

The  
Martineau  
Society



**Eleventh Newsletter**  
**July 1999**

THE MARTINEAU SOCIETY

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CONTENTS: NEWSLETTER NO 11

Editorial	2
Obituary: Reg Charles	3
Martineau Society Meetings	4
Harriet Martineau escapes to America	4
Harriet Martineau at the New Armit Library	12
'Fancy-work and Bluestockingism	13
E mail addresses	19
Addresses for Communication	20

**EDITORIAL**

This Editorial has to begin with an apology. You may have been wondering where your Spring Newsletter got to this year. Unfortunately, we were somewhat short of copy in March when the Newsletter is normally prepared, so I am particularly grateful to Deborah Logan of Western Kentucky University for coming to our rescue with her excellent article on Harriet Martineau and the 'needle versus pen' controversy in women's writing.

In other respects, the 11th issue of the Martineau Society Newsletter sees the Society enjoying an encouraging period of consolidation. We look forward to a joint meeting with the Dickens Fellowship in London, followed by the AGM at Dr Williams's Library in Gordon Square. The new programme of 'roving meetings' gives members a chance to enjoy a weekend break somewhere different each time, and possibly meet up with old friends in the area. In London this year we are arranging a tour of the Houses of Parliament as an additional treat. If you haven't so far attended an AGM weekend, do think about coming to the next one. They're not expensive, and you'll have an opportunity to meet other members of the Society, enjoy a sociable meal, and see some places of historical interest - including Dr Williams's Library itself. The Library not only houses an impressive collection of theology books, but also has manuscript material pertaining to the Martineaus, including the diaries of Henry Crabb Robinson - a commentator on members of the Wordsworth circle and Harriet Martineau's activities.

Work is going ahead to see whether commemorative plaques could be fixed to the sites of James and Harriet's London houses; and for those of you who have fathomed out the Internet, there will also be a Martineau website shortly - accessed via the 'Contents' list of the Harris Manchester

College website, which is part of Oxford University. The website will provide biographical and publication details for both Harriet and James, with pictures, and some commentary on their historical significance. This will clearly do a little more to raise their profile - as will the updated and expanded entry for Harriet, by Valerie Sanders, in the forthcoming Cambridge Bibliography of English Literature.

IN MEMORIAM

**The Reverend Reginald Thomas Charles, B.D., M.Th.**

Reg was born in 1921 at Oxford, where he went to school and college. He later became a licensed Lay Reader in the Oxford Diocese.

He saw war service with the Royal Air Force and afterwards with the Royal Navy. Later, his work and studies took him to the Dunn School of Pathology and the World Health Organisation in France.

On returning home, Reg read Theology at Aberystwyth University where he gained his Bachelor of Divinity and Master of Theology degrees. He combined intensive theological studies with a career in Chiropody.

Reg, with his wife Elizabeth, became members of St John's, Bexhill, in 1985. He later became an Elder and Pastoral Assistant. After pre-ordination studies, Reg was ordained as Assistant Minister (non-stipendiary) at St John's until retiring in 1994.

More recently, Reg was studying and preparing a thesis based on the life of Martineau. Had time been on his side, he had hoped to have obtained his Doctorate in Philosophy. His visits to Manchester College during these studies were always a great pleasure to Reg because they were a chance to meet up with so many good friends that he made during this period.

Reg leaves his widow Elizabeth, two sons and three daughters.

**MARTINEAU SOCIETY MEETINGS: 10-11 September 1999**

Members of the Society should now have received details of the 1999 meetings, which will be held in London on 10-11 September. On Friday 10 September there will be a combined meeting with the Dickens Fellowship from 6.30-8.30pm at the Swedenborg Hall, 20-21 Bloomsbury Way, WC1, when Professor Ken Fielding will give a lecture entitled: 'Likeness in Unlikeness: Dickens and Harriet Martineau.'

Next day, the Annual General Meeting and Seminar will take place at Dr Williams's Library, 14 Gordon Square WC1H, from 9.30 to 4.30. In addition to the formal business of the meeting, short seminar contributions are invited from members.

Accommodation is available in University of London student halls nearby: a list of addresses and 'phone numbers was sent out in a recent mailing.

**ELISABETH ARBUCKLE: 'Harriet Martineau Escapes to America'**

The continuation of Professor Arbuckle's paper presented at the AGM in September 1998:

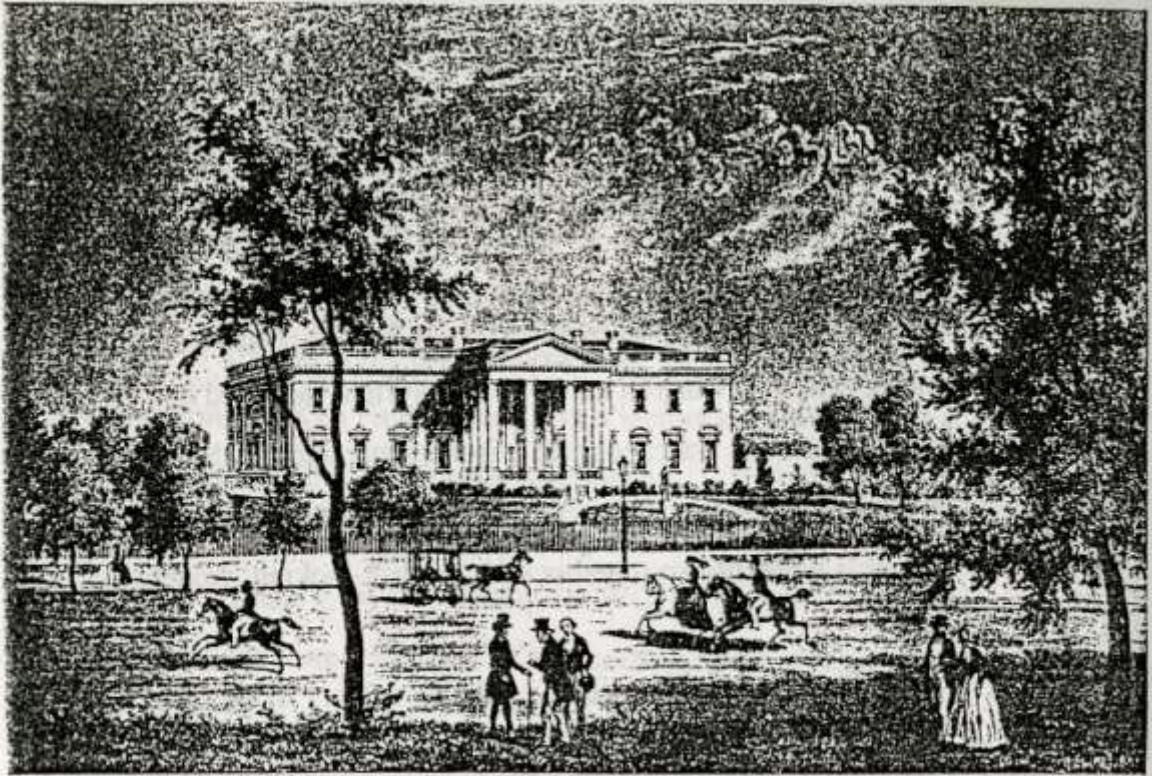
Travelling up the Hudson River by steamboat, Martineau saw West Point and noted the elegant library and other facilities for young male students. In Albany, she and Louisa met shipboard friends for an excursion to Niagara Falls. Albany seemed a 'bustling city...rising from the [Hudson] with its brown stone courthouse and white marble capitol.' In their hotel, Martineau opened a 'handsome piano' and 'found it empty of keys!' After dinner, Vice-President Martin Van Buren called on her. Next morning, they left for Schnectady by railroad and continued to Utica, New York, by canal boat. (Dickens was to anathematize travel on American canal boats, especially the men's obnoxious habit of chewing tobacco and spitting.

Martineau says only that she would never advise ladies to travel by canal.) At Utica, the party engaged a stagecoach with driver for \$80 to take them to Buffalo.

Martineau's friends had agreed to allow her a day at Auburn, New York, to inspect the state prison. It was run on the "silent system" admired by British prison reformers. She watched male prisoners marching to the workshop and women prisoners employed in sewing but noted that hopeful-looking girls were thrown together with 'brutish-looking' women.

They had already spied their first log cabin, and now solitary Indians began to appear along the road. Like other European travellers, Martineau longed to see Niagara Falls - she may have seen the 'panorama' of the falls exhibited in Leicester Square the previous spring. This time she was not disappointed, for the spectacle proved one of her most emotionally satisfying experiences in America. But contrasting reactions amused her. An eight-year-old American was full of awe, while an Englishman asked her whether she did not think 'the natives made a very silly fuss about the falls,' those of the Clyde in Scotland being 'much finer.'

By October, Martineau was in Northumberland, Pennsylvania, to visit the home of Joseph Priestley. At Priestley's tomb, she planted a snowberry for James and a rose- for his son- for herself. In December, she wrote to her family that 'all Philadelphia' had called on her, yet her visits to the penitentiary had been even more interesting, 'for the sake of discovering the causes of crime' in America. She believed she was 'almost the first' to be admitted alone to interview prisoners in solitary confinement, to sit beside 'murderers, burglars, forgers, and others,' using her ear trumpet to



THE WHITE HOUSE



JAMES MADISON  
Engraving by T. B. Welch after a  
drawing by James Barton Longacre, 1833

JAMES MADISON  
Engraving by J. Sartain after a painting  
by J. G. Chapman, 1833



listen to 'their eager and full confidences about their crimes and their miseries.' On Christmas Day, she called on a black family whose son-in-law was a charter member of the American Anti-Slavery Society. Once over the Maryland border, she would be in slave territory, and a shipboard friend now came to warn her not to go 'a step further south.'

Entering a wintry Washington, D.C., Martineau noted its oddly unfinished appearance. At a boarding house on Pennsylvania Avenue, a few minutes' walk from the Capital, she and Louisa shared a drawing room with Congressman Stephen Phillips of Massachusetts. Plunging into a round of sight-seeing, Martineau was welcomed by the British ambassador, heard speeches in the Senate (Daniel Webster's voice sounded beautiful) and visited with callers in the afternoon. On the first evening, she declined 'a great party' to chat with Edward Everett, a Congressman from Massachusetts and American 'man of letters *par excellence*.' By the end of January, she was having her portrait painted by Samuel Stillman Osgood (the location of this portrait is not known). On one of the coldest days of the winter, she went to see George Washington's home at Mount Vernon, but found the house and grounds sadly dilapidated.

Martineau was to characterize three American statesmen who most interested her - Henry Clay, Daniel Webster and John Calhoun - by the contents and manner of their *talk*. Former Chief Justice John Marshall gave her a letter of recommendation for wherever she travelled. She was invited to have dinner at the White House, coinciding with the members of Congress whose names began with J, K or L (invited alphabetically). Vice-President Johnson, sitting across from her, piqued her curiosity by



his wild countenance and lack of a cravat. On another occasion, she witnessed an assassination attempt on the President. From the stairs of the Capitol, she saw the insane culprit struggling in the crowd, while Jackson, 'the old soldier,' was thrown into a tremendous passion.

After leaving Washington in mid-February, Martineau went to Virginia to see former President James Madison. Eighty-three-year-old Madison, suffering from rheumatism but warmly wrapped and cared for by his wife, had not lost his relish for conversation. Among his topics were the death of Malthus, and population and food production, past Presidents and present politicians and the American quarrel with France. He told anecdotes of Benjamin Franklin and admitted liking the poetry of Dr Erasmus Darwin. When Martineau moved away to give him a rest from talking, he followed her across the room. Madison made her promise to come again, but died before she could return.

Martineau's itinerary now led through the south to New Orleans. Travelling by stage, train and steamboat, she stayed in hotels and inns, on plantations and in city homes and log cabins. Though she boasts of covering ten thousand miles, 'by land and water' without accident, the stages and trains routinely broke down. And the wiles and ingenuities of stage drivers amazed her. Sometimes she and Louisa had little food or sleep for days at a time. Exhausted by an all night ride, she could still wake to wonder where her fatigue had gone, for 'as the day steals through the forest, kindling up beauty as it goes, the traveller's whole being is refreshed.'

Coming to the gulf coast in the middle of a thunder storm, she and Louisa ran along the pier to catch the steamboat for New Orleans. Before morning, they were being 'whirled away to the city' by train - 'five miles in a quarter of an hour.' The French city seemed 'very new, very foreign.' Ladies wore 'caps or veils instead of bonnets.' To protect herself against mosquitoes, Martineau wore cotton gloves and 'prunella boots' in the day time and shrouded herself in a mosquito net at night. On the first night, in a city known for robbery and murder, the padding of feet around their bedroom gave them a scare. Next day, Louisa solved the mystery. It was a large dog, unchained at night to catch rats.

From New Orleans, they proceeded up the Mississippi River on the paddlewheel steamer *Henry Clay*. Scenery along the banks enchanted Martineau. The height of the trees - locust, cottonwood, elm, maple and live oak - seemed incredible. Thick creepers prevented entry in the forest, and the thought of being lost or left behind in such desolation seemed terrifying. Picturesque flatboats passed. When their steamboat ran over a log, the yawl was pierced and Martineau's feather fan blew away. Huge clumps of driftwood whirled by, and she tried to spot an alligator - without success, but admired the terrapins, wood-pigeons and 'the beautiful blue jay.' Canoes crossed the river. One managed by a woman looked 'fearfully light and frail,' and Martineau pondered 'being alone on that rushing sea of waters, shut in by untrodden forests.'

At Nashville, Tennessee, Martineau visited the state prison and then continued overland to the Mammoth Cave in Kentucky. At the mouth of the cave, the notion of solitude again overcame her, but she marvelled at

the humming birds flitting around the icy blast from within. The ladies tied handkerchiefs over their heads, 'like the witches in *Macbeth*,' and entered the gloom. There she heard the distant echo of footsteps, 'the hollow sound' of voices, and the sound of water dripping. On the second day, she crawled through an opening a foot-and-a-half wide into a spectacular grotto. It was 'a sensation worth knowing,' she says in *Society in America*, 'to feel oneself imprisoned in the very heart of a mountain.'

Martineau next visited Henry Clay near Lexington, Kentucky, and took another steamboat to 'the great City of the West,' Cincinnati. Approaching at night, she saw 'long rows of yellow lights, with a furnace flaring and smoking here and there.' Next day, her callers included the Reverend Lyman Beecher and his daughters Catherine, who ran a school, and Harriet, a talented fourteen-year-old.

On a sultry 25th of June, Martineau and Louisa left Cincinnati. By stage, they crossed the Allegheny Mountains to White Sulphur Springs, Virginia, and then revisited New York and New England. From Boston, they went to Newport, Rhode Island, to stay with Dr William Ellery Channing, the public character in America 'in whom the English feel most interest,' Martineau declares on behalf of English Unitarians.

Martineau had made many new friends and had gained valuable insights. The sea - and landscapes- charmed her, although the dense forest was frightening, and some Americans living in isolation puzzled her. She had another year to go in America, and she was just about to meet a group of individuals in Boston who would radically affect her future life.



"KING ANDREW I"

A political cartoon of Andrew Jackson (1767-1845), who was the 7th American President (1829-37) -in office when Harriet Martineau visited the White House.

KENNETH J FIELDING: Harriet Martineau at the New Armitt Library

In August 1997, the old Armitt Library was re-established in the centre of Ambleside on Rydal Road, almost facing the Knoll where Harriet Martineau set up her own new home in 1846. The Library is a local collection of books, papers and memorabilia, and was started in the town in 1911; and in its new form it focuses especially on Harriet Martineau, John Ruskin, the educator Charlotte Mason, and Beatrix Potter. It is of particular importance to anyone interested in Harriet Martineau, since it includes a sizeable collection of her original letters, and gives readers the chance to study and learn about the Lake District, which she chose as her home and working centre for her last thirty years.

Some members of the Martineau Society were able to visit the old Library in 1996 in its former cramped quarters above the public library; but in the new Museum there is a permanent exhibition devoted to Harriet, a handsome Library reading-room, and a chance to study in the very place she wrote about in her *Autobiography*, her letters, and the *Guide to the English Lakes*. In the year 2,000 she is to be given special attention, and a pamphlet will be published about her general career and life in Ambleside. Local readers have recently had the chance to read her own vivid account of life throughout the year, edited by Barbara Todd and serialised in *Cumbria Life*.

The Library is also looking forward to her centenary year in 2002 when it will be arranging special lectures and a further display. As she wrote in her own obituary in 1855, which was postponed for publication until 1876, 'In her Ambleside home she lived for ten [really thirty] years of health and happiness, which as she was wont to say, was worth all the rest of her

life.' It is not too much to claim that she cannot be fully understood without taking her residence in the Lakes into account and the way it is now shown at the Armitt.

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If you would like to read more about the Armitt Library, Eileen Jay's new book, *The Armitt Story* (1998) celebrates both its past history and its new beginnings. Hardback editions costing £20 each, and softbacks at £11.50 can be obtained from the Loughrigg Press, c/o Titus Wilson & Son, Kent Works, Burneside Road, Kendal LA9 4RL.

**DEBORAH A LOGAN: 'Fancy-work and Bluestockingism'**

'She can deep mysteries unriddle as easily as thread a needle'

'As we earnestly wish the authorship not to become known, I have used the mannish way of talking about needlework.'<sup>1</sup>

As a metaphor for the lives and work of Victorian women, needleworking in its many varieties offers a rich text through which to study the status of women, both how they were perceived by society and how they perceived themselves.<sup>2</sup> Aside from the universal expectation that women bear children, the other activity expected of all women was first, that they learn how to sew; second, that some piece of sewing (if not the entire work-basket) be kept nearby at all times; and third, that they never be caught with their hands idle when they might usefully be employed in needleworking. Little girls often received sewing instruction when barely out of the toddler stage; having the work of their tiny hands scrutinized by adult women, who sternly unravelled crooked stitches needing to be re-sewn, was thought to be character-building and a preventive check against troublesome behaviours bred by idleness. Regardless of their

socio-economic class, women were expected to sew throughout their lives, during childhood and girlhood, pregnancies and childrearing, while employed (both inside and outside the home), and as far into old age as their vision permitted.

No woman escaped with impunity the stricture to produce prodigious amounts of needlework, much of it necessary and useful ('plain-sewing') but some of it 'fancy-work' or busy-work which, if of limited practical use, provided visible proof of women's respectability. Highlighting the fact that women of all classes earn little or nothing from this laborious, time-consuming occupation, whether they work for hire or merely for appearance's sake, Elizabeth Barrett Browning's heroine, Aurora Leigh, laments:

The works of women are symbolical.

We sew, sew, prick our fingers, dull our sight,...

... This hurts us most, this - that, after all, we are paid

The worth of our work, perhaps. (*Aurora Leigh* I: 456-58, 464-65)

Women who produced the requisite amount of sewing hardly had time for disreputable, especially licentious, behaviours. Nor could they retreat to the attic to study poetry, as Aurora did, or to the sick-room to translate Greek classics, as Elizabeth Barrett did. Conversely, women who produced books instead of buttonholes opened themselves up to charges of neglecting their overflowing work-baskets and thus, of compromising their womanly role. The woman who could satisfy both sets of expectations was rare - and overworked - indeed. Carol Shiner Wilson notes that needlework 'is an important device with which women writers complicate, subvert, or challenge the ideal of domesticity,'<sup>iii</sup> an idea illustrated by Martineau's claim that she is 'excessively fond' of needlework even as she repeatedly asserts its inferiority to writing. It is the relationship between

sewing as an outward representation of respectability and writing as an expression of the inner, creative life that provides important insight into Martineau's identity as a writer. Needle and pen, thread and ink, fabric and paper - all are implicated in the linguistic and non-linguistic texts produced by a woman who was exceptionally prolific on both counts.

The Unitarian Martineau family was careful to observe the rules of social decorum. Liberal in their determination that both boys and (to a lesser degree) girls be educated, the Martineau parents also raised their children 'to an industry like their own; - the boys in study and business, and the girls in study and household cares' (*Autobiography*, 1, 27). This dual focus early established a basic pattern in Harriet Martineau's life, a life framed at its beginning and at its conclusion with sewing projects, with the busy years in between featuring a dynamic interplay between pen - as a writer in the public realm - and needle, when prolonged bouts of invalidism compelled her to sew items for charity bazaars rather than to write social problem articles. Although Martineau is unequivocally relieved to be free of the limitations of marriage and motherhood and identifies herself most directly with authorship, she cultivates her early domestic training, of which she claims to be 'excessively fond,' throughout her life. Yet she is also relieved when early publishing success permits her to put aside the needle (as an occupation) to pursue the literary career that was superior to needleworking in terms of intellectual stimulation, personal satisfaction, and remuneration. Martineau is quick to note, however, that it was needleworking that enabled her to launch her writing career by offering her a means of self-support during her literary apprenticeship. All her life,



needlework continued to represent some measure of security in the event that her literary career, or the health to sustain it, should ever fail.

Respectability is essential to the sort of middle-class family Martineau was born into, as were utility, economy, and prudence, and the most visible expression of this matrix of values centres on the image of young girls, eyes downcast, bent demurely over their sewing. Martineau internalizes these values early, taking pride in managing her clothing allowance so well that she has money to spare for charity and books. During girlhood, she stretches her budget by sewing nearly every item of clothing herself, from bonnets to silk-covered shoes: 'I sewed indefatigably all those years, - ...I made literally all my clothes, as I grew up...The amount of time spent in sewing now appears frightful; but it was the way in those days, among people like ourselves; (I, 26). Writing in retrospect, she does not recall feeling oppressed by this confining pastime, and is 'in truth excessively fond of sewing,' which allows for both 'gossiping' and more serious literary study. As a young adult faced with genuine poverty for the first time in her life, Martineau's needleworking skills serve her well in more ways than one: in that 'season of poverty' [1830], she not only sewed for hire; she also 'made and mended everything I wore, - knitting stockings while reading aloud to my mother and aunt, and never sitting idle a minute' (I, 153). But although time-consuming, more important to Martineau's development as a thinker and writer is the routine mindlessness of sewing, which affords the perfect opportunity for 'learning poetry by heart, from a book lying open under my work. There was some saving in our practice of reading aloud, and in mine of learning poetry in such mass.' The combined practice of intellectual exercise and domestic duties establishes a lifelong

pattern typical of a woman whose identity refuses fully to conform with the social expectations of these roles yet who is unwilling to relinquish either one.<sup>iv</sup>

Although 'respectability' is a term typically associated with sexual propriety or, in the case of middle-class women like Martineau, with conformity to prescribed gender roles as visible proof of propriety, the taint of what she terms 'bluestockingism' seems to have been nearly as great a cause for concern. When she openly receives formal and informal academic training, apparently at great sacrifice to her parents, she is not to exploit or capitalize on that learning, nor is she to let her knowledge become public: 'When I was young, it was not thought proper for young ladies to study very conspicuously; *and especially with pen in hand.*

Young ladies...were expected to sit down in the parlour to sew, - during which reading aloud was permitted,...but so as to be fit to receive callers, without any signs of bluestockingism which could be reported abroad' (I, 100: my emphasis). In other words, a woman's intellectuality is acceptable as long as it is confined within the family circle, and Harriet is free to study Wordsworth, Milton, and Shakespeare all she likes, as long as she is occupied with sewing while doing so and she is careful to cover up text with needlework should callers arrive. The matrix comprised of women's intellect, respectability, and needlework compellingly illustrates the idea that acceptable private behaviours are made unacceptable simply by exposure to what George Eliot calls 'the world's wife.'<sup>v</sup> As a symbol of Victorian womanly respectability, the needle is by far mightier than the pen, whereas the pen, in fact, compromises that respectability - an attitude Martineau disproves, yet never ceases to negotiate.

Ever the non-conformist, as her rejection of literary lionism early established, Martineau takes special pride in demonstrating that intellectual women are not 'unsexed,' as their male critics charged, but are capable of both 'masculine' pursuits like writing and 'feminine' pursuits like needleworking. Indeed, the undomesticated literary woman is an aberrant stereotype she resists being identified with, proving that, despite her adult eclecticism, Martineau never relinquishes her childhood conditioning in respectability. Public opinion, particularly where women writers desiring to retain respectability are concerned, is a primary consideration. In his advice to aspiring writer Charlotte Brontë, poet laureate Robert Southey dismissed altogether her literary gifts, urging her to look to the cooking stove and sewing basket for creative release. It is a testimony to the irrespressibility of native genius that today Southey is all but unknown while Brontë is immortalized through her strong-minded heroines, despite the brevity of her writing career.

[to be continued]

Notes:

<sup>1</sup> *Quarterly Review* xlix (April & July 1833), 137; Martineau, on her writing for the *Edinburgh Review*, quoted in Gordon Haight, *George Eliot, A Biography* (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1985), p. 268.

<sup>2</sup> For the purposes of this discussion, the term 'needleworking' refers to plain-sewing (straight sewing used for most garments and household items), fancy-work (embroidery, lace-making and related crafts), and wool-work (knitting and crocheting).

<sup>3</sup> Carol Shiner Wilson, 'Understanding Cultural Contexts: The Politics of Needlework in Taylor, Barbauld, Lamb, and Wordsworth,' *Approaches to Teaching British Women Poets of the Romantic Period*, ed. Stephen C Behrendt and Harriet Kramer Linkin (New York: Modern Language Association of America, 1997), p. 80.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Hoecker-Drysdale notes with surprise that Martineau, in her *Guide to Service* ('The Ladies' Maid,' 1838), recommends that servants learn poetry while sewing. Yet this is not really surprising: women who occupy their minds while sewing - learning poetry, for instance - are far superior, in Martineau's opinion, to those who waste time with idle gossip. Spending hours with the needle is inevitable; allowing one's mind to grow lax as a result is not. If women are to be thwarted in their need to acquire educations, then they must find ways to get what they need while performing required tasks. Martineau's own example is a case in point.

<sup>5</sup> Merely on suspicion of illicit behaviour, Maggie Tulliver (*The Mill on the Floss*) is hounded by the 'world's wife' - the collective term for the small-minded, mean-spirited hypocrite whose own inadequacies find expression through persecuting a communal scapegoat.

**E-Mail Addresses**

Several members of the Society now have E-mail addresses, as listed below, should you wish to contact them.

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Dr David Wykes 101340.2541@compuserve.com (Dr Williams's Library)

NEWSLETTER CONTRIBUTIONS:

Articles of any length, book reviews, letters, notes and observations, for the next Newsletter should be sent by the end of November to the Editor:

Dr Valerie Sanders, English Division, University of Sunderland, Priestman Building, Green Terrace, Sunderland SR1 3PZ

Enquiries regarding the Society, especially new membership, should be addressed to the Secretary:

Mr Alan Middleton, 49 Mayfield Avenue, Grove, Wantage, Oxon OX12 7ND



The New Armitt Library, Ambleside