



# *The Australian Brontë Association Newsletter*

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## 200<sup>th</sup> BIRTHDAYS OF THE BRONTËS



Starting from next year we will be celebrating the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversaries of the births of the four famous Brontë children. In preparation, imagine that it is now near the end of the year 1815.

Last May the Brontë family, Patrick and Maria with their daughters, Maria and Elizabeth, moved to Thornton, on the Bradford Road, a few miles from Haworth. Patrick took up the post of minister in the church just across the road. The picture to the left shows the Thornton parsonage as it will be many years from now, after a butcher's shop

will have been built at the front.

Little Elizabeth is just a baby and was baptised only a couple of months ago. But already her mother is pregnant with Charlotte. She will be doomed to spend more than half of her short married life of nine years expecting. Fourteen months after Charlotte is born, she will give birth to the only son, Patrick Branwell and eleven months later will see the arrival of Emily. The longest gap between successive children will be the eighteen months between Emily and Anne. Only after Anne is born will the family move to Haworth, the place with which they are most identified.

When Charlotte is born, little Maria will be just three but will already be helping her mother watch over the new baby.



# COWAN BRIDGE WAS NOT SO BAD AFTER ALL!



In 1946 the Brontë Society *Transactions* printed what was claimed to be a Prospectus for the Cowan Bridge School that was attended by Charlotte Brontë and several of her sisters. This is the school that is the basis for the notorious Lowood School in *Jane Eyre*, though it is generally acknowledged that Charlotte exaggerated the

difficulties that the new school experienced in its early years.

The author of the item in the *Transactions*, Edith Weir, refers to a faded and frail manuscript that she has faithfully transcribed but she fails to mention the author of this manuscript or how it came into her hands. It purports to be a copy of the actual Prospectus but a careful reading of it suggests it is a spoof! Indeed, in a *Transactions* article in 1952, Dame Myra Curtis explains that she has examined the records of the school and no such Prospectus exists. We reproduce the Prospectus here as a bit of fun and as a challenge to the reader to find the oddities that suggest that it could not have been genuine.

[ADVERTISEMENT]

## COWEN BRIDGE COLLEGE PROSPECTUS

**PATRON:** W.W.C. Wilson M.P.

**RECTOR AND THEOLOGICAL**

**LECTURER:** Rev W. Wilson M.A.

### ASSISTANT LECTURERS

**In Housekeeping and Domestic Economy:**

Rev R. Wilson M.A.

**Elocution and Ventriloquy:** Rev Edward Wilson

**Latin, Greek and Philosophy:** Rev Ian Blythe

### FEMALE MANAGING ASSISTANTS

**Arithmetic and Dressmaking:** Mrs W. Wilson

**Foreign Language, Dancing and Riding:** Mrs Ann Wilson

**English, Reading and Poetry:** Miss Jane Thompson

**Singing and Scourgemistress:** Miss Finch

**Physician:** W. Batty M.D., M.L.H.L.

**Chemist and Dentist:** Mrs Batty

**Solicitor and Law Agent:** John Hartley Esq

### VICTUALERS

**Butchers:** Ewan Atkinson

**Grocer and Ham Merchant:** John Wright

**Flour and Meal:** R. Kendal

**Spice:** L. Sedgewick

**Grocer and Poulterer:** M. William Green

**Fishmonger:** Barron

**Maltster:** W. Morphet

**Beef Vendors, Cheese Mongers and Spirit Merchants:** Turner and Son

The object of this Institution may simply be said to afford a comfortable home and all the Blessings of a Pious Liberal and Refined Education to the daughters of necessitous Clergy.



"Miss Temple, teachers, and children, you all see this girl?" (page 69).

To provide the future success of this Scheme, pecuniary assistance from the pious and Charitable is absolutely necessary.

It is truly painful to reflect how many Poor Clergymen are utterly unable to bestow that on their female offspring to which their rank in Society entitles them.

This civilized Island is blessed with various institutions for the promotion of Classical and Scientific Learning and Clergymen can send their sons to the University where ample scope is afforded for those Bright talents which are so frequently found in an humble sphere of life.

But hitherto, no colleges, no liberal institutions of learning for their daughters where they can reap those blessings their Brethren enjoy, and it by no means unfrequently happens that we may see these pious girls busy – perhaps in a Dairy or employed in some menial occupation in a kitchen, and at the very same time their brothers are enjoying Fellowship or Scholarship in a University or some other

valuable employment, the reward of their Assiduity and Literary Attainments.

Such circumstances, together with repeated Solicitations of my father, family and friends have at length induced me open a Clerical School, approaching as nigh as possible in resemblance (as to mode of Instruction, Rules, Dress, etc) to a College. For this purpose I have already engaged professional teachers of more than ordinary talent to assist me in superintending the Education of the Students.

Their abilities need no comment from me; they have already distinguished themselves by their accomplishments. I could afford instances of such, but seeing they are members for the most part of my own family, I refrain from motives of delicacy.

These gentlemen I have engaged in the various classes of Lecturers, Etc. (vide Prospectus) at a salary of £100 each. Attendance required = three days per week, 8 hours per day.

The Female Teachers I have engaged to be constantly resident at College (excepting my sister whom domestic afflictions must necessarily detain at her father's house during the winter session), at a salary of 50 guineas per annum each.

All the teachers named in the prospectus receive the above mentioned sum as being teachers etc., excepting Miss Finch, a lady well known the pious fortitude and resignation with which she has borne various trying afflictions) who has engaged for a very trifling annual remuneration to assist me in regulating the Discipline of the College.

Doctor Batty has engaged for the sum of £120 per annum to supply the students with all needful Medicines and to visit professionally every Friday in the week. His wife has also volunteered for a trifling gratuity to impart those portions of Chemical and Dental knowledge.

Edith Weir also reproduced in the 1946 Transactions the following song, to be

sung to the tune of “St Patrick’s Day in the Morning”. The author’s name is given as F. Neydhame and it claims to have been written “on sight of the Advertisement ... in a Country Newspaper of the date of August 1824”. There are 40 verses, but only some are reproduced here.

Come hither good neighbours, and cease from your Labours,  
And ye Reverend Clergy attend,  
Whilst I tell of a College, replenished with Knowledge,  
To which ye your daughters may send.

We’ve had many troubles, and various Bubbles,  
Of Schemes both on Land and On Water,  
And a pious good man, has commenced a Cheap Plan,  
Of rearing each clergyman’s Daughter.

We’ve appropriate schools, for “gross” Boys and Fools  
Whom John Shaw and Ralph Simpson can drill,  
And by mod’rate Diet, can curb and quiet,  
And return home sound proofs of their Skill.

Hence is modelled this plan, which much credits this Man  
Of Girls a Notorious Protector.  
‘Tis a Lucrative Scheme, and is no fev’rish dream,  
Of Loss to the Reverend Rector.

The Students are clothed, and liberally Boarded,  
For Fourteen pounds sterling per Annum;  
And well versed in Knowledge, return from the College.  
Each Lass will amaze her old Gran’num.

Both French and Italian each Student shall speak;  
Shall warble in Hymns and quote Scripture;  
And the Rector, in person, shall thrice in the Week,  
On various Sciences lecture.

He will Modesty preach, by example he’ll teach,  
Of Gratitude, Meekness and Tact.  
Meantime his Young Wife. the Sole prop of his Life,  
Instructs them to add and Subtract.

Next Roger, his Brother, by all ranks esteemed,  
Shall lecture on Breeding and Marriage.  
For to steal a Rich heiress he’s cleverly schemed  
And his plans cannot fail from Miscarriage.

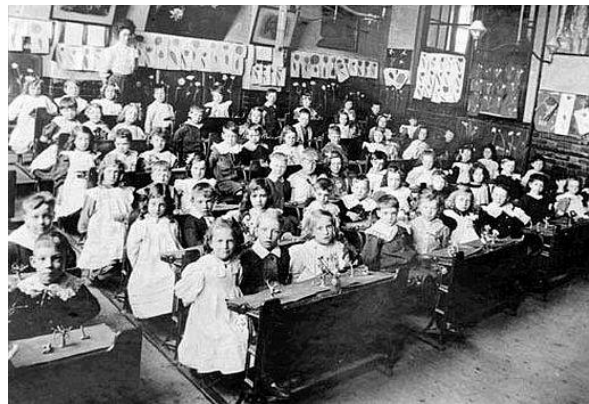
Stentorian Edward shall teach them to speak  
in Language distinct and refined.  
And jolly Blythe shall instruct ‘em in Latin and Greek

And lecture from Locke “On the Mind.”

‘Tis settled mild Ann shall give lessons in French  
During Spring at the College residing.  
In Wire and Rope dancing, and all kinds of prancing,  
Geography, Music and Riding.

Now to keep all in order, and punish disorder,  
And all kinds of Rows which may rise.  
They’ll a mistress require, full of spirit and fire,  
Who can flog with false tears in her eyes.

Miss Finch famed for Strength, and in pungency skilled,  
The Flog-mistress’ office shall fill,  
With Rods steeped in pickle, she’ll charmingly tickle,  
The Nun who conducts herself ill.



Lo! Eddy’s late pupil, (whose name to a tree,  
Was at Casterton nailed with his Laurels),  
Shall attend every Friday, at half after three  
To inspect both their Health and their Morals.

His spouse shall instruct ‘em in Mortars to pound  
Up the Med’cine’s Asthmatics require;  
By example she’ll show how to keep their fangs  
sound  
Without needing ivory and Wire.



These Chaste modest Maids are equipped for the trades,  
There are choice Nymphs for Soldiers and Sailors,  
And pious good Teachers for Methodist Preachers,  
And “Ready-clothes Makers for Tailors”

But this Scheme at first “start”, was “most strictly confined  
 To Clergymen’s daughters alone.”  
 To these the kind Rector has Clothes-makers joined,  
 And admits with these “darlings” – his own.



Then Oh! what a thing for the five pious Girls,  
 (Who own this good man as their Sire)  
 Who, with no cost at College, get Food, Clothes and  
 Knowledge,  
 What further can children require!?

The Reverend Rector has tried every plan  
 Of procuring the Students choice food.

And buys Butchers meat (wholesale) as cheap as he  
 can  
 Providing ‘tis wholesome – and good.

Betty Ewan contracts to supply him with Lamb,  
 And her Brother – with Mutton and Veal.  
 Little Wright, the new Grocer, with Sugar and Ham,  
 And Dick Kendal, with Flour and Meal.

Squire Sedgewick shall serve him with pepper and  
 salt;  
 Molly Willan with Ducks, Beans and Peas;  
 Lord Barron with Fish, and sly Morpher with Malt,  
 And old Turner with Bull-Beef and Cheese.

And oh! hear what dainties for the girls who eat  
 plucks;  
 Who gorge livers and guzzle small beer,  
 Who may now change such fare and eat Bull-Beef and  
 “ducks”  
 And drink ale which their Bosoms can cheer.

I don’t know what Charlotte was  
 complaining about! There is no mention of  
 burnt porridge in this Prospectus.

## MEMBERSHIPS DUE

Membership subscriptions are due. Payment will be accepted at the Christmas luncheon on 28<sup>th</sup> November and at the first meeting on 6<sup>th</sup> February 2016. Cheques or confirmation of payment by EFT can be posted to the Treasurer, Michael Links at 13 Greygum Place, Gympie Bay NSW 2227.

- \$40 standard membership
- \$55 two members at the same address
- \$30 for members of the UK Bronte Society
- \$30 for full-time students, concession care holders and overseas members
- \$20 for regional NSW and interstate members

## COMMITTEE

- |                              |   |
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For many people their knowledge of a classic novel relies on having seen the film. But no film has ever been made of Charlotte Brontë's *Villette*. There are dozens of versions of *Jane Eyre* but not a single *Villette*. It's a shame really because it would make a great psychological film. The dream sequence in the park (was Lucy Snowe on drugs?) would be particularly cinematographic. So you haven't seen the film and if you haven't read the book you can at least get the gist of the story by reading on.

It's a book that needs to be read at least twice because the narrator, Lucy Snowe, is far from honest towards her reader. You can't always believe what she says as you discover when you read further. On a second reading you are prepared. "Oh no Lucy Snowe, you don't fool me. I've read the whole book already and I know that what you say now is not quite true!"

The opening three chapters take place in an English village. Young Graham

Bretton is a lively 16 year old boy who makes a lot of fuss of a little girl, Polly, who comes to stay for a couple of months. Polly is pretty, but small for her six years. In fact we keep on hearing how very, very small she is, until we begin to wonder whether she's some sort of tiny fairy. Oh, yes there's also a 14-year old girl, Lucy, staying in the

house, a god-daughter of Mrs Bretton, and there's Polly's maid, Harriet.

In chapter 4 Graham and Polly disappear from the story while we follow Lucy. She's now 22 years old and is working as a companion to an invalid Miss Marchant. Come chapter 5 and we're still stuck with this Lucy Snowe. She's not the most interesting of characters, and clearly she won't be the main one. Perhaps she's like

Lockwood in *Wuthering Heights*, the narrator but only a minor character.



Lucy travels to London and, while crossing the channel, she meets Ginevra Fanshawe and, and so do we. This young 18-year-old English girl is returning to Brussels to continue her schooling. Ginevra is full of herself, but she's beautiful, vivacious and interesting, which is more than you can say for Lucy Snowe! Clearly she'll turn out to be the heroine of the story.

Once ashore, Lucy travels on to Villette (that's Brussels) where a young Englishman assists her by giving her directions to a suitable inn. As it's getting dark he even escorts her across the park – what a gentleman! Unfortunately he leaves her just before reaching the inn (“you'll be right just go down those steps”) and she's accosted by two rather unpleasant types. She runs off and takes refuge in a nearby girls' school. By the sort of good chance that only ever happens in novels, it's the very same school, Madame Beck's Pensionnat, to which Ginevra was returning. Yes Ginevra must turn out to be the heroine. Lucy does some fast talking and manages to get a job at the school, looking after Madame Beck's own children.

In chapter 8 we get to know Madame Beck and her system of surveillance. She spies on her teachers and gets her teachers to spy on the pupils, and on each other. She moves around the school silently and one never knows when she is listening or watching. She even goes through the teachers things to find out their secrets!

Lucy gets promoted to the position of English teacher and when discipline problems arise she locks the main perpetrator in the closet – no problems after that! In chapter 9 we meet Ginevra again and listen to her going on and on about a certain Isadore who has won her heart and has given her some very fine gifts.

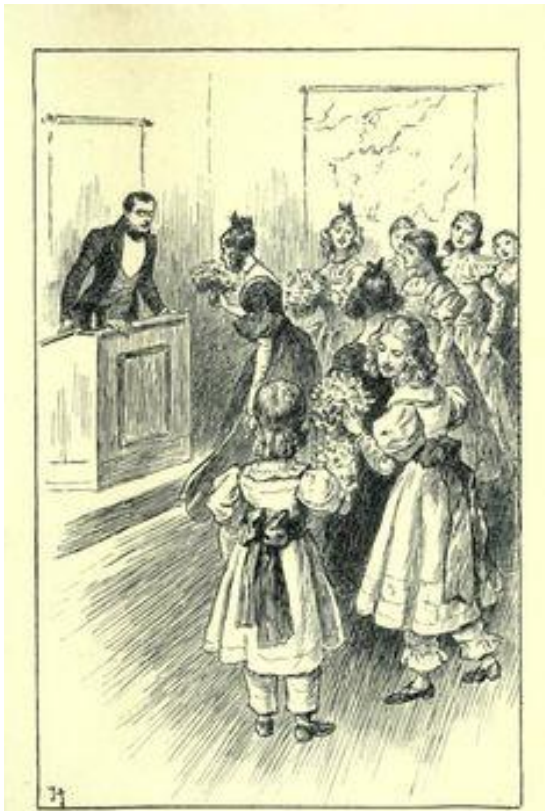
Then we meet a young English doctor who calls daily at the Pensionnat and in whom Lucy seems to take a lot of interest. Chapter 11 takes place in and around the portress's cabinet and seems to involve some mystery with this Dr John. Naturally Lucy

is there to try to find out what's going on. “The open door served me as a screen.” So Lucy is as much a spy as Madame Beck!

In chapter 12 we follow Lucy out into the garden. She seems to spend a lot of time there in its secluded walks, especially in the evenings. On one occasion a letter is dropped from a window of the boy's school that is on the other side of the garden. Naturally, as it's not addressed to her ... she reads it. But then Dr John suddenly appears. He seems to know something about that letter.

In chapter 13, Lucy finds Madame Beck prying into her things in the dormitory. Lucy retreats. Later she meets Dr John in the nursery and, after some little time, discovers that Madame Beck has been listening at the door.

Chapter 14 brings us to a holiday festival at which there is to be a dramatic performance. Monsieur Paul, one of the



teachers (he's also Madame Beck's cousin) persuades Lucy to fill in, at short notice, in a trouser role – as a young gentleman. To show her how much he wants her to undertake the part he locks her in the attic

while she learns her lines. We've met this Paul Emmanuel before and he seems to be harmless, but very, very eccentric.

Well then comes the long summer vacation. Practically everyone goes away. Lucy becomes exceedingly lonely, so much so that, though a Protestant, she goes to confession just so that she can talk to someone. She's been neglecting her health and, not long after leaving the church, faints in the street.

In chapter 16 she wakes up in a house, just outside the city, where she's been taken by those who found her. We're amazed to learn that this house belongs to Dr John and even more amazed to learn that he is none other than Graham Bretton ten years older. Oh, by the way he was also that helpful gentleman who assisted her when she first arrived in Villette. The kind lady who's been attending to her is Mrs Bretton. Did nobody recognise anybody? Lucy confesses that she *did* recognise Dr John as Graham some chapters back but she omitted to tell the reader.

And, you've guessed it – Ginevra's Isadore is *also* Dr John. It appears that every second male character in the novel is really Dr John. Lucy tries to convince him that Ginevra is unworthy of him and he gets rather cross with her.

Chapter 19 takes place in an art gallery that includes a number of paintings of scantily dressed ladies. Lucy clearly doesn't approve, which is why she goes to such great lengths to describe the paintings in great detail to us. Paul Emmanuel and Dr John happen to be there too and Lucy observes, and describes for our benefit, their rather different reactions to these paintings.

Chapter 20 occurs at a concert, which Lucy attends with Dr John and his mother. Ginevra is there also and her rudeness marks the beginning of the end of her spell over him. This is further developed in chapters 21 and 22. So will he now turn his attentions to Lucy? We're beginning to accept the fact that Ginevra may, after all, not be the central character in the story.

Will it be Dr John, alias Graham Bretton, alias Isadore, who will be the one to live happily ever after with Lucy?

In chapter 22 Lucy receives a letter from Dr John. She goes up to the attic to find some privacy and encounters the ghost of the legendary white nun that's supposed to haunt the school. Here's the little touch of Gothic that every good novel of the period had to include.

Chapter 23 describes a theatrical performance. There's a fire and in the stampede a young woman is injured. Dr John rescues her and takes her to the Hôtel Crécý where she lives with her father Monsieur Bassompierre. Now, since there's such great economy in the number of characters in this novel, she has to turn out to be none other than little Polly, now a grown young woman – still quite petite – known by her proper name, Paulina. Of course Dr John falls in love with her. A lot of explanations occupy chapters 24 and 25.

In chapter 26 Lucy decides that, romantically, Dr John is a lost cause so she decides to bury his letters in the garden. While there she again sees the white nun. Not much happens in chapter 27 and so we come to chapter 28.

From left of field comes an unexpected love-interest for Lucy – the eccentric, and not altogether endearing, Paul Emmanuel. Who would have expected that? Chapters 29 and 30 allow us time to get used to this idea.

In chapter 31 Paul Emmanuel and Lucy are in the garden as they get to know each other better. But they're not alone. In the darkness they both see ... the white nun! Chapter 32 takes us back to Paulina while in chapter 33 Paul Emmanuel takes the whole school on a country excursion.

Now Paul Emmanuel has an old and hideous mother, who's not at all happy with her son's apparent choice. In chapter 34 Madame Beck sends Lucy to her on some innocent errand and there she's told by Madame Emmanuel, in no uncertain terms, to back off. She doesn't want her son to

marry a mere assistant teacher, and a Protestant at that.

Chapter 35 is more stuff about the school. In chapter 36 the storm clouds start gathering and in chapters 38 and 39 the storm breaks. Paul Emmanuel's family are going to do everything in their power to prevent a union with Lucy (not that he's proposed to her yet). He's to be sent overseas on some important family matter.

In these chapters we witness a somewhat surreal, dream-like scene in the Royal Park. On the night of the big summer fête Lucy has been

drugged by Madame Beck. But the drug makes her strangely awake. Hearing the distant festivities she goes to the park and, hiding herself in the crowds, she discovers that practically everyone she knows is there – Dr John and his mother, Paul Emmanuel and his mother Paulina and her father, Madame Beck and her children – they're all there.

Now we skipped over chapter 37 – all that does is to round off the “happily ever after” bit for Dr John and Paulina. Chapter 40 does the same for Ginevra. She eloped with a certain Alfred on the night of the summer fête and we learn that her “ever after” is as happy as Paulina's. Oh, by the way, the white nun was simply a disguise that this Alfred adopted whenever he snuck into the Pensionnat at night to meet up with Ginevra.

So all that remains is to discover whether Lucy and Paul will enjoy the same happiness. In chapter 41 we learn that, before departing on his trip, Paul Emmanuel

sets Lucy up in a school of her own, intending to join her on his return. Oh, yes, he does get round to making a sort of proposal.

And in the final chapter, chapter 42, we learn that over the three years he's away he writes as often as there's a ship to take his letter. But at the time of his expected return there are reports of severe storms and many

shipwrecks, which could account for the fact that at the end of the novel he hasn't yet come back. We're not told whether he does lie at the bottom of the ocean or whether he's simply enjoying his freedom in some far off land. However

Lucy seems remarkably philosophical about this uncertainty and seems to be quite content to live happily ever after as a spinster-schoolmistress, if that should be her fate.

If you didn't know that the story is strongly autobiographical you do now. Lucy Snowe is Charlotte, Paul Emmanuel is Monsieur Heger, Madame Beck is his wife. This reflects Charlotte's time in Brussels at the Pensionnat when she and Emily were gaining extra skills in order to open a school. It is all greatly exaggerated of course. Monsieur Heger was a little eccentric, but nothing like Paul Emmanuel. And Madame Heger was not so much a spy as a generous person who took a great interest in her teachers and pupils. So perhaps, armed with this knowledge you need to read the novel for a third time!



## INTERVIEW BY LOUISE OWENS WITH CATHERINE REEF

Author of *The Brontë Sisters; The Brief Lives of Charlotte, Emily and Anne* (Clarion)

From Louise's README Blogsite [www.readmeblogsite.net](http://www.readmeblogsite.net)

**When did you first become interested in the Brontës?** The bookshelves of my childhood home held a 1943 boxed set of *Jane Eyre* and *Wuthering Heights* with woodcut illustrations by Fritz Eichenberg. As a young teenager I spent a lot of time with these two volumes. I was entranced by the stark, haunting pictures, and I



immersed myself in the stories, which were unlike anything I had ever read. For me this was a powerful experience of literature and art, one that has remained vivid in my memory.

**Which are your favourite images in this book?**

A big favorite has to be the one I chose to open the book: nervous horses desperately trying to gain a foothold as they struggle to haul a heavy cart up a steep hill. I wanted to begin with an image that emphasized the harsh, unforgiving environment in which the Brontës lived. It was a world indifferent to suffering, “a strange land,” as the sisters’ father, the Reverend Patrick Brontë, said. I like the sight of George Smith, the youthful publisher of *Jane Eyre*, first encountering its author. He stares at a letter in his hand, then at the diminutive woman standing before him, then at the letter, and again at the woman, back and forth, until it dawns on him

that she wrote this powerful novel. I also embrace the image of Arthur Bell Nicholls trembling with fear as he asks Charlotte Brontë for her hand in marriage. Nicholls was a mature man of thirty-three. As her father’s curate, he knew Charlotte well and had grown to love her through day-to-day contact. Yet he had to summon every bit of his courage to stand before her and open his heart.

**What was the most interesting thing you discovered when writing this book?**

*Jane Eyre* begins on a rainy day. Prevented by the weather from walking outside, the title character curls up in a window seat with an illustrated book. She is attracted to its pictures of bleak shorelines and fields of ice, scenes that mirror the loveless world Jane inhabits. She focuses on a particular illustration of a “rock standing up alone in a sea of billow and spray.” Jane was reading a real book, Bewick’s *History of British Birds*, which was on the shelves of the Haworth parsonage. Brontë had perused it often enough in childhood to have the illustrations imprinted in her mind. It was a happy day for me as a researcher when I tracked down this peculiar book at the Library of Congress in Washington, D.C. I found the page with the solitary rock, which now appears as an illustration in my book. I’m sure that Charlotte Brontë meant for the rock to symbolize Jane’s isolation in early life, when she is at the mercy of forces beyond her control.

**Was there any information/images which were hard to source?**

One thing I do, when writing about creative people such as the Brontës, is to show young readers how their work was received in the subjects’ lifetime. The sisters’ novels, now considered classics of English literature and studied in classrooms around the world, shocked people when they first appeared. The Brontës had written frankly about the emotional lives of women and about male-female relationships, revealing truths that many Victorians resisted acknowledging in their own lives and objected to seeing printed on a page. For example, in *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*, Anne Brontë describes a disastrous marriage marred by alcoholism and discord. At one point the wife, Helen Huntingdon, locks her husband

out of her bedroom, denying him access to her bed. Did this scene offend Victorian readers' sensibilities? Most definitely. Did such things occur in mid-nineteenth-century English homes? Of course. But no one ever spoke of them. "The slamming of Helen Huntingdon's bedroom door against her husband reverberated through Victorian England," commented May Sinclair, a writer of a later generation—or did she? I encountered this quote in several books discussing the novel, but not a single one credited a primary source. I had enough experience as a researcher to be suspicious, so I made it my business to track down Sinclair's words. I found them in her 1913 book, *The Three Brontës*, but what Sinclair actually wrote was this: "The slamming of that bedroom door fairly resounds through the emptiness of Anne's novel." This was the quote I included in my book. It was less dramatic than the first one, but it was accurate—and sourced. In this way I made a small yet important correction to the literary and historical record. It felt good!

**What do you love most about each of the Brontë sisters?** Admire might be a better word than love. I admire the way Charlotte Brontë looked after the interests of her siblings, including the ones who didn't survive childhood. The two oldest Brontë girls, Maria and Elizabeth, contracted tuberculosis while pupils at the Clergy Daughters' School at Cowan Bridge. This charity school for the daughters of poor ministers used cruelty and deprivation in a misguided attempt to mold the girls' character. A sadist can find a haven in such a place, and clearly one did—the teacher who singled out Maria Brontë for repeated abuse. As a small child Charlotte watched helplessly as her sister suffered, but as a novelist she spoke out in Maria's behalf by modeling Lowood, the dismal institution to which the orphaned Jane Eyre is sent, on the Clergy Daughters' School. Charlotte did her job so well that some readers recognized in her description the school at Cowan Bridge. I admire Emily's determination to be true to herself. She simply was not going to bow to convention in manners or dress if doing so forced her to be dishonest or stifle her will. The fiercely private Emily Brontë lasted as a teacher at Miss Patchett's School for a single term because she could not thrive by satisfying an employer's expectations. Even when death was descending on her, she refused to bend; she played the piano,

fed her dogs, and completed all the household chores that she loved to do right up until her final hours. No one else but Emily Brontë could have written *Wuthering Heights*, a novel that defied literary and social conventions to such a degree that it continues to resist interpretation and has the power to shock readers even today. I admire Anne's power of observation. A shy, retiring young woman of limited experience, Anne Brontë nevertheless produced two novels that explore human motivations and relationships with insight and sophistication. She found characters and plot elements by watching and listening as a governess in the houses of the well-to-do and at home in remote Haworth. In *The Brontë Sisters* I describe an afternoon when Anne, as a proper clergyman's daughter, entertains a visitor to the parsonage named Mrs. Collins. She listens politely as Mrs. Collins carries on for two hours about her unhappy marriage to an alcoholic cleric and her later success at being self-supporting. In Mrs. Collins's saga Anne found inspiration for *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall*.

**What do you think is the lasting appeal of the Brontë novels?** People are drawn to the Brontës' novels in part because the sisters' own story appeals to the imagination. Think of it—children growing up in a bleak environment where death is a constant presence, having only one another as playmates, creating an imaginary world, and writing down the sagas of its inhabitants. How wondrous it was that three of those children became important novelists, and how tragic that all three died before age forty. It's tempting to wonder what might have happened if they had lived. Had Anne continued to write, would she have rivaled Jane Austen? Her two novels revealed so much promise. Would Emily have published a second novel? Some scholars think that she wrote one, and that Charlotte destroyed it out of a fear that it would be misunderstood. And what about Charlotte? Would she have been satisfied as a clergyman's wife? Would she have abandoned novel writing, as her husband had wished? We can never know. The Brontës' books also have lasting appeal because, like all novels that have become classics, they deal with timeless themes: an individual's journey toward self-actualization, in the case of *Jane Eyre*, for example, or the destructive nature of unbridled passions, as illustrated in *Wuthering Heights*. They offer insight into human emotions, from

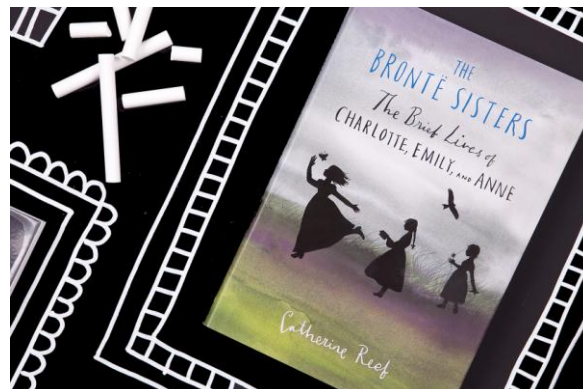
fervency to rage to despair. Edward Rochester is very much a man of the nineteenth century, yet readers of our own time understand his world weariness. Helen Huntingdon lives in a society that in many ways was different from our own; a married woman had no right to her property in mid-nineteenth-century England, or even to her children. Yet the suffering she feels as a partner in an unhappy, abusive marriage is no different from the pain an individual in such a situation experiences today. As Ernest Hemingway said about his own novels, the Brontës' books are true. The characters and plot details are fictional, but they are built upon a foundation of truth.

**What do you choose to do during your time off?** Some people who work hard spend their free time relaxing on a sofa and watching television. Not me—I like to be doing something. If I am not writing, you are likely to find me planning or finishing a craft project, cooking dinner for friends, visiting a museum, attending a concert or play, or going to a restaurant. If it's evening and the television is on, I will be knitting. I also read steadily and eclectically. I don't read much current fiction; I generally like novels best when they have had time to season. I enjoy as well reading biographies, memoirs, and any nonfiction of high literary quality. And of course I love to read poetry, but I can only absorb poems slowly.

**Do you collect anything?** I have never deliberately set out to collect things, yet I have ended up with a number of collections: pottery bowls, crockery decorated with fish motifs, covered dishes shaped like birds, vintage hand-knitted sweaters, knitting magazines from bygone decades. Certain objects have their connotations or particular appeal, are grouped together, and *voilà*—there's a collection. Quite a few quirky old books have also attached themselves to me.

**What is something that most people might be surprised to know about you?** It is my dream to travel to the Northwest Territories of Canada and see the Northern Lights. I saw them once on a frigid winter night when I was very young and living on Long Island, New York. My mother woke my brother and me and brought us to a window. As we looked out at a wondrous, glowing curtain of green hanging in the sky, my mother explained what we were seeing. She told

us never to forget the sight, because we might never see it again. An obedient child, I have not forgotten, but I do want to see the lights at least one more time.



**What are you working on next?** In August, Clarion will release *Noah Webster: Man of Many Words*, my biography of the great lexicographer. Webster had a talent for raising his contemporaries' hackles by writing provocatively about politics and language, yet he managed through those writings to influence the development of the young United States and the English language as used by Americans. He witnessed key events of his time and met a number of its great personages. He was an arrogant, opinionated, and socially awkward old fellow, yet I grew quite fond of him. I hope readers enjoy getting to know him too. Then, in 2016, look for my young adult biography of Florence Nightingale, the illustrious nurse. Many, many books on Nightingale have been written for young children, but virtually nothing is available for adolescents and teens. This is a shame because her story is one they will identify with strongly. What young person hasn't felt misunderstood by his or her family, as Nightingale did? Who doesn't feel at odds with society while coming of age? Nightingale was a pioneer in calling for a woman's right to work in the field of her choosing, and what she accomplished as a woman in Victorian England is remarkable. And, of course, the account of her years in the military hospitals of the Crimean War is nothing short of sensational. So I am excited!

**Website addresses:**

**Please include your website address for your tours, talks and books.**

<http://catherinereef.com/>

# THE BRONTË AUTOMATONS

Christopher Cooper – Reprinted from the ABA Newsletter December 2004

In the book *Top Secret: A Handbook of Codes, Ciphers and Secret Writing* by Paul B. Janeczko (Candlewick Press) one code is described whereby a particular edition of a particular novel is agreed upon and words are referenced by giving the page number, line number and the number of the word on that page. Of course this assumes that all the words one wants to use can be found in the particular novel. You wouldn't find the word "automaton" in any of Jane Austen's novels, for instance. But in the novels of the Brontë sisters it is quite another thing.

In a review of Janeczko's book the example given is the word "automaton" which is coded as the number 3271904 because it appears as the 4<sup>th</sup> word on line 19 of page 327. "All you have to remember is which of the Brontës' novels we're using and what edition."

I first came across the word "automaton" as a synonym for "robot" and later as a technical term in a computer science text so I was somewhat surprised that it would appear in a nineteenth century novel. But then I remembered that it was used to describe those mechanical figures that were very popular in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century.

The first use of "automaton", according to the Oxford Dictionary, is 1611 and by 1796 it was being applied to human beings who acted mechanically in a monotonous routine. Jane Austen moved in a circle where she would be likely to have seen one of these clockwork figures and it is surprising that she never felt the need for such a metaphor to describe a certain form of human behaviour. On the other hand all three of the Brontë sisters used the word, although it is likely that they never saw one. They probably picked up this

metaphor from their reading, but from which writer?

Charlotte uses it three times in *Jane Eyre*. (1) Rochester is stunned by the appearance of Mason at the wedding. He repeats his name "in the tone one might fancy a speaking **automaton** to enounce its single words". (2) In response to Rochester's attempts to persuade Jane to stay she replies: "Do you think I am an **automaton**? – a machine without feelings?" (3) St John Rivers "spoke almost like an **automaton**".

In *Shirley* the word is put under the spotlight. The young child, Jessy Yorke has trouble with the word. She says to her mother "... Rose there is such an aut --- aut – I have forgotten the word, but it means a machine in the shape of a human being. However between you, you will drive every soul away from Briarmains –". Rose replies "I am an **automaton**? Good! Let me alone then."

In *The Professor* Hunsden accuses Crimsworth of sitting at his desk in his uncle's counting house "day by day and week by week, scraping with a pen on paper, just like an **automaton**." And later Sylvie is described as having a "pale, passive **automaton** air".

Emily describes Hareton and Joseph as a pair of automatons – "they sat like **automatons**, one on each side of the fire".

In Anne's *The Tenant of Wildfell Hall* Huntingdon accuses Helen of having reduced little Arthur "to little better than an **automaton**". And in *Agnes Grey* Rosalie, now mistress of her own establishment, refers to the footmen as "mere automatons".



# LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

As we prepare for the New Year, we can look back fondly at another great year of excellent speakers, talks and camaraderie. In the second half of 2015 we explored some of Emily's poetry with Ryan Twomey, looked at the cinematic afterlives of *Wuthering Heights* with Jenny Maclennan and delved in to medical mishaps and maladies with Dr Vasudha Chandra. We welcome new members Tracy Peacock from WA and Emily Prince from Victoria.

In 2016 we will be celebrating Charlotte's bicentenary with an excellent program and events. Our book of the year is *Jane Eyre* and we look forward to exploring this enduring classic enhanced by readings from members at each meeting. We are gratefully acknowledge the generous sponsorship of the ABA by Abbey's bookshop and Yorkshire Tea.



We are thrilled to be partnering with the Brontë Society in the UK in celebrating not only Charlotte but the bicentenaries of Branwell, Emily and Anne in the coming years. A new link on the Society's website [www.bronte200.org](http://www.bronte200.org) will provide news and pictures of the many events taking place across the globe in 2016 and beyond.



With many thanks to Wendy King, we now have a Facebook page. Follow us at Australian Bronte Association.



There are so many new Brontë related books being published we are really spoilt for choice. I can't wait to read the new biography of Charlotte by Claire Harman. In the October edition of *Literary Review*, Samantha Ellis states that she is "not sure who Harman's Brontë really is. She's not Gaskell's sad, sweet martyr, she's not the caustic, love-hungry heroine of Lyndall Gordon's 1994 biography and she's not the neurotic, hypocritical woman who stalks the pages of Juliet Barker's group biography, *The Brontës* (published in 1994 and updated in 2010). Harman unforgettably conjures up Lucy Snowe, the protagonist of *Villette*, as a 'disturbing, hyper-sensitive alter-ego, a ticking bomb of emotions', but she never uses such language when describing Brontë directly."



In April we look forward to launching a new book by our Patron, Professor Christine Alexander, and A/Professor Sara Pearson from Canada - *Celebrating Charlotte*.

As we celebrate her bicentenary throughout 2016 it will be a wonderful to explore the many facets of this fascinating lady and decide for ourselves who Charlotte Brontë really is. We will keep you informed of additional talks and events throughout the year.

Susannah Fullerton will be giving a talk on Charlotte at the WEA on Friday, 11 March, 6.00pm to 8.30pm - bookings to be made with the WEA. She will also be giving a talk at the Art Gallery of NSW on Charlotte Brontë and *Jane Eyre* on Friday, 11 November and Saturday, 12 November – bookings will be available in the New Year through the Gallery.

With best wishes for Christmas and the New Year.

Sarah Burns



# THE AUSTRALIAN BRONTË ASSOCIATION

## 2016 Meeting Program

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The Australian Brontë Association meets in Sydney five times a year. Meetings are held at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel (near Town Hall Station) at 10:30am, though we serve morning tea from 10:00am. Those who wish to do so, have a light lunch at the hotel. At each meeting, a paper on some aspect of the Brontës' life and work is presented. There is a meeting charge of \$5 (members and non-members).

### *Celebrating Charlotte Brontë*

21 April 1816 – 31 March 1855

#### **Book of the Year: *Jane Eyre***

#### **6 February AGM: Friends of Charlotte Brontë**

An introduction to some those who knew and loved Charlotte Brontë and the contribution they made to the enduring legacy of their friend's life and works.

#### **2 April Dr Andrew Shields – *Shirley & The Luddite Movement***

Andrew will explore the social, political and cultural history of Victorian Britain and examine how Charlotte Brontë used contemporary events as a background for her novel.

#### **22 April Charlotte Brontë Bicentenary Dinner**

The Grand Dining Room (Cello's), Castlereagh Boutique Hotel

#### **4 June Dr Christopher Cooper – Was Charlotte a 'Closet Catholic'?**

Charlotte Brontë grew up in a staunchly Protestant household. She made veiled, and often explicit, criticism of Catholicism in her letters and her novels. Yet, reading between the lines, one can detect the fact she was secretly fascinated by the forms and rituals of the Catholic Church. Intellectually she was repelled by Catholicism, but emotionally she seemed to be drawn to it. Her ambivalence began during the time she spent in the very Catholic environment of the school she attended in Brussels and her love-hate relationship with her very Catholic teacher, Monsieur Heger.

#### **6 August Jenny McLennan - *The Cinematic Afterlives of Jane Eyre***

The era of movies and TV productions, which lend themselves to rich colour, impressive scenery and great acting which brings the characters to life, has brought out a large number of versions of this classic novel. Jenny will look back at the many and varied film and television adaptations over the years.

#### **1 October Christine Gietz – *Jane Matters***

Will the real Jane Eyre please stand up? A close study of all the matters pertaining to Jane including her five incarnations and her Gothic and Victorian origins and an exploration of Jane the woman and Jane the character.

#### **3 December ABA/Dickens Christmas Lunch**

The Grand Dining Room (Cello's), Castlereagh Boutique Hotel

# MARIA BRANWELL'S SHIPWRECKED BOOK *THE REMAINS OF HENRY KIRK WHITE*

Partly based on an article by Nicola Harley in the UK Telegraph 13<sup>th</sup> Nov 2015

Just before Maria Branwell married Patrick Brontë in 1812 she had a sea chest of her belongings shipped from Cornwall, but the ship foundered and her box was dashed to pieces.



Maria Branwell

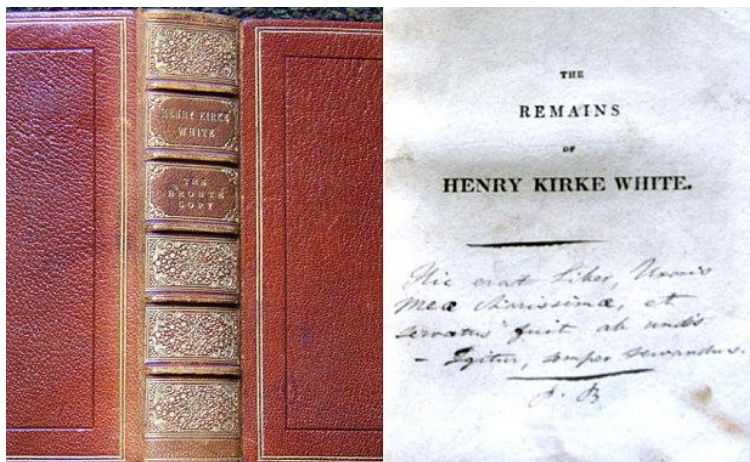
Most of her possessions were lost but one item that was saved was a sea stained copy of *The Remains of Henry Kirk White* by Robert Southey. Many years after her mother's death Charlotte was given this book by her father and she treasured it as a memory of the mother she hardly remembered.

Its value lies not so much in the published text but in the numerous pieces of writing and sketches that this copy contains – done by various members of the family. Patrick wrote in it, in Latin, “....the book of my dearest wife and it was saved from the waves. So then it will always be preserved.” It also contains many annotations, doodles, and sketches by the children and, what is especially interesting, a hitherto unknown poem of Charlotte's.

It was sold after Patrick Brontë's death in 1861 and ended up in America where it remained in a private collection for over a hundred years. Recently it was bought by the

Brontë Society for £200,000 thanks to £170,000 from the National Heritage Memorial Fund and additional funding from the V&A Purchase Grant Fund and the Friends of the National Libraries. It will go on display at the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

Ann Dinsdale, Collections Manager of the Brontë Society said: “Mrs Brontë's book is one of the most significant Brontë items to come to light in many years. It was clearly well-used and of great sentimental value to the Brontë children, who lost their mother while they were very young. In addition, the unpublished



Robert Southey's *The Remains of Henry Kirke White* Photo: Ben Lack

writings by Charlotte offer new opportunities for research, which is really exciting.”

The poem, related to the Angrian Juvenilia, includes the following lines:

Mary thou did's't not know that I was nigh  
Thou did's't not know my gaze was fixed on thee  
I stood apart and watched thee gliding by  
In all thy calm unconscious majesty.

There is also a very short story by Charlotte featuring a public flogging, embezzling from the Wesleyan chapel, and a “vicious” caricature of the Reverend John Winterbottom – a religious opponent of her father – in which Winterbottom is “dragged from his bed” and then “by the heels from one end of the village to the other”.