom
 Must be my dungeon and my tomb.*

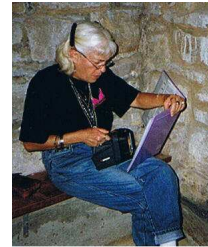
*I dream of liberty, 'tis true,
 But then I dream of sorrow too,
 Of blood and guilt and horrid woes,
 Of tortured friends and happy foes;*

In *The North Wind* Anne welcomes the breeze that comes through the iron bars because it has come from her own land and brings messages from home.

*That wind is from the North, I know well;
 No other breeze could have so wild a swell.
 Now deep and loud it thunders round my cell,
 Then faintly dies,
 And softly sighs,
 And moans and murmurs mournfully.
 I know its language; thus it speaks to me –*

*'The sweet world is not changed, but thou
 Art pining in a dungeon now,
 Where thou must ever be;
 No voice but mine can reach thine ear,
 And Heaven has kindly sent me here,
 To mourn and sigh with thee,
 And tell thee of the cherished land
 Of thy nativity.'*

*Confined and hopeless as I am,
 O speak of liberty,
 O tell me of my mountain home,
 And I will welcome thee.*



In *The Captive Dove* Anne identifies with a caged bird.
*Poor restless Dove, I pity thee,
 And when I hear thy plaintive moan
 I'll mourn for thy captivity
 And in thy woes forget mine own.*

*In vain! In vain! Thou canst not rise –
 Thy prison roof confines thee there;
 Its slender wires delude thine eyes,
 And quench thy longing with despair.*

Another of Anne's Gondal poems is *Lines Inscribed on the Wall of a Dungeon* written in 1844. Here the prisoner is denied even the solace of a wind that has blown from home. Imagination remains the only solace.
*Though not a breath can enter here,
 I know the wind blows fresh and free;
 I know the sun is shining clear,
 Though not a gleam can visit me.*

Finally, we heard Anne's poem *A Prisoner in a Dungeon Deep* in which the prisoner is set free. But when told that his foes are all dead he cries out that all mankind must be now dead.
*'My foes are dead! It must be then
 That all mankind are gone.
 For they were all my deadly foes
 And friends I had not one.'*

2006 Report to the Brontë Society

In March of 2006 our patron, Professor Christine Alexander, gave us a talk on “Reading the Brontë Home”, where she spoke of the Brontë Parsonage, what “home” meant to the Brontë girls, and how this came through in their writings. In June, Tim Roberts, also from the University of New South Wales, spoke on “*Jane Eyre* and Character Development”. He argued that contrary to popular opinion, Jane’s character does not develop throughout the novel – she remains essentially the same from her childhood to her marriage. While she *appears* to change in order to meet the demands of society, she in fact always gets her way. She is able to do this through her powerful and compelling narrative voice, which is able to dominate all other voices in the text while still remaining an appealing and sympathetic character.

In September Robyn Williams from the Jane Austen Society of Australia explored the Gothic elements of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* in a talk entitled “The Horror, the Horror”. Also in September we gathered at the home of one of our members, Marloesje Valkenburg, for an evening entitled “Adèle’s Dolls”. She talked about the history of dolls and showed us a selection from her extensive collection. These included some wax dolls and wooden dolls that were old enough that they could have been part of Adèle’s collection. Some of the more modern dolls she showed included a Shirley Temple doll and Marloesje reminded us that it was Charlotte Brontë who first appropriated the masculine name “Shirley” for a woman. I spoke on the many doll references in the Brontë novels and reminded everyone that, as a child, Jane Eyre was comforted in her loneliness by her shabby doll. I speculated on whether she took that doll to Lowood, or even to Thornfield Hall. I mentioned that I came across a reference, in a doll book, to Charlotte Brontë having had 21 dolls including a wooden one that she won, at the age of five, for hemming her first handkerchief. But I can find no source for

this assertion so it is likely not to be true. Nevertheless, from the many detailed references in her novels, Charlotte certainly knew her dolls and the substances from which they were made.

Our Christmas lunch this year was held in an Indian restaurant overlooking the Parramatta River. While we feasted on the banquet we remembered two gentlemen who, having been rejected in their respective proposals of marriage, went off to India to try to forget. These were, of course, the fictitious St John Rivers who went to India as a missionary having had his proposal to Jane Eyre rejected and the real James Taylor who, having been rejected by Charlotte, went off to Bombay to open a branch of the publishing firm Smith, Elder & Co. Another employee of that firm, one who became a good friend of Charlotte, was William Smith Williams. One of his sons, Frank, emigrated to Australia and Ann Lock, one of our members, has been finding out what she can about him from public records. She was very excited to locate two direct descendents, now in their 80s, living here in Cronulla (in Sydney). They were not aware of their family’s connection with Charlotte Brontë and when Ann met them she was able to tell them.

Christopher Cooper

BRONTËS IN THE MEDIA

Several items sent in by Ann Lock.

On 18th March ABC TV showed an episode of Agatha Christie’s *Miss Marple* in which *Jane Eyre* was being filmed in the town and the character in the story was playing Helen Burns.

The Antique Roadshow of 14th February was located in Huddersfield and we were shown inside the Red House, Mary Taylor’s House, used by Charlotte Brontë as the model for Briarmains in *Shirley*. We were also shown items from the Luddite riots – a sledge hammer used to smash machinery, a truncheon used by the police on the Luddites and a small material holder from a man hung for killing a mill owner.

THE EXTENDED BRONTË FAMILY

A website www.freespace.virgin.net/pr.org has a gallery of spoof biographies of members of the Brontë family that no-one knew existed!

Agnes Bronte 1813-1892

Born at Hartshead 1813, Agnes was the first legitimate fruit of the union between Patrick and Maria Brontë. A sickly child, Agnes was never a scholar. Indeed most of her childhood was spent in bed in the nursery at Thornton, eating gruel and studying the patterned carpet. Upon moving to Haworth in 1820, Agnes found that there was more to life than hypochondria, and when she came of school leaving age (despite hardly ever having attended), she became a child prostitute in Stanbury. She never made a great fortune from this career, and at the age of 20, in 1833, moved to Whitby, where she soon became the mistress of William Wilberforce, the anti-slavery campaigner. They used to spend Tuesdays together in his small fishing boat in Whitby Bay, when he used to demonstrate how slaves were kept in chains on the long Atlantic crossing. It is believed that Agnes Bronte's lifelong love of bondage derived from this period.

In 1859, following a disagreement with Wilberforce, she left him and Whitby forever, moving to London where she set up a brothel for the upper strata in 19th century England. "The Bronte Dungeon" was an immediate success, and amongst her many clients were prominent figures of the day, including Peel, Disraeli, Palmerston, Gladstone, Trollope, John Stuart Mill, Lord Derby, Charles Kingsley, Lord Salisbury, but never General Gordon. (He used to patronise an establishment of a different kind three doors away, next to Dr Bensons Boys Home.)



Agnes never became romantically linked with her customers, indeed she remained aloof and some would say distant from them. However, there was one exception, and Agnes could often be seen walking out with Lord Randolph Churchill in between sittings at the House of Commons. When the House was in recess, Agnes and "Randy" (as she called him) used to steal away to a thatched love nest near Market Rasen for weekends. (The Hamlet of Rand still exists.)

It was during one of these illicit sojourns that Agnes is believed to have become pregnant. For the next nine months the lovers must have agonised over the future of the child. What was to become of it? Eventually, it seems, a solution must have been reached, and in 1874, Agnes probably gave birth. It is arguable that the child was smuggled into Blenheim Palace, for "The Times" carried an announcement next day which proclaimed the birth of Winston Spencer Churchill.

Was the great man the son of Agnes Bronte? We shall never know. Shortly after this episode in her life, Agnes received a huge sum of money, on the condition that her dalliance with Lord Randolph Churchill was kept a secret. It was, and Agnes returned to the day-to-day running of her establishment in London.

Agnes died in 1892, a wealthy, happy and well-liked old lady, who had, in her own way, spread a lot of happiness and disease throughout the land. She never married.

A HIGHLAND WEEKEND WITH CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND SIR WALTER SCOTT

Friday 21st – Sunday 23rd Sept 2007
RANELAGH HOUSE,
ROBERTSON

Charlotte Brontë made a couple of short trips to Scotland and she greatly admired Walter Scott and all things Scottish. One of the highlights for her was a visit to Abbotsford, the “medieval castle” that Scott built for himself.

We’ll hear about Charlotte’s brief visits to Scotland, through her letters. But the focus for the weekend will be her hero, Sir Walter Scott. We’ll learn about his life and his books and his influence on both Charlotte and Emily.

We’ll stay at Ranelagh House, in Robertson in the Southern Highlands. This large house was built in the 1920s as a hotel, but once was a Franciscan Seminary (there are magnificent stained glass windows dating from this time). There are extensive grounds for walking, with peacocks and deer.



FULL WEEKEND including all meals from Friday evening to Sunday lunch and morning and afternoon teas.

Room with en suite (single or double) \$295 per person.

Please note that there are only 8 such rooms and these will be allocated on a first come first served basis.

Room with shared bathroom (single, double or twin) \$245 per person

DAY RATE

Saturday, including lunch and morning and afternoon tea \$60 per person.

HAIR DNA SHOWS BRONTËS ATE WELL

From the UK Weekly Telegraph 2-8/5/07.
Spotted by Catherine Barker

Science has revealed the Brontë sisters lived relatively affluently, contrary to the common belief that they lived lives of drudgery and loneliness in Yorkshire where their father forced a diet of potatoes on them. DNA samples of their hair, examined by scientists at Bradford University, show they ate a healthy & balanced diet.

[I think this is another vindication of Patrick Brontë don't you?! - CB]

BRONTË WORLD THEME PARK

No, not yet. But in reviewing the newly opened Dickens World in the U.K. James Button writes in the Sydney Morning Herald (27th June):

Or imagine a Brontë World where Heathcliff and Catherine appear, where panels and films describe the sisters’ lives and children are invited to write about and paint the mad woman in the attic.

BRONTË BIRTHPLACE SELLS FOR £178,000.

The house in Thornton in which Charlotte, Emily, Branwell and Anne were born failed to reach its reserve at auction this week but was subsequently sold to a private developer from London for £178,000. The Brontë family lived there for several years and moved, in 1820, to Haworth. The house has had a chequered history. At various times it has been a restaurant, a butchers shop and later it was converted into two flats before its recent owner, Barbara Whitehead began to restore it. It suffers from its location, being on the busy road into Bradford, in a row of rather run down terraces. But still it is surprising that it sold for somewhat less than smaller terrace houses in the same road. Neither the Brontë Society nor Bradford Council made a bid at the auction.

PERFUMED LETTERS: An Invention of Jane Austen and the Brontës

In an article *A Hungry and Malevolent God* by Joe Hildebrand (*Sydney Daily Telegraph*, May 12th 2007) the author attributed, with tongue in cheek, the invention of perfumed love letters to Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters. It seems that he associates scented letters with Victorian “chick-lit” and the names of Austen and Brontë seemed to roll off his pen as synonyms for the sickly sweet Victorian romantic novel. I’m not sure when the love letter was given an olfactory dimension, but it doesn’t seem to have been part of Jane Austen’s world. Yet I can imagine that someone with a shallow acquaintance with Jane Austen might imagine Elizabeth sprinkling some eau-de-Cologne on a letter to Darcy. But imagine Catherine Earnshaw sending something like that to Heathcliff!

“There is an argument our reliance on cyberspace for interaction has made face-to-face contact a dying art-form, that email has destroyed the letter and that instant and often erroneous information has replaced considered and meticulous research.

“Wouldn’t it be better if we could look into the eyes of the person we were talking to? The windows of their soul?”

“Wouldn’t it be nice to experience again the sweet perfume and the gentle hand of a love letter sent from afar? Wouldn’t it be nice to have to study again, that we might rediscover the joys of learning?”

“No. It would be absolutely crap.

Firstly, there are some people I don’t want to look at. I don’t want to look at anyone. If they’re ugly it’s rude, if they’re plain there’s no point and if they’re beautiful they just annoy you by not having sex with you.

“Secondly, who gets scented love letters? Nobody. They never did. It was a trick invented by Jane Austen and the Brontë sisters to make blokes do it and it never worked because blokes don’t read Jane Austen.

CHARLOTTE BRONTË AND THE WHITE RABBIT

On 11th June 2007 Patti Smith and her band gave a concert in Brussels which included Jefferson Airplane’s acid rock song *White Rabbit* (based on Lewis Carroll), *Le Soir*’s review of the concert linked this psychedelic, drug inspired song with Lucy Snowe’s dream like excursion into La Grande-Place in *Villette*.

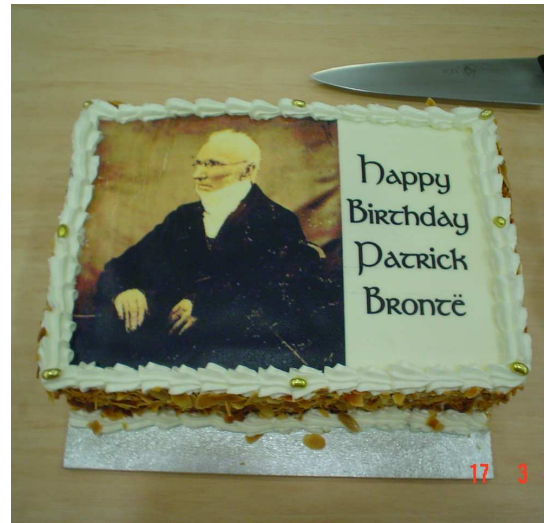
Cristina, who maintains the Brontë Blog (www.bronteblog.blogspot.com), quotes Mrs Gaskell in her *Life of Charlotte Brontë*.

I asked her whether she had ever taken opium, as the description given of its effects in *Villette* was so exactly like what I had experienced – vivid and exaggerated presence of objects, of which the outlines were indistinct or lost in the golden mist etc. She replied that she had never, to her knowledge, taken a grain of it in any shape, but that she had followed the process she always adopted when she had to describe anything which had not fallen within her own experience; she had thought intently on it for many a night before falling to sleep – wondering what it was like or how it would be – till at length, sometimes after the progress of her story had been arrested for weeks, she wakened up in the morning with all clear before her, as if she had in reality gone through the experience and could then describe it, word for word, as it had happened.

WAS DIANA AN EMILY BRONTË HEROINE?

From The New Yorker Mon Jun 23rd 1997
What few people have understood is that Diana’s love for Charles ... was embarrassingly intense ... How could Charles have known that the demure deb he married would turn out to harbor a cache of emotions out of Emily Brontë.
(Tina Brown)

SOME MORE PICTURES FROM ST PATRICK'S DAY AND THE DUNGEON EVENING



FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Saturday 28th JULY 10:30am at the SMSA, 280 Pitt St SYDNEY

Jane Eyre and Friends

Several characters from *Jane Eyre* will be interviewed and will be asked many questions that do not get answered in the novel.

Friday 21st – Sunday 23rd SEPTEMBER

A HIGHLAND WEEKEND at Ranelagh House in Robertson in the Southern Highlands
See the separate information and booking form with this newsletter.

Saturday 6th OCTOBER 10:30am at the SMSA, 280 Pitt St SYDNEY

JOINT MEETING WITH THE DICKENS SOCIETY

Dr Virginia Lowe: As No-one but a Woman Can

She compares Esther Summerson from *Bleak House* with Lucy Snowe from *Villette*.

Friday 2nd NOVEMBER 7pm in Eastwood (light meal included)

GREENLAND – ‘THAT RESERVOIR OF FROST AND SNOW’

Book by ringing Christopher Cooper on 9804-7473.

Saturday 8th DECEMBER: ABA CHRISTMAS LUNCH

More details and a booking form will be available later.