

# Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

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The George MacDonald Society

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# Orts

## The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 17, September 1989

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1. Our next AGM will be on Friday 24 November at 7.30 pm. It will be held at 58a Westbourne Park Villas, LONDON W2. All members are welcome.

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### 2. **Things afoot**

1. The committee is thinking of arranging a three-day tour of Huntly and district in autumn 1990. The event would include lectures on MacDonald and visits to places connected with him and his family. Participants would stay at a local hotel and transport would be by bus. Guest lectures would be included, possibly a memorial service and a celebration dinner – and perhaps the unveiling of a plaque commemorating George and Louisa MacDonald at Drumblade cemetery where the other members of the MacDonald family are buried.
2. The committee is also thinking of publishing Pilgrim's Progress. This is the play (based on Bunyan) in which George MacDonald played a star role when the family production was taken on tour. Society Members would receive a copy free or perhaps for a modest payment.
3. Gordon District Planning Committee has received a proposal for the siting of a new cottage opposite the gates of Drumblade Cemetery, and the George MacDonald Society committee has decided to object and send a letter to the Planning Committee.

The above three items raise some very interesting issues. What is the Society's Raison d'être? Some may see it as essentially a literary society and may feel that publishing relevant texts and criticism is its major function. Those of this mind may perhaps be in favour of 2 above and also of certain aspects of 1. Others may see the Society in a broader light as a celebration of George MacDonalds and his family line. One thing is certain: our small Society has neither the funds nor the energy to do everything it might have wished. In the case of item 1 above, the travel and other costs to be met by would-be participants might well be prohibitive, even for some who live in Britain. Such a scheme might therefore tend to be divisive, as compared with the issue of free or subsidised publications, which all our members would hopefully get. The idea, mentioned under 1, of putting a plaque at Drumblade perhaps highlights the issues. What is the Society's focus of interest and how do members want to see their money spent?

Do please write to committee members with your views – or write to "Orts". Kathy and I will be delighted to hear from you and unless you request otherwise we will

gladly try to find your letter a place in our pages. Remember, too, to let us have your requests and offers re books either on or about George MacDonald. Our “second hand” feature has been in abeyance pending a revival of trading activity!

3. **Victorian Photographs.**

In June 1864 Lewis Carroll noted in his diary that he took Mary and Irene MacDonald to a fundraising fete in the Horticultural Gardens, South Kensington, where Lady Hawarden [pronounced “Haywarden”] took their portraits in a photographic booth set up there.

There will be an exhibition of Lady Hawarden’s work in the Victoria & Albert Museum (South Kensington, London), in their photographic gallery from 27th Sept 1989 to 28th Jan 1990, as part of the Museum’s celebration of the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of photography.

Unfortunately the portraits of Mary and Irene will not be included, as the exhibition organiser failed to locate them. She asks if GMD Society members can help. We will pass on the information to the V&A if anyone contacts us with information about these photographs.

4. **Literary References.**

A new biography out this year bears witness to George MacDonald’s happy knack of bringing people together. Eva Gore-Booth and Esther Roper by Gifford Lewis (Pandora £6.95) records how these two women met at Casa Coraggio and lived together platonically for the rest of their lives. They campaigned for pacifism and the rights of women, and were involved in the separation of the Irish State from the UK.

Little, Big by John Crowley (Bantam Books 1981; Victor Gollancz 1892) has the following allusion:

He yawned nervously, and looked over nearby titles; it didn’t appear that anyone had taken a book from these laden shelves in a long time. There were sets of sermons, volumes of George MacDonald, Andrew Jackson Davis, Swedenborg.

Chapter 2, p.31.

Dennis Lennon, Rector of St Thomas’ Episcopal Church, Edinburgh, contributes to the Daily Notes Bible study notes published by Scripture Union, For July 5th 1989, commenting on Hebrews 3 vs1-19, he said:

Israel backed off from the risks of practical obedience to God at the very doorstep of his “rest” (vs7-11,17). Too harsh a judgment? George MacDonald said, “To say that a man might disobey and be none the worse would be to say that no may be yes and light sometimes darkness.” Happiness lies in our holiness, and that comes down to a straightforward practical obedience to his voice.

5. **Phantastes Suite.**

It would be lovely to have a public performance of this little-known suite by Gustav Holst (based, of course, on MacDonald’s fantasy). The Committee has contacted musician Hilary Davan Wettan, who has shown interest, but points out that the suite is scored for a large orchestra, and some subsidy would be required to make a performance feasible. The matter is being pursued, and we will keep members informed as to progress.

6. **"Permanent Things"**

It is a pity that a celebration of twentieth-century Anglo-Christianity cannot include

MacDonald's ideas. However, as his thought underlies much of the work of G.K. Chesterton, C.S. Lewis and others, we felt that members would be interested to hear of a "Conference in Celebration of Permanent Things", planned for June 26 – July 1 1990 in Seattle Pacific University. "A primary goal," says the publicity leaflet, "will be to define and ferret out the golden threads which run through the works of G.K. Chesterton, W.H. Auden, T.S. Eliot, Charles Williams, Dorothy L. Sayers, C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien." Estimated fee is \$300. A two-week post-conference study tour visiting Oxford, Salisbury, Canterbury and London is planned from 14<sup>th</sup> – 27th July 1990. For further information contact Dr. Michael MacDonald, School of Humanities, Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, WA 98119.

Photogen kills werewolf. Arthur Hughes' illustration for The Day Boy and the Night Girl

