



# The Australian Brontë Association

Newsletter

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## Brontë Biographies For Busy Beginners

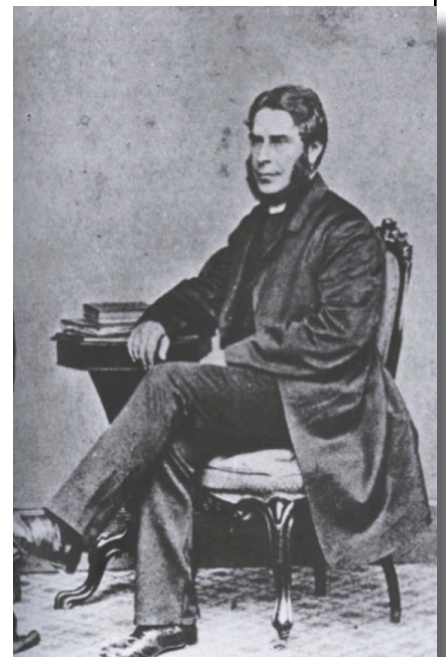
### Part 6: Arthur Bell Nicholls

*This is the final of Christopher Cooper's informative radio scripts from 2SER in the 1980s.*

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** The marriage of a gifted and famous woman to an obscure clergyman is an idea which Charlotte herself might have developed in a novel. In real life the husband in such a situation, whose wife died after only a few months of marriage, might have earned for himself reproaches from the literary world which had recognised her genius. Charlotte, as we know, had some doubts initially about marrying Mr Nicholls, since they apparently had little in common, but she was quickly convinced of the wisdom of accepting him, and her married life though tragically short, was most happy. It contrasted strongly with all her worries, tensions and frustrations, which had gone before. We must be grateful to Arthur Bell Nicholls for this and for his care of Mr Brontë after Charlotte's death. His action in remaining at Haworth, where he had experienced firstly rebuffs and then the sadness of bereavement, was a generous one.

Opinions about Mr Nicholls differ, but it should be remembered that when in 1853 he left Haworth in despair at not, at that time, winning Charlotte's hand, the parishioners presented him with an inscribed gold watch. Further, Charlotte wrote from her death bed to Ellen Nussey in February, 1855: 'I find my husband the tenderest nurse, the kindest support – the best earthly comfort that ever woman had'.

**MALE NARRATOR:** Mr Nicholls was born in County Antrim in Ireland in 1817, but was of Scottish parents on both sides. He was left at the age of seven to the charge of an uncle – the Rev'



Arthur Bell Nicholls, c1854 1

Allen Bell – who was headmaster of the Royal School at Banagher, in King’s County. Mr Nicholls afterwards entered Trinity College, Dublin, and it was from there that he went to Haworth, his first curacy. He succeeded a fellow countryman, Mr Peter Augustus Smith, in 1844. The first impression we have of the new curate in Charlotte’s letters is scarcely more favourable than that of his predecessors.

**CHARLOTTE:** ‘Dear Ellen, We are getting on here the same as usual, only that Branwell has been more than ordinarily troublesome and annoying of late; he leads papa a wretched life. Mr Nicholls is returned just the same. I cannot for my life see those interesting germs of goodness in him you discovered; his narrowness of mind always strikes me chiefly. I fear, he is indebted to your imagination for his hidden treasure.

‘Dear Ellen, Who gravely asked you whether Miss Brontë was going to be married to her papa’s curate? I scarcely need say that never was rumour more unfounded. A cold far-away sort of civility are the only terms on which I have ever been with Mr Nicholls. I could by no means think of mentioning such a rumour to him even as a joke. It would make me the laughing-stock of himself and his fellow curates for half a year to come. They regard me as an old maid, and I regard them, one and all, as highly uninteresting, narrow, and unattractive specimens of the coarser sex.’

**MALE NARRATOR:** It took six more years before Mr Nicholls took the step described in this next letter.

**CHARLOTTE:** ‘On Monday evening Mr Nicholls was here to tea. I vaguely felt without clearly seeing the meaning of his constant, and strange, feverish restraint. After tea I withdrew to the dining-room as usual. As usual, Mr Nicholls sat with Papa till between eight and nine o’clock; I heard him open the parlour door as if going. I expected the clash of the front door. He stopped in the passage; he tapped. Like lightning, it flashed on me what was coming. He entered; he stood before me. What his words were you can guess; his manner you can hardly realise, nor can I forget it.

‘Shaking from head to foot, looking deadly pale, speaking low, vehemently, yet with difficulty, he made me for the first time feel what it costs a man to declare affection where he doubts response.

‘The spectacle of one ordinarily so statue-like thus trembling, stirred and overcome, gave me a

kind of strange look. He spoke of sufferings he had borne for months, of sufferings he could endure no longer, and craved leave for some hope. I could only entreat him to leave me then and promise a reply on the morrow. I asked him if he had spoken to papa. He said he dared not. I think I half led, half put him out of the room. When he was gone I immediately went to papa, and told him what had taken place. Agitation and anger disproportionate to the occasion ensued; if I had loved Mr Nicholls, and had heard such epithets applied to him as were used, it would have transported me past my patience; as it was, my blood boiled with a sense of injustice. But papa worked himself into a state not to be trifled with; the veins on his temples started up like whip-cords and his eyes became suddenly bloodshot. I made haste to promise that Mr Nicholls should on the morrow have a distinct refusal.’

**MALE NARRATOR:** Mr Brontë, with the fame of his daughter ringing in his ears, thought she should do better than marry a curate with £100 per annum. ‘I am afraid that papa thinks a little too much about his want of money,’ says Charlotte in another letter a few days later on the engrossing subject. ‘He says the match would be a degradation, that I should be throwing myself away, that he expects me, if I marry at all, to do very differently; in short, his manner of viewing the subject is on the whole far from being one in which I can sympathise. My own objections arise from a sense of incongruity, an uncongeniality in feelings, tastes, principles.’ The Vicar, in fact, made no secret of his indignation that a nobody should commit the unwarrantable presumption, as he considered it, of aspiring to the hand of a celebrity of whom the whole country was justly proud. Mr Nicholls remained at Haworth for some months, but in the early spring he left, carrying with him the regard of the parishioners, and a testimonial of respect; while Charlotte herself admits that, though she could not give him such hope and such encouragement as he wanted, ‘Still, I trust,’ she says, ‘he must know now that I am not cruelly blind and indifferent to his constancy and grief.’ Mr Nicholls then became curate at Kirk Smeaton, near Pontefract.

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** During the few months which had to elapse before his preparations could be completed he was quite unable to conceal the bitterness of his disappointment and to show a brave face to the world. The poor man did not actually ‘sit sighing ‘neath a willow tree’, but he lost his appetite, shunned the society of his fellows, and, when seen

abroad, had all the appearance of one who has just received a mortal wound. This behaviour made things rather uncomfortable for Charlotte, and in order to avoid unpleasant meetings, she went off on a visit to London. But she was back again in May, and went as usual to Haworth Church on Whit-Sunday, where Mr Nicholls was to officiate for the last time. This perhaps was not very wise; though it is difficult to see how, being at home, she could have done otherwise, for her truthfulness was of the kind that would not allow her to invent a headache, when she had none. Possibly, too, she may have thought that her absence would be taken as a sign of weakness or even of an uneasy conscience. But the sight of her at the communion rails proved too much for Mr Nicholls. He collapsed completely, and could only finish the service in broken whispers.

**MALE NARRATOR:** Mr Brontë, when he heard of the scene, was once again very angry, as any father well might be; for Mr Nicholls had publicly called attention to his daughter in a very marked way, and in a love story the role of the rejected swain is a more sympathetic one than that of the 'cruel fair.' 'Unmanly' was the epithet with which he branded the conduct of his curate. But Charlotte was deeply moved. Mr Nicholls had, in fact, behaved rather like one of her own more melodramatic heroes; and this did him no harm in her eyes. She certainly began to feel some twinges of remorse.

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** Before he left Haworth, Charlotte gave Mr Nicholls permission to write and promised to reply, insisting that the correspondence would be conducted purely as one between friends. However to spare her father's feelings, it was carried out in secret and, although Charlotte wrote frequently to Ellen Nussey, it wasn't until matters had come to a head that Ellen knew anything of it.

**CHARLOTTE:** 'Dear Ellen, Mr Nicholls came on Monday, and was here all last week. Matters have progressed thus since July. He renewed his visit in September, but then matters so fell out that I saw little of him. He continued to write. The correspondence pressed on my mind. I grew very miserable in keeping it from papa. At last sheer pain made me gather courage to break it. I told all. It was very hard and rough work at the time, but the issue after a few days, was that I obtained leave to continue the communication. Mr Nicholls came in January; he was ten days in the neighbourhood. I saw much of him. I had

stipulated with papa for opportunity to become better acquainted. I had it, and all I learnt inclined me to esteem and affection. Still papa was very, very hostile, bitterly unjust.

'I told Mr Nicholls the great obstacle that lay in his way. He has persevered. The result of this his last visit, is that papa's consent is gained, that his respect, I believe, is won, for Mr Nicholls has in all things proved himself disinterested and forbearing. Certainly, I must respect him, nor can I withhold from him more than mere cool respect. In fact, dear Ellen, I am engaged.'

#### **SWEET MUSIC:**

**MALE NARRATOR:** At 8 a.m. on June 29th 1854 a little white-robed bride went quietly down to the church. Miss Wooler (her former schoolmistress) and Ellen Nussey accompanied her. Mr Brontë had decided against going. Perhaps he did not really approve of the marriage; he had said to Tabby that Charlotte was too delicate for marriage and also he feared the emotional strain. Mr Nicholls awaited them, and his friend Mr Sowden united them in the bonds of matrimony. What a trembling hand wrote her last signature as 'Charlotte Brontë'.

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** Her dress was white embroidered muslin, with a lace mantle, and a white bonnet trimmed with green leaves, 'looking like a snowdrop,' as some of her humble village friends said. We are not told what her going-away dress was, but we may be sure it was neat and unpretentious like herself.

After the wedding Charlotte and her husband left by train for North Wales, crossing from Holyhead to Dublin, on to Banagher, the home of Mr Nicholls' youth. Charlotte was pleasantly surprised by all she saw. She wrote that 'Dr. Bell's house, where Arthur Nicholls had been brought up, was very large, and looks extremely like a gentleman's country seat. Within, most of the rooms are lofty and spacious, and some, the drawing-room and dining-room etc. are handsomely and commodiously furnished'.

**MALE NARRATOR:** Then Charlotte went on to say:

**CHARLOTTE:** 'My dear husband appears in a new light here, in his own country. I was very much impressed with all I saw, and also greatly surprised to find much of English order and repose in the family habits and arrangements.

‘More than once I have had deep pleasure in hearing my husband’s praises on all sides and am told I am a most fortunate person.’

**MALE NARRATOR:** One of their honeymoon expeditions was to Killarney. She wrote:

**CHARLOTTE:** ‘We have been to Killarney. We saw and went through the Gap of Dunloe. A sudden glimpse of a very grim phantom came on us in the gap. The guide had warned me to alight from my horse as the path was very broken and dangerous. I did not feel afraid and declined. We passed the dangerous part. The horse trembled in every limb and slipped once but did not fall. Soon after, she (it was a mare) started, and was unruly for a minute however, I kept my seat. My husband went to her head and led her. Suddenly, without any apparent cause, she seemed to go mad, reared, plunged, and I was thrown on the stones right under her. My husband did not see that I had fallen, he still held her. I saw and felt her kick, plunge, trample round me. I had my thoughts about the moment – its consequences – my husband – my father – when my plight was seen and the struggling creature was let loose. She sprang over me. I was lifted off the stones neither bruised by the fall, nor touched by the mare’s hoofs. Of course, the only feeling was gratitude for more sakes than my own.’

**MALE NARRATOR:** From the pleased surprise with which Charlotte alluded in her letters to the ‘English order and repose in the family habits and arrangements’, and the fact that the ‘male members of the family seem thoroughly educated gentlemen’, it is evident that her pre-conceived notions about her in-laws were unflattering. She really need not have been so apprehensive. Arthur Nicholls was an orphan, and his uncle and guardian, Dr. Allen Bell, who brought him up with his own five sons and four daughters, was a man of some distinction – headmaster of the Royal School at Banagher, one of the three schools founded in Ireland by Queen Elizabeth. He died before Charlotte’s marriage, and in the large solid 18th century mansion, set in the heather of the great Bog of Allen, near the banks of the River Shannon, his widow was hostess to the newly-married couple.

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** Cuba House was a huge building. Even to Charlotte, accustomed to austerity, it seemed ‘desolate and bare’. But she wrote that there was a turf fire burning in the wide old chimney of their bedroom (notice that she had already learnt to use the Irish word ‘turf’ (for peat) and the cold was

forgotten in the warmth of the welcome she received. She sums up her impressions in the words, ‘I must say, I like my new relations.’

**CHARLOTTE:** ‘Dear Ellen, Since I came home I have not had an unemployed moment. My life is changed indeed; to be wanted continually, to be constantly called for and occupied seems so strange; yet it is a marvellously good thing. As yet I don’t quite understand how some wives grow so selfish. As far as my experience of matrimony goes, I think it tends to draw you out of, and away from yourself.’

‘During the last six weeks, the colour of my thoughts is a good deal changed; I know more of the realities of life than I once did. I think those married women who indiscriminately urge their acquaintance to marry, are much to blame. For my part, I can only say with deeper sincerity and fuller significance what I always said in theory, ‘Wait God’s will’. Indeed, indeed, Nell, it is a solemn and strange and perilous thing for a woman to become a wife. Man’s lot is far, far different. Tell me when you think you can come. Papa is better, but not well. How is your mother? give my love to her, Yours faithfully, Charlotte Nicholls.’

**MALE NARRATOR:** After their return to Haworth, Ellen Nussey visited them. Charlotte was anxious to show that her marriage made no difference to her love for her old friend, insisting that Ellen should walk next to her saying ‘even your Nicholls should not come between us’. Both Mr Nicholls and Ellen Nussey were possessive. He regarded his wife as his property. The other, who had shared so many sorrows and a few joys with Charlotte, found it difficult to realise that now she must take a second place.

He objected to his wife writing so freely – and indiscreetly – to Ellen, not because of what she wrote but because letters might fall into other hands. He required a written promise from Ellen that she would burn all letters, and she agreed to this. Otherwise he would censor every letter. Ellen says that as he did not keep his promise not to censor, her promise was void. Doubtless he was right and wise; had he had any idea how her letters would be studied his decrees would have been more stringent. If Mrs Gaskell had not had access to the over 300 letters preserved by Ellen, her *Life of Charlotte Brontë* could not have been one of the best biographies written.

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** Her time was now

fully occupied. She must have no separate occupations; she actually enjoyed not having an unoccupied hour. To be wanted continually was marvellous. She is a trifle apologetic for him: 'Faultless he is not. I did not expect perfection.' Her husband, in spite of not being perfect, became her 'dear Arthur'. Ellen asked her if she was writing another novel. She answered:

'I have got a story in my head, but Arthur does not wish me to write it; he says I should attend to other things.' When Ellen remonstrated, Nicholls said; 'I married Charlotte Brontë, not Currer Bell'.

The married life was short. Charlotte died on March 31st, 1855. Almighty God took her soul unto Himself in His infinite goodness and mercy, for had she regained her health would she not have had an all-powerful impulse to write? If so, Mr Nicholls could not have shared in all her interests, each feeling disappointed with the other. She spoke of his 'kind companionship in health, and tenderest nursing in sickness.'

**MALE NARRATOR: Mr**

Nicholls bore his sorrow with great dignity and courage. In granting him his wish Fate had reserved for him a grimly ironical sequel. He had lost the wife to whom he was passionately devoted and for whom he had sacrificed his independence, and he was left instead with her father, a man whom he might pity profoundly, but could hardly be expected to find endearing. But he did not shirk his responsibilities. For nearly six years he lived on in that desolate Haworth house, faithful in the discharge of his parochial duties, and unflinchingly kind to Mr Brontë, now increasingly infirm, and nearly blind. When Mr Brontë died in 1861, Arthur Bell Nicholls returned to his home at Banagher in Kings County, Ireland, where he had property, and took to farming. He brought with him Martha Brown, the Brontës' maid. He and Martha had seen much sorrow together and he wished her to have peace and comfort in her old age. He later married his cousin and died at the advanced age of almost ninety in 1906.

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** In 1955 an old woman recalled her childhood memories of her uncle

Arthur Bell Nicholls and of Martha Brown, in an article in the *Irish Times*.

**OLD WOMAN:** 'I am an old woman now, and I think my very first recollection is of being wrapped in a large shawl by my mother, preparatory to being carried by our manservant across the two fields which separated the grounds of the Vicarage at Banagher from the Hill House, where Uncle Arthur Bell Nicholls and his second wife, my Aunt Mary, lived, and where there was always a kind and affectionate welcome for a small visitor.

'There, too, lived "Gran", as we always called her, equally kind and loving, and, besides her, Martha Brown, who would soon enter with a glass of creamy milk and a slice of delicious sponge cake. My chief memory of her is of her Yorkshire accent, so different from the Irish voices I was used to.



'Some years after returning to Ireland, Uncle Arthur married my aunt Mary who made him a devoted wife, and treasured everything that had belonged to Charlotte. My grandmother and my aunt loved to tell me about her; and I loved to listen. Charlotte's wedding dress, so tiny, and her tiny white gloves, buttoned to the wrist, was given to Arthur's niece, Allen Nicholls' youngest daughter, who had been given the names of Charlotte Brontë at her christening. Later on she often stayed at the Hill House,

and came to love Uncle Arthur, as did all the young people; and, after his death, feeling that these things were peculiarly sacred, she had them burned.'

**MALE NARRATOR:** The spirit of Charlotte never ceased to brood over the Hill House. Arthur had brought the faithful maid, Martha Brown, from Haworth, and that smell of her sponge cake was generally the first thing that met visitors at the door of that hospitable house. She had not lost her Yorkshire austerity in the more easy-going Irish atmosphere and once, when she found her master making up a four at whist, she exclaimed: 'The minister playing cards! What would the people of Haworth say!'

She also figures in a photograph, leaning awkwardly on a pillar in her stiff black silk

dress. With generous loyalty, Mary Nicholls made every room in the house a Brontë shrine. The drawing room was hung with the sisters' drawings. Mr Brontë's gun leaned up against the dining room wall, and Charlotte's portrait overlooked the sofa on which Mary used to rest. One day it broke away from the wall, missed a table which stood below it, and fell on Mary.

coffin placed beneath the portrait until it was carried from the house.

Neither the portrait nor Mary was harmed. When Arthur died in his 88th year, Mary had his

Was Arthur Nicholls the gauche and morose man that he has sometimes been painted? Certainly he was deeply reserved, and the publicity of his wife's fame caused him real mental anguish, which showed itself in whole days of silence whenever it brought his own name into public notice. But that this reserve overlay a warm and generous nature is amply shown in Charlotte's letters after her marriage.

.....

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** So Arthur Bell Nicholls brought the memories of Charlotte Brontë through to the 20th century. He was very possessive of these memories, and was not at all interested in sharing her with the rest of the world. Despite this, the interest of the rest of the world in his wife and in her sisters continued to grow, and in 1893 the Brontë Society was formed.

**MALE NARRATOR:** Mr W W Yates, a Dewsbury journalist who had long taken an eager interest in the Brontës and their books, made the first proposal to form a Brontë Society. He put his idea before the late Sir John Brigg, who invited him to meet a few friends at the Liberal Club in Bank Street, Bradford, to discuss his plans.

This led to a public meeting called by the Mayor of Bradford, in the Council Chamber of Bradford Town Hall, on December 16th, 1893. And so the Brontë Society was born. The headmaster of Bradford Grammar School, the Rev W H Keeling, presided in the absence of the Mayor, and said that there were many reasons why a memorial to the Brontës should be established. The Brontës, though not of Yorkshire parentage, represented the true Yorkshire spirit; they depicted the lovely Yorkshire scenery; and they formed a strong link between Yorkshire and the great world of literature.

Mr Yates proposed that a Brontë Society be formed and a Museum established to house drawings, manuscripts, paintings, personal relics, editions of the works of the Brontë sisters, and books relating to them. These suggestions were adopted. In 1895 the first of the annual *Brontë Society Transactions* was published. Over the years these *Transactions* have published numerous interesting articles about the Brontës and their writings and have included many previously unpublished letters, poems and fragments of unfinished prose works.

**FEMALE NARRATOR:** The amount of detail concerning the lives of the Brontës that has been unearthed and published in these transactions is incredible. They must surely be the most well-documented in English history outside of royalty. There are articles on Branwell's participation in free-masonry, on the eyesight of the Brontës and even an article on Mr Brontë's tax returns. (He paid 3s 6d a year in hair powder duty and £2 13s 3d a year for window tax.)

**MALE NARRATOR:** In the early years of the Society a Brontë Museum was set up in the village of Haworth in Yorkshire. But it wasn't until 1928 that a long-cherished hope of all Brontë lovers was realised: the purchase of the old Haworth parsonage. It has been set up in something like the manner of old with many items of furniture which had been dispersed having been purchased and restored to their former places. A wing was added at the back to house a collection of manuscripts and other relics. Such is the interest in this literary family that over 200,000 visitors a year make their pilgrimages to Haworth and to the parsonage.

## MUSIC

**Christopher Cooper**



# *L'Ingratitude*

by Charlotte Brontë

*Charlotte Brontë's French homework for 16 March 1842, as handed in to her teacher.*

A rat, weary of the life of cities, and of courts (for he had played his part in the palaces of kings and in the salons of great lords), a rat whom experience had made wise, in short, a rat who from a courtier had become a philosopher, had withdrawn to his country house (a hole in the trunk of a large young elm), where he lived as a hermit devoting all his time and care to the education of his only son.

The young rat, who had not yet received those severe but salutary lessons that experience gives, was a bit thoughtless; the wise counsels of his father seemed boring to him; the shade and tranquillity of the woods, instead of calming his mind, tired him. He grew impatient to travel and see the world.

One fine morning, he arose early, he made up a little packet of cheese and grains, and without saying a word to anyone, the ingrate abandoned his father and his paternal abode and departed for lands unknown.

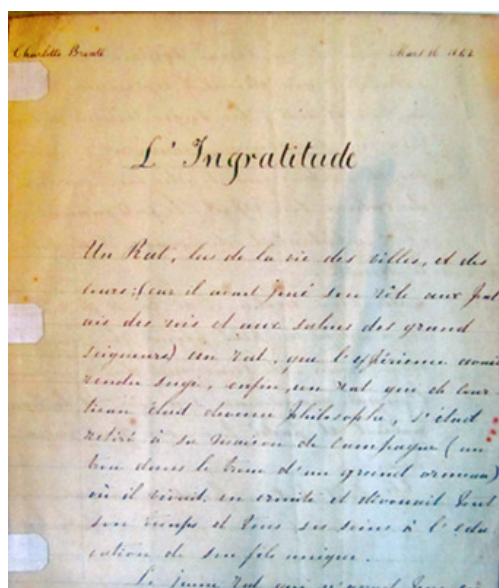
At first all seemed charming to him; the flowers were of a freshness, the trees of a greenness that he had never seen at home – and then, he saw so many wonders: an animal with a

tail larger than its body (it was a squirrel), a little creature that carried its house on its back (it was a snail). After several hours he approached a farm, the smell of cooking attracted him, he entered the farmyard – there he saw a kind of gigantic bird who was making a horrible noise as he marched with an air fierce and proud. Now, this bird was a turkey, but our rat took him for a monster, and frightened by his aspect, he immediately fled.

Towards evening, he entered a wood, weary and tired he sat down at the foot of a tree, he opened his little packet, ate his supper, and went to bed.

Waking with the lark he felt his limbs numbed by the cold, his hard bed hurt him; then he remembered his father, the ingrate recalled the care and tenderness of the good old rat, he formed vain resolutions for the future, but it was too late, the cold had frozen his blood. Experience was for him an austere mistress, she gave him but one lesson and one punishment; it was death.

The next day a woodcutter found the corpse, he saw it only as something disgusting – and pushed it with his foot in passing, without thinking that there lay the ungrateful son of a tender father.



*From the London Review of Books (Translated by Sue Lonoff).*

## CHARLOTTE BRONTË'S LONG LOST HOMEWORK

This long lost piece of homework (*devoir*) written by Charlotte Brontë in French for her Belgian tutor was published on 8 March 2012 for the first time. The manuscript, *L'Ingratitude*, dated 16 March 1842, was discovered in Brussels by Brian Bracken. Bracken writes:

*'L'Ingratitude' turned up in the course of my research for a biography of Constantin Heger, who taught Emily and Charlotte Brontë French during their time in Brussels and with whom Charlotte fell in love. I'd been trying to find out about his brother Vital, a sales representative for the royal carpet*

factory in Tournai and decided to look through the catalogue of the Musée Royal de Mariemont for any mention of him – its eclectic holdings include carpets – and found a reference to a manuscript by Charlotte Brontë about a rat. It turned out to be the first piece of French homework Charlotte had written for Heger, lost since the First World War.

In June 1913, Paul Heger donated four surviving letters Charlotte wrote to his father to the British Museum, and gave permission for them to be published in the Times. The publication caused a sensation and drew the attention of one of Belgium's most avid art collectors, Raoul Warocqué. Warocqué's family had made a fortune from coalmining. In 1829, they bought the ancient royal hunting grounds of Mariemont, where they built a castle surrounded by parkland. Raoul was said to be the wealthiest man in Belgium, if not Europe; a banquet at Mariemont in 1903 was attended by more than 3,000 guests, including the future king of the Belgians. An occasional diplomat for Leopold II, Warocqué used his travels around Europe, Russia, India and China to acquire numerous treasures for Mariemont. They included a five-ton 'fragment' of a sculpture of a Ptolemaic queen and a *Bourgeois de Calais* by Rodin. He had no heir; and the collections, castle and grounds were left to the state. In 1960, a fire destroyed the castle but the collections were saved; a new museum opened in 1975.

Warocqué also collected manuscripts and after reading Charlotte's letters in the Times decided he wanted to add her to his collection. He knew Paul Heger, the rector of Brussels University, because he'd paid for the university's anatomy institute in 1891. Warocqué wrote to Heger, saying he hoped to acquire one of Charlotte's letters. In August 1913 Heger replied: 'We don't have any of Charlotte or Emily's letters any more, but I could possibly get hold of another souvenir of their Brussels stay.' In November, Heger wrote again: 'I hope to be able to please you; when we get a chance to meet I will tell you why there is a delay.' Six months later, Heger was insisting he hadn't forgotten: 'If I have not already sent it to you, it is because I would like to "situate" it in a way that you will find pleasing. Now there's a sentence that will intrigue you; I won't say any more about it so I can prepare a little surprise for you.'

Warocqué received his gift the following year. It was a small grey album inscribed with his name, its two dozen pages filled with facsimiles of Charlotte's four letters to Heger, photographs of the pensionnat and the manuscript of 'L'Ingratitude'.

One of Charlotte's letters to M. Heger was recently included in the British Library's exhibition – *Love Letters: 2000 Years of Romance* – for Valentine's Day.

The essay was read to members by Marloesje Valkenburg at the ABA meeting on 17 March 2012, 170 years after after it was written.

For further information or to listen to Gillian Anderson's reading of this essay, see [www.lrb.co.uk](http://www.lrb.co.uk)



## Readers' Niche

Australia's 'only online literary gift store' offers something for everyone - **booklovers and those not afraid to wear their literary hearts on their sleeves, coats, jackets or whatever!** For Brontë and other author inspired items, see [readersniche.com.au](http://readersniche.com.au)





## The Brontë Parsonage Museum & Brontë Society



*A press release from the Brontë Parsonage Museum:*

### ***Brontë Relics: A Collection History***

*New exhibition opens at the Brontë Parsonage Museum on Saturday, 14 April 2012.*

The new exhibition at Brontë Parsonage Museum tells the extraordinary story of the Museum's collection; how it came together and how it continues to grow as new discoveries are made. Complete with a colourful cast of characters (both heroes and villains), twists and turns that would seem melodramatic in fiction, and even an unresolved mystery or two, the story of the collection is almost as extraordinary as the Brontë story itself.

***Brontë Relics*** tells this story; how the treasures of the collection survived and how they were brought together by the Brontë Society at the Parsonage. The intriguing journeys that various objects undertook before returning to the Parsonage are traced back through previous owners and collectors to the major sources of Brontëana, amongst them Charlotte's husband, Arthur Bell Nicholls; Ellen Nussey, Charlotte's lifelong friend; the family of Martha Brown, the Brontë's faithful servant; and the American collector, Henry Houston Bonnel.

The exhibition is included with admission to the Museum and runs until 10 March 2013.

### **Charlotte Brontë Treasure Sold**

As reported in our December newsletter, Charlotte's 1830 *Young Men's Magazine* manuscript and 11 further items were offered for sale at Sotheby's in London on 15 December 2011. The manuscript, which has never been published and is considered to be important for the light it sheds on the writer's literary development, was expected to sell between £200,000 and £300,000. The Brontë Parsonage Museum appealed for funds to buy the manuscript but couldn't compete with the larger museums bidding for this treasure.

The manuscript was sold at auction for **£690,850** to the Musée des Lettres et Manuscrits and was exhibited in Paris in January 2012.



### ***STOP PRESS!***

Catherine Barker tells us that the *Weekly Telegraph* reports plans for £12m windfarm on the moorland 'that inspired *Wuthering Heights*'. Haworth is only five miles away from the projected site. The Brontë Society UK has of course voiced its objection to the scheme. Stay tuned!

# Society News

## 2011 President's Report to the UK Brontë Society

*The ABA sends this report to the UK Brontë Society annually, as well as most of the content of our publications. This report was also read to members at our own AGM 2012*

We began the year with a couple of talks on Bewick and the Brontës. I spoke on Thomas Bewick's life and his techniques while Christine Alexander explained the influence he had on the Brontës.

An Australian author, Emily McGuire, who has read Jane Eyre countless times, gave us a very personal account of what she loves about the book. In May, Mandy Swann gave a comprehensive talk on Charlotte Brontë and Romanticism. Then in September another Australian author, Rowan McCauley, gave a lively analysis of the character of Lucy Snowe in *Villette*. We finished the year with a hands on workshop on Emily's use of dialect in *Wuthering Heights*.

A highlight of the year was a weekend conference devoted to Education and the Brontës. We stayed in a conference centre that at one time had been a girls' school, at Robertson in the Southern Highlands of NSW. It retains much of the feel of a girls' school, though we did not have to sleep in dormitories or eat cold porridge! There were background talks on the state of education and the role of the governess at the time of the Brontës as well as specific talks on education from the Brontë perspective, such as Patrick's education in Ireland and Charlotte's and Emily's experiences in Brussels. Christine Alexander gave a geography lesson on Africa, relating it to the juvenilia and we had our very own drawing master who instructed us in the manner of the drawing masters that the Brontës encountered.

I have now retired as president, but will remain the Australian representative of the Brontë Society. We are looking forward to another full year under new leadership.

## Letter from the new President

On 17 March, at our new venue, the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, we celebrated Patrick Brontë's birthday at the ABA's first meeting for 2012. The AGM heralded a new chapter for the ABA with a change of President. We are pleased that Christopher Cooper will continue on the committee and as our liaison with the Brontë Society in the UK, and welcome Michelle Cavanagh as a new ABA committee member.

Marloesje Valkenburg delighted us with a reading of a recently published essay, 'L'Ingratitude', written by Charlotte Brontë in French on 16 March 1842 during her time at Pensionnat Heger in Brussels. An English translation and details of the discovery of this long lost manuscript are included in this newsletter.

Our Patron, Christine Alexander, gave a fascinating talk on *Charlotte Brontë and the Bible*, illustrated by images of John Martin's biblical paintings. After the meeting, many members joined Christine and the Committee for lunch in the lounge bar at the hotel.

With the popularity and success of our Christmas lunches with the NSW Dickens' Society, we have outgrown the Adams Room at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel and will move to a new venue for our Christmas Lunch on 1 December 2012 – the City Tattersalls Club in Pitt Street, Sydney.

I look forward to seeing you during the year to hear our wonderful speakers and hope you will join us for lunch after the meetings.

**Sarah Burns**

# Society News

AGM 2012



## The Australian Brontë Society's Annual Financial Statement

17 March 2012

	<b>Balance as at</b>	<b>02/03/11</b>	<b>\$3,625.31</b>
	Conference		\$4,160.00
	Bank Interest		\$14.69
	Name Bsdges		\$54.50
	Membership Renewals		\$940.00
	Meetings - Lectures		\$427.20
	<b>Total Receipts</b>		<b>\$5,596.39</b>
			<b>\$9,221.70</b>
<b>Less:</b>			
<b>Payments</b>	Conference	\$5,595.00	
	Membership - Refund	\$10.00	
	Parking	\$25.00	
	Postage	\$110.40	
	Print Newsletters & Thunderer	\$924.00	
	Use Projector	\$100.00	
	Raffle Prizes	\$45.90	
	Refreshments for Meetings	\$73.52	
	Room Hire	\$783.00	
	Speakers' Gifts	\$329.93	
	Stationery	\$68.38	
	<b>Total payments</b>		<b>-\$8,065.13</b>
	<b>Nett</b>		<b>\$1,156.57</b>
	<b>Anne Lock Account</b>		<b>\$500.00</b>
	<b>Balance as at</b>	<b>17/03/12</b>	<b>\$1,656.57</b>

Michael Links, Treasurer

### New Members

We welcome the following people who joined us in the period to March 2012


Elizabeth Goodwin  
Margaret Greathead  
Max Lawson  
and Stephanie Rigby, rejoining.

We hope they enjoy their membership!

## Do we have your email address?

To ensure members receive notice of meetings and other events, please confirm your email address to the ABA on [info@ausbronte.net](mailto:info@ausbronte.net)

## PROGRAM FOR 2012

 This symbol indicates meetings held at the Castlereagh Boutique Hotel, Level 1, 169-171 Castlereagh Street, Sydney, between Park and Market Streets, just up from Town Hall station. Meeting charge is \$5. Morning tea from 10am - meeting begins at 10:30am



**Saturday 2 JUNE**

**Will Christie**

Charlotte Brontë and *Blackwood's Edinburgh Magazine*

In this paper Will Christie discusses aspects of the history of the magazine and its contributors, as well as the influence of the magazine on Charlotte Brontë's writing and conceptions of writing.



**Saturday 4 AUGUST**

**Susannah Fullerton**

Charlotte Brontë in London

In 1851 Charlotte Brontë visited the great Exhibition for the second time and spent 3 hours looking at the exotic and fascinating exhibits. By that time she knew the capital city quite well. But what else did she see and do when in London? Who did she meet and dine with, where did she stay? Susannah Fullerton recounts the story of Charlotte's London visits, with illustrations.



**Saturday 6 OCTOBER**

**Michelle Cavanagh**

The Brontës and Food

Eating is one of the pleasures of life. But how different is our diet to that of the Brontë family? And what constituted good food in 19th century Yorkshire? From the background of a Yorkshire grandmother, Michelle Cavanagh explores the Brontë relationship to food, in their own lives and those of some of their characters.



**Saturday 1 DECEMBER:** Christmas lunch with Dickens' Society at the City Tattersalls Club, 198 Pitt Street between Park and Market Streets. (12 for 12:30) **Note new venue for this lunch.**

**ABA Website: [www.ausbronte.net](http://www.ausbronte.net)**

**Email: [info@ausbronte.net](mailto:info@ausbronte.net)**

### Committee:

<i>President</i>	<b>Sarah Burns</b>	<b>9953 1244</b>	<b><a href="mailto:sarah.burns@mls.net.au">sarah.burns@mls.net.au</a></b>
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<i>Secretary</i>	<b>Carmel Nestor</b>	<b>9665 6083</b>	<b><a href="mailto:nanuk@ozemail.com.au">nanuk@ozemail.com.au</a></b>
<i>Treasurer</i>	<b>Michael Links</b>	<b>9524 7835</b>	<b><a href="mailto:meccano@telstra.com">meccano@telstra.com</a></b>
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	<b>Michelle Cavanagh</b>	<b>0413 2900 480</b>	<b><a href="mailto:michcav@gmail.com">michcav@gmail.com</a></b>
<i>Non committee position:</i>			
<i>Publications editor:</i>	<b>Helen Malcher</b>	<b>9416 5444</b>	<b><a href="mailto:hm@malcher.com.au">hm@malcher.com.au</a></b>

*Members are strongly encouraged to submit pieces for this, their Newsletter.*