

# Orts: The George MacDonald Society Newsletter

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2004

## Orts 66, 2004

The George MacDonald Society

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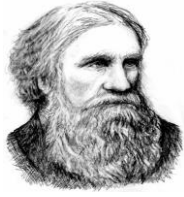
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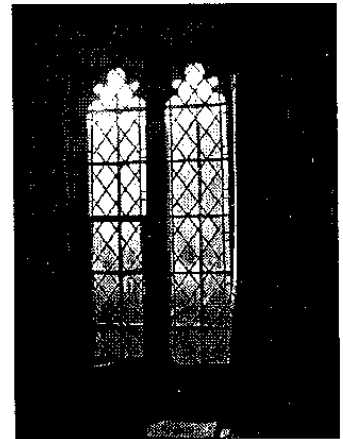
# Orts

## **The George MacDonald Society Newsletter No. 66, Winter 2004/05**

### **Joint George MacDonald Society/Charles Williams Society Conference at Pusey House, Oxford, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2004**

About thirty members from both Societies attended an enjoyable and rewarding one day conference on Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October at which two speakers from each Society gave papers on the treatment of the character of Lilith in Williams's *Descent into Hell* and MacDonald's *Lilith* and other works. Brian Horn gave a concise, but detailed paper on the Williams novel, concentrating particularly on the character of Lawrence Wentworth who, through his own self-love and disregard for others, does literally 'descend into hell'. Brian read his concise, but detailed and erudite, paper in thirty five minutes, allowing plenty of time for questions and discussion in the remainder of the hour allotted. John Docherty followed with a wide-ranging talk on the *Lilith* theme in MacDonald, referring not only to the eponymous novel, but also to earlier works, particularly the stories which are the core (and perhaps the real interest) of *Adela Cathcart*.

After lunch, taken by some at the favourite Inklings' watering holes, 'The Eagle and Child' and 'The Lamb and Flag', we returned to hear the Rev. Richard Sturch's most entertaining paper on *Descent into Hell*. Richard used his histrionic skills to good effect in the passages he read from the novel. Kirstin Johnson presented the final paper, a fascinating comparative study of Williams and MacDonald entitled 'Relationality: Shared Perspectives in MacDonald and Williams'. She concentrated on the character of Pauline Anstruther in *Descent into Hell*, showing how Williams uses her to demonstrate his doctrine of 'co-inherence', of how true Christianity involves the bearing of another's burdens. She then gave us insights into MacDonald's last and perhaps most difficult book. It is to be hoped that all four papers will appear in print at some stage.



### **Lending light to our meeting at Pusey House**

### **Annual General Meeting, Pusey House, Oxford, Saturday 30<sup>th</sup> October 2004**

This took place immediately following the joint conference. 11 members of the Society were present. Apologies for absence were received from Mr & Mrs Alan Stott.

The Chairman, Richard Lines, began his report by reminding those present that two greatly valued members of the Society had died in the last year. Vivienne Forrest, known to members as a highly effective Treasurer and Membership Secretary for several years and as a friend to so many in the Society, had died in October 2003. Tributes to Vivienne from the Chairman and from Roger Bardet had appeared in the Autumn 2003 edition of 'Orts' and the two of them and Rachel Johnson had attended her funeral in north London. Freda Levson, great niece of George MacDonald and founder member and long-time committee member of the Society, had died in early October 2004 at the age of 93. Many members would have warm memories of her hospitality at her flat in Paddington for committee meetings and Annual General Meetings. Her funeral would take place on Wednesday 3<sup>rd</sup> November at Kensal Green Crematorium. The Chairman and other members would be attending.

The Chairman said that the committee had met three times during the year, mainly to plan events and activities for the centenary year 2005. Details of these events with dates are set out below. He thanked Roger Bardet warmly for taking on the duties of Acting Treasurer and Membership Secretary in addition to his existing job of Minutes Secretary. He thanked John Docherty for his efforts as editor of the journal, 'North Wind', and Ian Blakemore for continuing to edit the newsletter, 'Orts'. During the year he had been in correspondence with the Chief Executive of the Royal Parks Agency. The latter had agreed to place a plaque near Alexander Munro's statue 'The Boy on a Dolphin' (for which Greville MacDonald had been the model) in Hyde Park and arrange an opening ceremony, if the George MacDonald and Lewis Carroll Societies would provide a plaque with appropriate wording. This was now in hand. The Chairman had provided information about the MacDonald family to Robert Whelan, who is editing the letters of Octavia Hill. This help will be acknowledged when the book is published. The committee has discussed the names of well-known writers who will be approached to submit articles on MacDonald for publication in newspapers or general literary magazines. In discussion afterwards Ian Blakemore mentioned the exhibition of MacDonald documents in Aberdeen next year and it was agreed to hold next year's Annual General Meeting there in October.

Roger Bardet reported that the Society's finances were in good shape with a credit balance at the bank on 8 September 2004 of £1,325.04. Income for the year was £2,050.35, the largest amount coming from subscriptions. He acknowledged the continued generosity of the Ashfield Trust, which had given £400. Expenditure for the year had been £725.31, the main items of expenditure being the printing of 'North Wind', £386.66, and postage and stationery, £229.65. The Society had paid for a floral tribute to Vivienne Forrest. The sum of £89.97 was still owing to Vivienne's estate for expenses incurred by her.

Wearing his Membership Secretary hat, Roger reported that the Society had 63 members in the USA and 90 members elsewhere in the world, mainly in the UK. Three new members had joined during the year and four members had decided not to renew their membership. Four members had died during the year. In addition to Vivienne Forrest and

Freda Levson, these were Canon McNaughton and Richard Lancelyn-Green. The latter's death in tragic circumstances had been reported in the national press. Despite two reminders only about one third of USA members had paid their subscriptions last year and just under half of the others. It was to be hoped that members would pay their dues promptly for the centenary year. Roger said that, although he was happy to continue as Treasurer, he wished to relinquish the post of Membership Secretary.

John Docherty reported that there had been a successful 'North Wind' and he had despatched the 2004 journal to Baylor University in Texas for printing and distribution. It contained contributions from authors from six different countries, showing the increasing interest in MacDonald's writing around the world. He announced that, after several years in the job, he wished to give up the editorship of 'North Wind' in order to concentrate on his own writing. He commended Dr Fernando Soto, a former Ph.D student of Professor Stephen Prickett at Glasgow University as a well-qualified and worthy successor.

Ian Blakemore said that he was happy to continue to edit 'Orts'. He hoped to bring out four issues during the next year, starting with one in the late autumn of 2004. It was agreed that this would continue to carry news items and lighter articles, but not 'heavy' academic articles of the sort that are suitable for 'North Wind'. Mike Partridge had continued to look after the Society's website, [www.george-macdonald.com](http://www.george-macdonald.com)

The following were elected as officers and committee for 2004/05:

Chairman:	Richard Lines
Treasurer:	Roger Bardet
Minutes Secretary:	Roger Bardet
Membership Secretary:	John Docherty
North Wind Editor:	Fernando Soto
Orts Editor:	Ian Blakemore
Committee Members:	Mike Partridge, Geoffrey Straw



**Joint George MacDonald Society/Charles Williams Society Conference:** two of the speakers - **Kirstin Johnson** (GMD Society) in conversation with **Dr. Brian Horne** (CW Society) - next to the book table!

**Freda Levson**  
1911 - 2004

**It is with sadness that we report the death of one of our 'founder members'—and great niece of George MacDonald. A service in 'Celebration of the life of Freda Levson' was held in Kensal Green, London on 3<sup>rd</sup> November. There was a tribute by Phil Streeter which was read by Rachel Johnson, a tribute by Paul Joseph and also music—bagpipes, Schubert, Handel and Nkosi Sikilele I'Afrika. Afterwards there were refreshments at Freda's flat in Westbourne Park Villas.**

**"Freda was a woman of gladiatorial determination and quiet nobility, her indomitable spirit having been hardened in the fires of the early anti-apartheid movement."**

**"Her words, her looks, her gestures, her entire life being that of someone that I can only describe as an *Elect Lady*."**

**Rev. Phil Streeter**

I met Freda Levson at my bother-in-law's—Bill Raeper's Memorial Service in Oxford shortly after his death in 1992. What a person—direct, friendly and consoling—Freda made a bee-line for my wife Susan—with words of comfort. She was very close to Bill—both being key people in starting the 'George MacDonald Society' all those years ago—and she said 'Bill will be sorely missed'.

I got to know Freda over the years—she was always hospitable—even insisting on making me lunch on my last visit to her flat in 2003. We had a lot to share and I was happy to listen to Freda—ever an enthusiast for life—and all things MacDonald. Freda encouraged me right up to a few weeks ago by writing to me as we shared 'those thoughts on GMD'!

Freda 'you will be sorely missed'.

**The Editor**

Professor Spina has sent a tribute for Freda from Italy:

Dear Friends,

Grievously distressed by the news. Mrs Freda Levson dead!

Dear to me the remembrance of the gentle lady I first met thirty years ago, when I paid a visit to her at home. There, along Westbourne Park Villas, I delivered a talk at a yearly Society meeting and there, every year, when in London, I paid a visit, alone or with my wife. Mrs Freda Levson was always interested in my work. Alas! I express my sympathy to the George MacDonald Society, all of them.

Yours faithful  
**Giorgio Spina**

### **Centenary Events in 2005**

#### **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> May:**

A coach tour of MacDonald's Hastings organised by Edward Preston

#### **Friday and Saturday June 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup>**

Regent College in Vancouver, B.C. is putting on a MacDonald Conference

**Saturday 23<sup>rd</sup> July**

George MacDonald Centenary Conference at University College, Worcester (see below for details)

**Friday and Saturday 29<sup>th</sup> and 30<sup>th</sup> July**

A two day conference on 'George MacDonald and Today's World' at Temple Lodge, Hammersmith, chaired by Society President, Professor Stephen Prickett. For further details apply to John Docherty

**Saturday and Sunday 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> September**

MacDonald Conference at Baylor University, Baylor, Texas, organised by Professor Stephen Prickett

**September** (on a date to be announced): Unveiling of plaque to 'The Boy on a Dolphin' in Hyde Park, London

On a date to be announced, unveiling of an English Heritage blue plaque on Tudor Lodge, MacDonald's home at Albert Street, London NW 1

**Saturday 8<sup>th</sup> or 15<sup>th</sup> October**, Exhibition in Aberdeen and Society's Annual General Meeting with guest speaker (dates to be confirmed). For further details apply to Ian Blakemore.

The proposed **American 2005 East and West Coast Workshops** will probably be on *Phantastes*. The tentative title is:

"How to (mis)Understand *Phantastes*: Escaping from the Nonsense of the Introductions in the Everyman and Eerdmans Editions of *Phantastes*."

It is astonishing that these two major publishers have chosen to promote *Phantastes* by using as introductions, passages from essays by authors who fail to comprehend the book and so chose to denigrate it! The introduction to the last Everyman edition drew upon a materialistic, 'liberal', psycho-analytical study of *Phantastes* by David Holbrook that appeared in number 4 of *Seven*. The introduction to the Eerdmans editions draws upon the preface to C.S. Lewis's collection of devotional quotations from MacDonald where he seeks to promote MacDonald's theology by denigrating his literary skills. From what he writes it seems that the moral purity of *Phantastes* so overwhelmed him that he never dared to consider that the book might be of an equally high literary quality!

People who attend these workshops will discover the astonishingly high quality of *Phantastes*, both as a work of literature and as a work of practical spiritual psychology.

To register interest in these workshops and request further information when available, please contact [nancymellon@tellink.net](mailto:nancymellon@tellink.net)

### 'The Singer' - An overture to *Phantastes*?

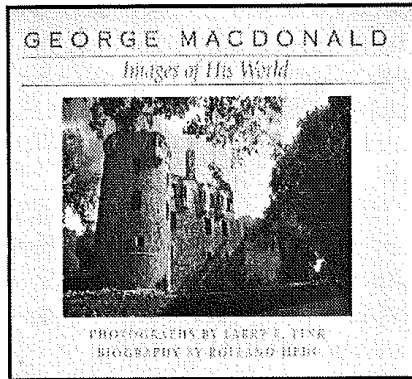
*Phantastes* has a precursor. In a still earlier text, which has received little critical attention, George MacDonald had already experimented with a polysemous and multi-dimensional narrative to convey, albeit in a much smaller compass, how artificial are the frontiers between the world—or the multiple worlds—we imaginatively enter in the tales we hear or read and the world to which we must return when the story-teller falls silent or we put down the book we have been reading.

*Within and Without*, subtitled 'A Dramatic Poem', was MacDonald's first book. It was published, three years before *Phantastes*, in 1855. The first scene of Part III of the drama is set in the cell of the monk Julian. Julian is heard reading aloud a narrative entitled *The Singer*. It is a fragment of fantasy and MacDonald's earliest exercise in this mode. We hear how one Melchah, standing by the dead body of his son, relates a dream he had had of a youth who, it would seem, is seeking immortality. The youth is met by 'a hundred majestic forms, as of men who had striven and conquered'. One of these figures asks him, 'What wouldst thou sing to us, young man?' The youth replies, 'A song which I have made for my singing.' The youth is then led into a cave. The sequence of what follows is imprecise and need not detain us. What is striking is how the allusive imagery of appearances shifting and dissolving anticipates that of *Phantastes* ('I could see their faces change like waters in a windy and half-cloudy day'). In his dream Melchah seeks an explanation and is told that the young man 'desired to sing to the Immortals' and that 'no one shall sing a song who cannot be the hero of his tale—who cannot live the song that he sings'. Melchah learns that in the cave the youth 'lives in the forms of his own tale.' Melchah, sleeping, dreams that he falls asleep and then wakes. On waking, he recognises the youth, emerging from the cavern, as his own son. He recognises too that his son 'hath told his tale to the Immortals.'

One must learn 'to live in the forms of one's own tale' or 'to live the song one sings'. It is the principle and conviction undergirding *Phantastes*, as in measure all MacDonald's work. Narrative as imaginative construct and narrative as one's own life-story are not worlds apart. The latter must aspire to the former; the former must be fulfilled in the latter. I step into the story I tell or the song I sing. My story or song is caught up in a greater and unfinished narrative, a tale that unfolds in the turning pages of my own life-story. I am the song I have sung, the story I have told. Of what we are to become it is not possible to speak directly. Our flourishing, beyond the power of words to describe, can only be expressed by the analogy of musical harmony. Such harmony, we learn with Anodos in *Phantastes*, is as of 'the inarticulate music' of the leaves of a beech tree whispering, to ears attuned to hear, of a great good coming.

**John Pridmore  
Hackney**

### ***Book News & Reviews***



#### **George MacDonald: Images of His World**

Photographs by Larry E. Fink

Biography by Rolland Hein

Abilene, TX: Pasture Springs Press, 2004.

110pp.

UK Distribution: Rosley Books

Rosley Books Members Offer—Post Free: HB in dust-jacket £30.00

**Write a review** *send to the Editor*

*George MacDonald: Images of His World* is an enticing introduction to the life and art of the man C.S. Lewis called "my master". Of MacDonald, Lewis wrote, "I dare not say that he is never in error; but to speak plainly I know hardly any other writer who seems to me closer or more continually close, to the spirit of Christ Himself." Quotations from MacDonald's books and letters complement photographs of places he lived in and wrote about—from northern Scotland to the Italian Riviera, from his birthplace to his gravesite. Here, his life style is told in its visually stunning contexts, reflecting his deep appreciation for the beauty of his Creator's world and offering readers—old and new—a fuller understanding of his ideas and values.

#### ***Featuring:***

**Biography** by Rolland Hein, author of the full-length biography, *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker*

**Photography** by Larry E. Fink—over 130 photographs of MacDonald sites in Scotland, England, Belgium, Switzerland, and Italy—accompanied by extensive quotations from his fiction, poetry, and letters

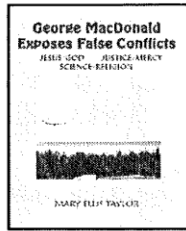
**Chronology** of MacDonald's life

**Bibliography** of the MacDonald's works

**Larry E. Fink** is Professor of English at Hardin-Simmons University, Abilene, Texas. Along with George MacDonald, his research interests include C.S. Lewis, Walker Percy, and Loren Eiseley. "Street photography" describes his favourite style of photography; he has had one-man shows in local galleries and led several workshops.

**Rolland Hein** is Professor Emeritus of English at Wheaton College, Wheaton, Illinois. Among his publications are *George MacDonald: Victorian Mythmaker*, *The Harmony Within*, *Christian Mythmakers*, and *Growing with My Garden: Thoughts on Tending the Soil and the Soul*.





**George MacDonald Exposes False Conflicts:**  
Jesus/God Justice/Mercy Science/Religion.  
Mary Ellis Taylor.  
Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2004. xxii,125pp.  
UK Distribution: Rosley Books  
Rosley Books Members Offer - Post Free: PB £8.99  
HB in dust-jacket £15.99  
**Review** by *Rachel Johnson with Nathaniel Johnson*

Mary Taylor's succinct and readable book is clearly the result of her own personal journeying with faith. Her intention is to interpret George MacDonald's ideas for a contemporary generation and to construct bridges of continuity between his thought and concepts found in the work of twentieth century thinkers.

Taylor addresses three key questions she has identified as 'areas of traditional conflict' (p. xvii). Thus the organisation of the book falls naturally into three parts, each divided into chapters focusing on specific aspects of the key questions. Parts 1 and 2 examine the questions 'Can God be less loving than Jesus?' and 'Can God be less forgiving than Jesus?'

Taylor maintains that "the first two questions are ripping churches and denominations apart, driving away church members and causing ministers to be dismissed". (p.xvii) Though questions causing such deeply disturbing conflicts within churches differ within the UK context, they nevertheless highlight the clarity of MacDonald's thinking on such issues, thinking that is broad enough to apply to the underlying problems and consequences of division, not only within individual churches but also within the church community as an entity and the effect this has on the way that community is perceived by the society of which it is a part.

Taylor begins by investigating the relation of Son to Father with the emphasis on Jesus as the expression of God's character "he visibly represents the invisible God." (p.9) With carefully chosen quotations from MacDonald's theological writing and with reference to letters quoted in his biography, Taylor explores MacDonald's thinking on this issue clearly and concisely. She continues with comments on the problematic exclusivity of the Father-Son model, counterbalancing it by citing the "numerous Godlike women characters in his fantasies and fairy tales" who emphasise the "maternal qualities in God" (p.9). Part 1 concludes with a discussion on values attributed to God and on Jesus' character as "the active essence of God." (p. 15) She focuses on aspects of God's character in relation to God in terms of self-denial, relationship and suffering. (p.20) Taylor cites two twentieth century writers, Kenneth J. Foreman and William Barclay, whose work takes up the ideas found in MacDonald on the relationship between Jesus and God describing it as "not unlike the accord between one human and another." (p.20)

In Part 2, 'Justice and Mercy' Taylor tackles the Christian view of God's justice and human justice, explaining MacDonald's premise that God's justice cannot contradict his love. She cites Unspoken Sermons III and states "He (GMD) uncompromisingly challenges any teachings about divine justice that contradict the beliefs that God is love, and that God's love is fair." (p.26) The intention here is to raise the appraisal of God's justice to the level of ideal model for human justice. Taylor discusses models of God's

relationship with human, for example law enforcer or parent, with reference to contemporary writer's exposition of these models, particularly the latter as found in the work of Sally McFague. She follows this by examining MacDonald's distinction between punishment and revenge, and repentance (p. 29) using illustrative instances to explain concepts. Taylor continues by again referring to modern writer's corroboration of MacDonald's ideas. This section also serves as a reminder that MacDonald provides the best commentary on MacDonald.

The penultimate chapter in this section addresses the question 'Any Limits to God's Forgiving Presence?' (p.38). The discussion focuses on MacDonald's illustration of four levels of forgiveness demonstrated by four different human attitudes followed by the nature of that "which cannot be forgiven" (p.41) Taylor concludes her discussion by stating "Once again we find MacDonald clearing up distortions and sweeping away contrasts that blur our image of God. He affirms that there is *no* opposition between God's infinite justice and God's infinite mercy." (p. 47)

The final chapter in Part 2 takes this propensity for distortion into the subject of the Atonement with a discussion of MacDonald's understanding of divine suffering and divine sacrifice. After a brief overview of the purpose and meaning of sacrifice in the Old Testament and how Jesus demonstrated this in his life, Taylor foregrounds MacDonald's objections to Anselm's system of substitutionary sacrifice. Her exposition of MacDonald's interpretation of punishment as restorative rather than retributive is linked to the understanding of God's justice and mercy as the ideal for human justice when she states "perhaps our practical goals for human justice can become more humane as they become more akin to divine justice". Conversely "the close-up focus on God's justice and mercy that George MacDonald offers can clarify and enlarge our understanding of the origin and source of our human sense of fairness". (p. 62)

Part 3, Science and Religion, the largest section of the book, begins by defining the distinction between the *why* of religion and the *how* of science by means of a discussion of MacDonald's four levels of truth and the difference between law and truth. The main element of this discussion lies in the perceived need to balance the concepts of God as immanent and God as transcendent. In this context, Taylor discusses the origin of 'panentheism' and gives an overview of twentieth century theologians who have addressed the difficulties raised by 'problematizing' rather than reconciling these two aspects of God's character. A reference to Matthew Fox's work might have been helpful in this section.

In pursuing MacDonald's attitude to science, Taylor outlines the argument against determinism from MacDonald's thinking through to fractal geometry and chaos theory. Taylor draws in examples of scientists who *think* in the generalised allusions to "other perceptive scientists" (p. 78) including René Dubos, Alfred North Whitehead, Benoit B. Mandelbrot, Michael Polanyi, John D. Barrow, Harry Prosch and Paul Davies.

She encompasses pure mathematicians, cosmologists and applied scientists in this wide range. She does not however mention the excellent studies dealing with the science

versus religion debate available in the UK and written by scientists who are Christians such as MacGrath, Polkinghome, Stannard and MacKay.

The exploration of early twentieth century movements that changed views of the interconnectedness of creation and the rise of Creation theology provides a helpful review of progress and the acceptance of prevalent theological ideas of God's immanence and transcendence into the dominant Western discourse.

The final chapters dealing with the ever-present creation versus Darwinian evolution debate leads into an explanation of MacDonald's writings on the limitations of a scientific view and the need to differentiate between the 'workings' (the how) and God's 'intent' (the way), with the conclusion that "Religious findings and scientific findings need not be incompatible." (p. 106) We are left with MacDonald's view that the highest of the four levels of truth is the reflection on our experience with nature in order to understand "the truth of a thing" (p. 113), which is God's intent.

The short extracts Taylor uses to illustrate this section are in keeping with her intent to introduce the reader to the arguments surrounding her three initial questions. She states on p. 111, in her discussion of Gell-Mann's work on elementary particle theory that she does not intend to address the technical implications but to draw out the reflective elements of the thinking found in the works cited. It could be levelled that this book is not really about George MacDonald but is straight Christian apologetics using MacDonald's thinking to underpin perceived misinterpretations preventing belief, but that would be a distorted view of the work. Addressing 'old chestnuts' by providing a fresh and accessible introduction to MacDonald's theology, readers new to his thinking should be inspired to consult the clearly presented bibliography to deepen their understanding.

Though the USA/UK perspectives on these questions differ, the clarity with which MacDonald's thought is expounded will be valuable to readers on both sides of the Atlantic.

(Italics used are taken from the author)  
*Rachel Johnson with Nathaniel Johnson*

New book for 2005:

**George MacDonald: A Biography**  
William Raeper  
New Edition (Centenary Edition)  
To be published September 2005  
**Ink Books** (an imprint of Rosley Books)

*Please send news and articles for the next Orts*

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Children's Literature**



**GEORGE MACDONALD  
CENTENARY  
CONFERENCE  
JULY 23<sup>RD</sup>, 2005**

**KEYNOTE SPEAKERS:**

***PROF ROD MCGILLIS, CALGARY***

***PROF MARIA NIKOLAJEVA, STOCKHOLM***

***PROF DAVID NEUHOUSER, INDIANA***

***A ONE-DAY CONFERENCE: £50 INCL. LUNCH***

***CALL FOR PAPERS***

Papers/presentations 20 minutes in length.

500 Word outline on any subject connected with George MacDonald: e.g. his life; work - writing for children and/or adults; the Victorian context; contemporary and current reception. Closing date: March 31<sup>st</sup> 2005.

Dr. Jean Webb, Graduate School, University  
College Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester,  
WR2 6AJ, UK.

or e-mail: [j.webb@worc.ac.uk](mailto:j.webb@worc.ac.uk)

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