NEWS

Annual General Meeting

The next Annual General Meeting of the Society will be held on Saturday 6th November 2010 at 10 Appian Court, Parnell Road, London E3 2RS at 2pm. Space is limited, so if you intend coming please contact Roger Bardet on + 44 (0)20 8980 0083 or at r.bardet@hotmail.co.uk. The purpose of the meeting is to receive accounts and a report of the Society’s activities, to elect officers and committee for 2011 and to discuss the Society’s future programme. The nearest underground is either Mile End or Bow Road. Members wishing to explore the neighbourhood ahead of time may enjoy the Roman Road area, a dynamic corner of London featuring an atmospheric street market.

Richard Lines

MacDonald on British TV?

We have recently been approached by the BBC with a view to a short item about George MacDonald being broadcast on the BBC Sunday evening television programme “Songs of Praise” to be filmed in Arundel, West Sussex, where MacDonald was briefly Minister of the Trinity Congregational Church at the beginning of his career. This is not certain at the moment of writing, but if the broadcast interview takes place on a popular prime-time BBC TV programme, this would be a major publicity event for the Society. We hope to give you more news later, but our present information is that the broadcast is scheduled for transmission in February 2011, one hundred and sixty years after MacDonald took up his Arundel pastorate.

Richard Lines

Orts Redux

Jennifer Koopman, of Montreal, Canada, has taken over the editorial baton after Ian Blakemore’s ten years of sterling service. Although it has been over twenty-four months since the last issue of Orts appeared, we hope that this will have been but a brief pause in Orts’ mission, begun in 1981, to report on news and events in the MacDonaldsphere.

Richard Lines

Wisbech and Octavia Hill

A Visit on Saturday 2nd October 2010

The Society, for a variety of reasons, was dormant throughout 2009 and much of 2010. But a specially-arranged visit to the Octavia Hill Museum in Wisbech on 2nd October this year may signal an awakening from our
slumbers. Octavia Hill (1838-1912), best known as a housing reformer and a founder of the National Trust, was a close friend of George MacDonald and his family. On a famous occasion when the MacDonals were in Bude for the summer, Octavia Hill coached the eleven-year-old Greville in Latin, the two of them sitting together on a rock near the breakwater, and sent him back to school for the autumn term firmly grounded in a subject he had hitherto regarded as his “enemy.” On a later occasion she took the part of Piety in a family performance of Pilgrim’s Progress. Some years ago a speaker from the Octavia Hill Society had talked about her housing work at one of our AGMs, and the following year (1999) I was invited to give the annual Spring Lecture of the Octavia Hill Society on “George MacDonald and Octavia Hill” at the National Trust headquarters in London. This was something I regarded as a great honour, but, sadly, after this occasion contact between the two societies was lost. On the initiative of our Treasurer and Membership Secretary Roger Bardet, the recent visit was arranged.

Peter Clayton, the Chairman of the Octavia Hill Society, welcomed us and his wife Anne provided a sandwich lunch in the basement tea-room. After a short talk by Peter we were free to visit the museum, which we were able to do at leisure. The Octavia Hill Society has been able to purchase Octavia’s birthplace on South Brink in Wisbech and turn it into a fine museum commemorating her background, life and work. At the end of the afternoon I received a second invitation to talk to the Octavia Hill Society and it is hoped that a date for this can be arranged soon. We came away inspired by the work of the Octavia Hill Society and determined to strengthen the links between our two societies.

Richard Lines

Report from the G. K. Chesterton Conference

The 29th Annual G. K. Chesterton Conference brought over three hundred attendees to Mt. St. Mary’s University in Emmitsburg, Maryland on August 5-7, 2010. This year marked one hundred years from the publication of Chesterton’s book, What’s Wrong with the World—the theme of the conference. In addition to fourteen one-hour presentations by eminent speakers from around the world including Fr. Peter Milward, SJ (Japan), Fr. Ian Ker (Oxford, England), and Joseph Pearce (American transplant from England).

The conferences are reasonably priced with food and accommodations conveniently located on a university campus. The cost of this year’s conference, all included, was $290 dollars. Next year’s conference is scheduled for St. Louis, Missouri. Future locations being planned are Reno, Nevada and Houston, Texas. More information can be found on their website: http://chesterton.org/.

What might this all have to do with George MacDonald? Chesterton was a fan MacDonald’s books (both the novels and fairy tales), first recommending him in a newspaper column in 1901. He also wrote a flattering preface to the 1924 biography by MacDonald’s son, Greville.

Bob Trexler
**Upcoming C. S. Lewis Conference**

A day conference on C.S. Lewis will take place on Sunday, November 27th, 9:30-3:00pm at The King’s Centre, Olney Mead, Oxford, United Kingdom. Entitled *C.S. Lewis: New Directions*, the conference examines Lewis’s influences—which include, among others, George MacDonald. Scheduled speakers include Michael Ward (on “C. S. Lewis' Biggest Secret”), Nick Page (“‘My Name is George’: C.S. Lewis and George MacDonald”), and Colin Duriez (“C.S. Lewis and Tolkien: the Gift of Friendship”). The cost is £15 for individuals, £10 for students, and £30 for families, with childcare available for children 0-4 years, and activities for 5-11 years. King’s Bible College has online registration forms at [http://www.kbctc.org/events/cslewis](http://www.kbctc.org/events/cslewis).

**George MacDonald Blog**

George MacDonald readers now have numerous ways to connect with one another online, thanks to the efforts of GMS member Mike Partridge. Since 2006, he has been blogging about MacDonald at The George MacDonald blog, [http://gmsociety.blogspot.com/](http://gmsociety.blogspot.com/). Mike also administers The Golden Key, an online resource of MacDonald materials, which can be found at [http://www.george-macdonald.com/](http://www.george-macdonald.com/). In addition, he has created a George MacDonald Society Facebook group, [http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=46694797386](http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=46694797386), where MacDonald fans may chat and share news.

**Mugs and More**

MacDonald readers can now support the George MacDonald Society and raise awareness of their favorite long-bearded Victorian with an attractive line of George MacDonald mugs, T-shirts, and bags, now available to order online. Check out the designs at [http://www.zazzle.ca/georgemacdonald](http://www.zazzle.ca/georgemacdonald). All proceeds go to support the activities of the George MacDonald Society.

**A Visit to The Retreat Saturday 11th October 2008.**

The Society’s 2008 Annual General Meeting was held on Saturday 11th October at Temple Lodge, Hammersmith, former home of the artist Frank Brangwyn. After re-election of the officers and committee, the members present listened to a fascinating and learned address by the President, Professor Stephen Prickett, on “George MacDonald and the Making of the Christian Imagination.” Stephen Prickett identified six themes or influences on MacDonald’s imaginative writing. The first was the legacy of Dante and medieval religious symbolism. The second was German Romantic literature and theology, which included E.T.A. Hoffmann, Goethe,
Novalis and Schleiermacher. He thought that the most powerful German influence on MacDonald was Goethe’s *bildungsroman*, *Wilhelm Meister*. Next was the influence of the English Romantic poets, particularly Wordsworth, Coleridge and Byron. The term *Romanticism*, he told us, was invented by the French critic Hippolyte Taine. Then Prickett moved to the mid-nineteenth century contemporary context, stressing MacDonald’s friendship with the fantasy writers Lewis Carroll and Charles Kingsley, and with the theologian F.D. Maurice. Suffused throughout MacDonald’s imaginative writing was the Victorian preoccupation with death, particularly early death. Finally, he noted that with MacDonald, fantasy writing acquired a new meaning.

Stephen Prickett had to leave at this point to keep another engagement and the other members present enjoyed lunch in a riverside pub and afterwards gathered by appointment at “The Retreat,” 26 Upper Mall, Hammersmith, now known as Kelmscott House. The present tenants of the house, Jock and Joy Birney, had invited a small party of Society members to visit the house and afterwards to tea in their lovely garden. It was a beautiful day of warm sunshine, more like summer than mid-October. George MacDonald and his family lived in the house from 1867 to 1877. In 1878 William Morris took over the lease and he lived there with his family until his death in 1896, changing the name of the house to Kelmscott House, bearing the same name as his country house, Kelmscott Manor, near Lechlade in Gloucestershire.

Jock and Joy took us around the house, much altered from the state it was in when the MacDonalds lived there, showing us the principal ground floor rooms and the huge drawing room on the first-floor which MacDonald had used as a study. MacDonald had commissioned an artist friend to decorate this airy, light-filled room overlooking the river with crimson flock wallpaper on which were stencilled fleur-de-lys in black paint. The ceiling was painted dark blue “with scattered stars in silver and gold, and a silver crescent moon.” The effect, according to Dante Gabriel Rossetti, who found the house for Morris, was “fearful to the eye.” Morris was to replace the wallpaper with his “Bird” hanging, a double woven woollen fabric which was hung around the room in folds from floor to picture-rail. The Birneys had prepared notes about the house for visitors and we were given copies of these to take away with us. They told us that it was a pleasant change to welcome visitors more interested in MacDonald than in Morris!

After tea in the garden there was time to visit the William Morris Museum in the former coach house next door.

A letter of thanks was sent to Jock and Joy Birney together with the gift of a copy of Greville MacDonald’s biography of his parents, *George MacDonald and his Wife*. This book has a chapter about the family’s occupation of The Retreat with a photograph of it and references to visits to the family by Tennyson, Burne-Jones and many other well-known people of the day.

Richard Lines
ORTS INTERVIEW

Jenny Neophytou on George MacDonald

Jenny Neophytou, a doctoral candidate in the Department of English at Brunel University, University of London, examines the historical context of MacDonald’s writing in her dissertation, “Princesses and Goblins: Resolving Class and Gender Tensions in the Works of George MacDonald.” She spoke to Orts’ Jennifer Koopman about muscular Christianity, animal rights, working men’s colleges, and MacDonald’s male heroes.

KOOPMAN: How would you describe your research, in a nutshell?

NEOPHYTOU: My main focus is on the historical and social context—the way in which social tensions relating to the interlinked issues of class and gender (exacerbated by rapidly changing legislation) are represented within his narratives.

KOOPMAN: In what way does your approach differ from earlier studies of MacDonald?

NEOPHYTOU: While many prior investigations place emphasis on interpreting MacDonald’s spiritual (and to a lesser extent, social) message, my work focuses on the way in which the social context shapes the narrative—analysing points where the structure of narrative conflicts with spoken assertions.

KOOPMAN: How does MacDonald fit into the broader Victorian picture?

NEOPHYTOU: It’s become a cliché to say that MacDonald is overlooked academically, but in his case it is clearly true. MacDonald lived within a unique social situation as a close friend of many core social activists—Scott, Maurice, Butler, Ruskin, Hill, Gurney, the Leigh-Smiths, Lady Byron—and it would be naive to suggest that his exposure to these individuals did not help to shape his narratives. Indeed, there are numerous letters praising or criticising a novel’s moral or social message. As such, MacDonald is an extremely interesting literary figure—at once involved in, and separated from, some of the most fundamental legislation changes of a very tempestuous era.

KOOPMAN: The rapid transformation of the world during the nineteenth century inspired a fair degree of anxiety. Could you offer an example of how legislative progress and the resulting tension inform MacDonald’s novels?

NEOPHYTOU: One area I’m investigating is the development of animal rights legislation, and the way in which popular discourse blurred the boundaries between animal abuse and domestic violence. MacDonald’s novels contain numerous examples of horses being treated cruelly by men who are later abusive to women. One particular example is Donal Grant [1883], in which the Earl’s castle is littered with horse whips, spurs and other instruments of animal control and torture. This is contrasted by his willingness to imprison both Forgue’s mother and his niece. Similarly, Forgue’s cruel treatment of a horse is later paralleled by his complicity in the scheme for Arctura’s imprisonment and forced marriage.

KOOPMAN: Abuse of horses—a sure sign of villainy in MacDonald novels. If I recall correctly, the Marquis in Malcolm (1875) suffers a fatal fall shortly after he lames his bay mare. And in The Marquis of Lossie (1877), Malcolm wastes no time in getting rid of Hodges, the man who loses his leg after tormenting Kelpie the horse.
NEOPHYTOU: Exactly, and if you look at the rhetoric surrounding each description, the man is criticised for failing to control the mare adequately without violence. I don't know if it always expresses villainy so much as a failure of masculine social duty—the Marquis suffers through his failure to control his mare, yet this failure echoes his failure to control his "wild" daughter.

KOOPMAN: Earlier, you mentioned “interlinked issues of class and gender”—how do gender relations figure in your work?

NEOPHYTOU: I am particularly interested in the different representations of the male and female body—how they differ from one another, and how they change throughout his literary career. One aspect of my research is to unpick the rhetoric that underpins the so-called “muscular Christianity” of his protagonists (for example, Malcolm and Robert Falconer). This of necessity involves research into F. D. Maurice and A. J. Scott, and MacDonald’s role in the working men’s colleges.

KOOPMAN: Working men’s colleges—what were these about, and how was MacDonald involved?

NEOPHYTOU: MacDonald taught in the working men’s colleges (and later the women’s colleges) from about 1864—there is a lovely letter from Octavia Hill expressing her excitement that MacDonald will be joining them. The colleges were set up by F. D. Maurice in order to provide moral, religious and practical education for working men. Maurice outlines his reasoning in The Workman and the Franchise, asserting that the solution to class-based dissatisfaction is education (particularly a moral education that will teach social responsibility). My interest with respect to MacDonald is the way in which education is portrayed in his narratives, and the difference in the quality of education between men and women of different classes—i.e., how “social responsibilities” differ between different parts of the population.

KOOPMAN: Donal Grant (1883) reminds us, for instance, that Percy Forgue might have turned out better, had he only had a tutor like Donal to guide him—even though Donal, a former shepherd, comes from a lower socio-economic class.

NEOPHYTOU: Very true (although, of course, Forgue is stripped of his apparent status by the discovery of his illegitimacy, while Donal is educated above his status as a result of his friendship with Sir Gibbie).

KOOPMAN: The characters Robert Falconer and Malcolm both emerge from working-class origins, and proceed to apply Christian principles to daily life with great earnestness. I’ve often found MacDonald’s male heroes bear a strong resemblance to one another, and they tend to follow similar narrative arcs. In what ways are Robert Falconer and Malcolm 1) typical protagonists for the period, and 2) uniquely MacDonaldian?

NEOPHYTOU: Robert Falconer and Malcolm are interesting characters in that they are both “born” morally righteous—there is no suggestion of a fall narrative, as there is in what I term MacDonald’s prodigal son stories (Alec Forbes of Howglen, Home Again, Guild Court, etc). Their moral status is indicated both in their physical build, and in the social reactions to their presence. Most notably in Malcolm, the initial supposition that he is Mrs. Stewart’s son results from an apparent belief that any individual with such a
manly physique must be noble-born. My particular interest in these characters is the way in which they try to resolve social tensions within the novels. Robert Falconer walks amongst the urban poor and attempts to rehabilitate them (and it is his method of rehabilitation that I find particularly interesting). Malcolm uses his naturalised social status to assert control over both the rebelling township of Port Lossie, and over his rebellious sister Florimel. It is hard to say that they are “typical protagonists for the period,” but I would argue that they are typical protagonists for the Christian Socialist movement, and for exponents of muscular Christianity in particular. I quite agree that MacDonald’s male (and female, for that matter) heroes follow similar narrative arcs, usually vacillating between searching for a ‘father’ and becoming a ‘father’. In the cases of Robert Falconer and Malcolm, literal paternity morphs into a form of social paternity, so that their social collectives (either the urban poor or the township) look upon the protagonists as moral guides, educators and patriarchs.

**KOOPMAN:** *I remember a similar transformation in Donal Grant—Donal marries the heiress and inherits the estate, yet the book ends not with procreation (the expected conclusion of many Victorian novels), but education, as Donal transforms Morven House into a school where he teaches boys how to become gentlemen and true men of God. Although we have to end our interview, I wonder if you have any parting thoughts about the extent to which the novel form functions as a tool of instruction for MacDonald’s readers.*

**NEOPHYTOUN**: I see MacDonald's novels as essentially narratives of education—teaching men and women the moral standards they need to adhere to in order to maintain social stability. Of course, it is not just the characters that teach—it is the narrator himself, and through him, MacDonald. MacDonald rarely makes any effort to disguise the sermon-like quality of his narratives, and the propensity for teacher-(or preacher-) heroes allows him the scope to teach within the narrative form. There is, of course, nothing unusual about this—particularly in the mid-Victorian period. Most narratives were educational to some degree. However, I would argue that it is the nature of the lessons, and the way in which they reflect social change, that allow us to view MacDonald within his social context.

**Jennifer Koopman**

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**MACDONALD QUOTES**

George MacDonald shows how God guides everyone through trials and sufferings. In *Paul Faber, Surgeon*, the narrator says of Faber, an atheist: **“He was growing, and that is all we can require of any man.”** When we trust that every person is being taught by God Himself, it makes us humble, tolerant and respectful towards our fellow human beings. It is not an expression of faith to hate our fellows because of religious differences. May God help us stop hurting and killing each other in the name of religion!

Miho Yamaguchi, Kurume University and Kyushu University
IN MEMORIAM
Geoffrey Straw (1927-2008)

Geoffrey Straw, a committee member for several years, died on 28th December 2008 after a long illness. Until prevented by his illness during 2008, Geoffrey was an assiduous committee member and a loyal supporter of all the Society’s events. A lover of MacDonald’s works, particularly his poetry, he had a great love of English poetry generally. It was a delight to hear him quoting extensively from Shelley’s “Adonais” entirely from memory in a spontaneous response to Jennifer Koopman’s paper on Shelley and MacDonald, given at our Hammersmith centenary conference in 2005. He was a valued friend and colleague and is much missed.

ABOUT ORTS

The word ors means scraps, or fragments of food left after a meal. The newsletter Orts depends upon contributions from its readers, so please send your morsels this way. Orts welcomes submissions: if you wish to share an article, notice, news, or comments, or if you’d like to be featured in an article or interview, please contact the Orts editor, Dr. Jennifer Koopman, at ortseditor@gmail.com, or the GMS chairman, Richard Lines, at 38 South Vale, Upper Norwood, London, SE19 3BA, r.lines878@btinternet.com.