

# 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. 69, Summer 2006

### Manchester 2006

**The MacDonalds moved to Manchester in 1853** and later moved into 3, Camp terrace, Lower Broughton, 'a nice house, large, and in some respects handsome' for £35 a year. Greville was born during this period, and MacDonald attended the inaugural lecture of the Working Men's College given by his friend F.D. Maurice. MacDonald's first book *Within and Without* was published during his Manchester years.

**Our annual conference will be held 13-14 October.**

**Venue:** Luther King House, Rusholme (near the University)

We will meet in their chapel conference room, adjacent to the library

For further information please see their website; [www.lkh.co.uk](http://www.lkh.co.uk)

Arrival between 4-5pm Friday—depart Saturday afternoon

Accommodation available—Friday night

Cost of conference including accommodation and lunch—£45

Cost of conference as day visitor (inc lunch) –Saturday—£20

Details of the sessions and further information will be sent out with confirmation.

**Please contact Roger Bartlet to place booking or for further information.**

Roger Bartlet, 10 Appian Court, Parnell Road, London E3 2RS

Tel: 020 8980 0083. E-mail: [r.bardet@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:r.bardet@hotmail.co.uk)

**The Society AGM will be held in Manchester Saturday 14 October-4pm**



Scene from our George MacDonald Centenary Dinner  
in Huntly  
October 2005

## **Chairman's Report 2005**

The centenary year of 2005 has come, but not yet gone. Indeed, with an eye on the events arranged here in Aberdeen and Huntly in the coming week 'the best is yet to be', to quote Robert Browning, one of George MacDonald's (and my) favourite poets.

The Committee, strengthened by the presence of our webmaster Mike Partridge, has met only once in a formal sense during the year, but this does not mean that the Society has been inactive. Various events, some organised by the Society and some by other bodies, have taken place during the year in celebration of George MacDonald's life and work. These have been admirably summarised in the centenary issue of 'Orts' which went out recently, but I will summarise them again here with my own comments.

We started with a visit to Hastings on a very chilly Saturday in mid-May. Edward Preston once again organised the day and even managed to secure a generous grant from the Hastings Borough Council. Edward gave an introductory talk and was followed by Mark Richards, Chairman of the Lewis Carroll Society, who spoke of the Carroll/MacDonald friendship which was first forged in Hastings. A surprise item was the singing of three hymns written by George MacDonald by a choir from the Bexhill Free Church. After an excellent buffet lunch Edward was once again an incomparable guide on a coach tour of the town. We saw again the two houses in which MacDonald and his family lived, but this time we were not able to go inside Hathaway House. While we were freezing in Hastings, John Docherty was enjoying sunshine on the Rhine at the George MacDonald International Symposium at Oberwesel organised by the German Inklings under Adelheid Kegler.

Kirstin Johnson spoke about MacDonald at a CS Lewis day conference in Vancouver on 4<sup>th</sup> June.

On 21<sup>st</sup> June in London John Docherty addressed a joint meeting of our Society and the Blake Society of St. James's with a fascinating talk about the influence of Blake on MacDonald. He was supported by your Chairman and Treasurer and Committee member Geoffrey Straw. What was interesting was that, while the George MacDonald Society members knew a good deal about Blake, very few of the Blake Society people had much knowledge of MacDonald. John, with our help, was able to enlighten them.

On 28<sup>th</sup> June an English Heritage Blue Plaque was unveiled on Tudor Lodge, Albert Street, Camden Town in London by the well-known author AN Wilson. John Docherty and I both also spoke. MacDonald and his family lived there from 1860 to 1863. Although their residence at The Retreat, Hammersmith was much longer, William Morris, who bought the house from MacDonald and renamed it Kelmescott House, pre-empted the Blue Plaque long ago. English Heritage were efficient and assiduous in their arrangements and the sun shone. At one point I was handed a mobile phone by a member of EH's staff and gave an interview to the 'Aberdeen Evening Express'. The next day that paper printed a two page illustrated article (no, there was not a photograph of me) under the headline 'Lost North-east fantasy wizard whose works forged legends'. Yes, I did make a (probably unwise) reference to MacDonald's possible indirect influence on JK Rowling, but the publicity was excellent.

AN Wilson had referred to 'At the Back of the North Wind' in his unveiling speech and on the following two Mondays the Daily Telegraph published two remarkable articles by him on MacDonald with particular reference to that work. He also mentioned the Blue Plaque. I hope some members listened to the wonderful radio adaptation of the story broadcast on the digital station BBC 7 on 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> September starring Juliet Stevenson, Tom Fleming and Joss Ackland. [Available to buy as a 2 CD boxed set from the Editor]

A one-day conference on MacDonald was held at Worcester University on 23<sup>rd</sup> July and the following Friday and Saturday we held our own conference on MacDonald at Temple Lodge, Hammersmith under the admirable chairmanship of our President, Professor Stephen Prickett. Sadly, John Docherty who had organised the conference was prevented from attending by ill-health. Fascinating papers were presented by Adelheid Kegler on 'Late Modern Landscapes of the Soul in GM's Oeuvre', by John Pennington on the American 're-writes' of his novels, Jennifer Koopman on 'GM and Literary History', Fernando Soto on 'Developing Identity and Perception in Lilith and Kirstin Johnson on 'Curdie's Isaiah: an Intertextual Response to Maurice, Coleridge and Arnold'. The papers were all of a very high standard and will, I hope appear in 'North Wind' or elsewhere. Lively discussion followed each paper in which most of those present took part. The food and accommodation arrangements were first class. The conference ended at Saturday lunchtime and we ended with a visit to the William Morris Museum at Kelmscott House, close by.

Another successful conference was held at the Armstrong Browning Library, Baylor University Texas organised by Professor Stephen Prickett who is Director of the Library. Papers were delivered by David Robb, Colin Manlove, Rod McGillis and others, including Kirstin and Fernando. I am very pleased to report that John Docherty was able to attend this conference.

The last event on which I am able to report is the unveiling on 20th October in the Rose Garden in Hyde Park, London of a plaque commemorating Alexander Munro's statue of 'The Boy and the Dolphin', for which the model was Greville MacDonald, and the amusing account written by Lewis Carroll. Carroll's comments, written in his diary, are inscribed on a handsome stainless steel plaque which has been beautifully set on an English oak pedestal by the Royal Parks Agency. Our thanks our due to the Agency and in particular to the Deputy Superintendent of the Park, Tom Jarvis, for agreeing to the placing of the plaque and for arranging the pedestal. The event was attended by Katharine Macdonald, Munro's grand-daughter and for a long time a committee member of the Society.

Finally, I have to refer to an unexpected centenary bonus, the donation to the Society of a collection of MacDonald books belonging to his secretary, William Carey Davies, many with GM's signature and dedication. The collection has been valued at about £20,000. The AGM decided that these precious books ought to stay in the UK and they have been offered on permanent loan to Aberdeen University, George MacDonald's own alma mater.

I would like to thank my fellow committee members for their work and support. Roger Bartlet has been a loyal and assiduous Treasurer. He and I have met frequently throughout the year and Roger has given great assistance to John Docherty in his Membership Secretary duties. John

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himself is currently undergoing treatment for cancer. He is treating serious disease with his customary panache. I think you will wish to join me in wishing him well. Geoffrey Straw has been a wise head on the committee and has loyally supported our events. It was a pleasure to hear him quoting large chunks of Shelley during discussion of one of the papers at the Hammersmith conference. Mike Partridge has continued as webmaster. Ian Blakemore has edited *Orts* and, with Chris Hunt, has organised the October MacDonald events in Scotland. Fernando Soto has been busy preparing the centenary edition of 'North Wind'.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who have supported the Society by renewing their membership and attending events and, of course, a special thanks is due to all who have written and presented papers during the year.

### **Richard Lines**

Delivered at the AGM on 22 October 2005



Dr. David Robb giving his lecture in Aberdeen as part of our George MacDonald Centenary Dinner, October 2005. The lecture was entitled 'The Scottish Sources of MacDonald's Fantasy'

### **A Traveller's Report: Baylor Conference**

The George MacDonald conference held at the Armstrong Browning Library this September at Baylor University, Waco, Texas September 16-September 19, 2005. This was one of the many conferences that commemorated the centennial of George MacDonald's death. Participants from North America, Europe and Asia gathered together to celebrate the life of George MacDonald as well as listen to and discuss many interesting papers.

The conference began with a warm welcome by Stephen Prickett, who organized the conference and continued to be a gracious host to the participants of the conference. The Armstrong Browning Library at Baylor University provided an aesthetically appealing context for lectures, discussion and coffee breaks, which were generously supplied with home made cakes.

It was appropriate to have David Robb start the conference off by reminding us of MacDonald's firm roots in his Scottish literary context. This was further enhanced by a paper spontaneously given by Kerry Dearborn in one of the panel sessions, pointing out the theological influences, also very important for understanding MacDonald in his context. John Docherty discussed the German Romantic influence, focusing on Schlegel's irony, which was further elaborated upon by Chad Schrock and myself, both of us presenting papers on the influence of Novalis upon MacDonald. A very important issue arose with the interpretation of MacDonald's symbolism. Carolyn Kelly discussed the importance of symbols in MacDonald's writing on a more general level, while Kirstin Johnson and Fernando Soto had a closer look at the symbols and imagery in *the Princess and Curdie* books, Kirstin emphasizing the biblical influence of the book of Isaiah and Fernando pointing to the influence of Greek mythology.

Robert Trexler made some exciting discoveries in regard to the protagonist of *Lilith*, Mr. Vane, linking him to Sir Henry Vane and David Neuhauser had a careful look at MacDonald's universalism. Colin Manlove discussed the influence of MacDonald on the Inklings, while John Pennington raised some important questions regarding the popularized versions of MacDonald's novels. The final paper was presented by Roderick McGillis, who interpreted MacDonald's fantasy literature in light of MacDonald's sermons *Miracles of our Lord*. This was an important paper to end the conference with as it raised the question of the significance of MacDonald's theology, expressed in his sermons, for understanding his fantasy literature. Many more papers were given which I cannot mention here.

What I found most enriching were the discussions after the presentations, during the coffee breaks, over dinner and at later hours, over cocktails. Many of the participants had come from a wide spectrum of backgrounds, with a wide variety of approaches to interpreting MacDonald's work. I found my conversations and discussion with others very enriching, challenging and inspiring. It was great to finally put faces to names that I had read and heard of but never met. It was well worth it to travel the long distance to Waco, Texas in order to both celebrate the life of George MacDonald and to be in conversation with so many George MacDonald fans and scholars. Thank you to Stephen Prickett for organizing such a successful conference.

Gisela Kreglinger University of St. Andrews, Scotland

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### Regent Report

On June 4th, 2005, Regent College in Vancouver, Canada, hosted a day conference to celebrate the centenary of George MacDonald's death. The plenary speakers were Kerry Dearborn, professor at Seattle Pacific University, Seattle, Washington and Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, member of the "Institute of Theology, Imagination and the Arts" (ITIA) at St. Andrew's University, Scotland.

Dearborn, responsible for introducing hundreds of students to MacDonald during her teaching career, gave a lecture entitled: "Going Home: MacDonald's Wisdom on Aging and Death." She explained how MacDonald approached aging and death not as a problem to be solved or a process to be avoided, but a movement toward purification and a final unveiling when one may

actually see God face to face: "The shadows of the evening that precede the lovelier morning." The lecture highlighted MacDonald's wisdom in relationship to suffering and death and showed ways in which he approached his own pain and loss through his life and writing. Dearborn made clear how relevant MacDonald's message is for a contemporary culture in which "youth is beauty," and "ease of life" one of the greatest goods. Dearborn's Aberdeen PhD thesis on MacDonald has long been an important resource for students of MacDonald, and her forthcoming book is highly anticipated.

Kirstin Jeffrey Johnson, of the "Institute of Theology, Imagination and the Arts" (ITIA) at St. Andrew's University, Scotland, lectured on: "Sacred Story: The Mythopoeisis of George MacDonald." The term 'mythopoeic' has recently been adopted to describe much fantasy writing. Johnson argued that the usual contemporary definition, 'literary myth,' is insufficient to convey the depth and import of what was intended by writers such as Auden and Lewis when they introduced the term, and when they called MacDonald "the greatest mythopoeic." Exploring MacDonald's own intentional employment of the concept, the lecture examined MacDonald's intentional use of 'Story' as a means of transformation, and, for him, an illumination of understanding of God; his desire "to wake things up"<sup>2</sup> in his congregation of readers, in the unveiling of a "wise imagination, which is the presence of the Spirit of God."<sup>3</sup> Playwright and Artistic Director of Vancouver's Pacific Theatre, Ron Reed, also presented—with a cast of stunning actors—a dramatic reading of Ron's work-in-progress, *A Bright Particular Star*. This play is an exploration of the challenges facing MacDonald's eldest daughter Lilia, as she and her family face the hostilities of a Victorian Society towards one of her family's chosen mediums of Story: theatre. Lilia is the most gifted actress of the family, encouraged by contemporaries such as Octavia Hill, Ellen Terry, and Lewis Carroll, and yet facing personal and social trials as she seeks to be who God has gifted her to be. It is anticipated that the completed play will be performed in Vancouver next year, possibly touring further.

Excellent discussion ensued each presentation, from an international audience that included long-term lovers of MacDonald's literature, students and professors from several universities (some themselves doing work on MacDonald), as well as some who were new to MacDonald and intrigued to learn more. As the MacDonald centenary celebration issue of *Christian History and Biography* (edited by MacDonald scholar Jennifer Trafton) had just been published, this added fodder to the rich dialogue. The conference was complemented with an 'Inklings-related' rare book and artefact exhibit in the college library.

The conference was recorded, and CD's of the proceedings will be available through Regent Bookstore, by inquiring at: [www.regentbookstore.com](http://www.regentbookstore.com)

### **Kirstin Johnson**

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### **MacDonald - Tolkien's Master**

Did you know just how much Tolkien owed MacDonald for *The Lord of the Rings*? His Old Man Willow and his Ents he took from the Ash and other trees of *Phantastes*. The 'Princess' books, particularly *The Princess and Curdie*, were a main source: Tolkien said he drew his ores from MacDonald's goblins: but there are also the goblin mines and the Mines of Moria; Curdie's

colour-changing emerald and Frodo's phial, each warning of danger; the birds that attack Curdie on his journey, and the crows over Hollin; Irene's sick king father preyed on by evil counsellors, and King Theoden shut in his palace and drained of life by Wormtongue; Gwyntystorm and Minas Thith, both cities carved out of rock; the flock of the mystic grandmother's pigeons that turn the battle outside Gwyntystorm, and the flight of eagles that arrives to save the battle outside Minas Tirith.

Tolkien also probably took his plot and his landscapes from a story of MacDonald's he had known from childhood and once. (1960) began to edit -'The Golden Key' (1867). MacDonald portrays a boy who finds a golden key and who sets out on a long journey to find the keyhole it comes from: so too Frodo with the golden ring and the 'keyhole' of the cracks of doom. There is a fairy lady in a wood who gives helpful advice to the children in 'The Golden Key'; and there is a similar lady Galadriel in Tolkien's story. Through both narratives we move from a wooded to rocky landscapes. In MacDonald's story there are two mountain-ranges crossed via tunnels, and the story ends high up in a cavern in the heart of a mountain, above a place of subterranean fire: so too in Tolkien's. Mossy and Tangle in 'The Golden Key' are parted during their journey, and thereafter they pursue separate adventures; in *The Lord of the Rings* Frodo and the Fellowship become divided, and then we have two stories.

MacDonald is no mere forebear, he is the fountainhead of modern fantasy!

### **Colin Manlove**

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Notes:

A report on the Scottish Centenary events and news on the William Carey Davies Collection moving to Aberdeen will appear in the next issue of *Orts*.

The 2006 Frances White Ewbank Colloquium on C. S. Lewis & Friends was held at Taylor University on June 1-4, 2006. A report will appear in the next issue of *Orts*.

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*Please send news, reviews and articles for the next Orts*

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