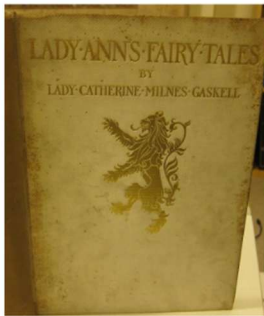




FORGOTTEN WOMEN OF WAKEFIELD

REMEMBERING LADY CATHERINE MILNES GASKELL



Lady Catherine was born the eldest daughter of Isaac Newton Fellowes Wallop 5th Earl of Portsmouth and Eveline Alicia Juliana Herbert, Countess of Portsmouth. She was a prolific and successful author publishing 9 books and numerous essays.



Without the Milnes -Gaskell Family Wakefield would not have Thornes Park. Land from Thornes house was gifted to the people in 1892.



Awarded The Order of St John of Jerusalem Lady of Justice /Lady of Grace for her outstanding contribution to War Work 1st Feb 1916. The highest award a woman could receive, Lady Catherine shared this honour with Florence Nightingale.



A CHAMPION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

BY SARAH LEAH COBHAM

Medical reformer, advocate for the poor, patron of the arts, author and supporter of women's rights and animal welfare.

When Lady Catherine Milnes Gaskell, born in 1856, was awarded The Order of St. John of Jerusalem, Lady of Justice/Lady of Grace, in 1916, her dedication to bringing medical care to the poorest in Wakefield was well known. She was able to accept the award knowing that the St John's Ambulance Brigade Yorkshire Division she had founded in 1911 had been ready to work with, and support the regular army for many years.

At its registration, which took place Thornes House, 70 men and 27 women wore their uniforms with pride. It was at this dedication ceremony that a St. John's uniform was worn for the very first time. This uniform was provided by Lady Catherine and funded from the sale of Alpine plants grown in her garden. As an experienced and knowledgeable horticulturalist these plants were sought after and provided a healthy funding revenue. Lady Catherine also financed the medical training that was delivered by Dr. J.M Hermon. This training was of such a high standard that, when war came, the St. John's Ambulance Brigade had total autonomy of a ward and delivered outstanding medical care at Clayton Hospital. Daniel Gaskell, who funded the building of those wards, was a Liberal Party MP and great uncle of Catherine's husband Charles Milnes Gaskell. The ward at Clayton hospital was named after his patronage, not Lady Catherine's hard work.

TIMELINE

- 1856 Born 7th December Hurstbourne Park Whitchurch
- 1876 Marries Charles Milnes Gaskell of Thornes Park. Birth of son Evelyn 1877
- 1881 Founding member of the Relief of Irish Ladies in Distress Movement. Birth of daughter Mary.
- 1884-1885 Publications of 'A Farm that Pays' & 'Servants Old and New'. Writing in accent and dialect capturing folklore stories from the women's point of view.
- 1887 Established the President of the Guild of Pity. Providing milk for orphans as part of the Free Breakfast Mission
- 1888 Established Lupset Convalescence Home for Women and Children.
- 1891 Supporting the RSPCA in Wakefield.
- 1892-1893 Publishes 'Some Talk about Englishmen' & 'My Story in the Highlands' & 'Dogs we have Known'
- 1893 Gifts Thornes Park. Opened July 6th
- 1893 Raising funds for Bede's House at The Waifs & Strays Festival.
- 1894 Publishes 'Old Wenlock' & 'Wenlock Abbey'
- 1901 Poor Law Guardian who worked for the remainder of her life establishing and running 'Scatter Homes' for orphans
- 1903-1908 Publishes 'New Cinderella and Other Plays' & 'Old Shropshire Life' & 'Spring in a Shropshire Abbey' & 'Prose Idylls of the West Riding' & 'A Shropshire Lad & Lass' alongside articles in The Lady and Tatler Magazines.
- 1910 Vice President Victoria Nursing Institute
- 1911 Establishes, provides & funds the training for Yorkshire Regions first St. John's Ambulance Brigade
- 1916 Publishes, with daughter, Mary Gaskell, a 'Yorkshire Cookery Book' to raise funds for sick and wounded soldiers.
- 1916 Awarded Order of St. John of Jerusalem Lady of Justice (from Lady of Grace) for her War Work
- 1935 Justice of the Peace
Dies Much Wenlock 21 August



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LADY CATHERINE

BY SARAH LEAH COBHAM

As the founder and President of the St. John's Ambulance Yorkshire division Lady Catherine's interest in the health, education and well being of Wakefield's poor began much earlier, in 1881 when, recently arrived as a new bride from her home in Shropshire, she became a founding member of the Relief of Irish Ladies in Distress. Her support for women and children less fortunate than herself continued as she established the Guild of Pity in 1887 and provided free milk to children in workhouses as part of the Free Breakfast Mission. Harnessing the stitching and sewing skills of women across all economic classes, the Guild of Pity annual displays of clothing which were then distributed to the poor and families of wounded soldiers always took place in the grounds of Thornes House. These events were also used to raise funds for the Lupset Convalescence home for Women and Children which Lady Catherine established in 1888. This was later used as a nursing home during the war, once again under her care.

Lending her patronage to the Royal Society for the Protection of Animals whilst working firstly with Miss Ann Clarkson and latterly with Miss Louisa Jane Clarkson, her love of animals is well known. Grave stones to her numerous canine companions can still be found in the grounds of Thornes Park. The inscription to her beloved dog 'Mouse' can be seen clearly.

By 1891 Lady Catherine was an established published essayist exploring the complex lives of women which were, unsurprisingly, received with some hostility by a male dominated press. By the time of her death in 1935 she shared the same publishers as George Gissing and the Bronte Sisters and had published 9 books and a host of articles and essays. Her keen observation and attention to detail and description is exquisite, as is her great command of the English language. Writing in accent and dialect whilst recounting the stories of country folk captures the reality of a harsh rural existence for women. Surrounded by the literary and creative elite, she was a great friend to and hosted literary soirees and social gatherings with Henry James, Robert Wenlock, Thomas Hardy, Henry Brooks Adams and Dante Gabriel Rossetti.

When Princess Christian visited Wakefield in 1893 for the Church of England Waifs and Strays Festival to raise funds for the extension of Bede House, Lady Catherine was at the forefront of the welcoming party providing a platform for artists to display their work and providing exquisite design for the foliage she donated to decorate the Grand Hall in the Corn Exchange. The festival was designed to raise funds to provide an industrial building for 18 boys rescued from the workhouse to enable them to learn a trade. The Wakefield Guardian's dedication to the care and education of the poor were behind this initiative so just eight years later in 1901 Lady Catherine, deeply committed to the cause, put her occupation as 'Poor Law Guardian' on the census. As a Guardian she was instrumental in the setting up of the Scattered Home scheme which placed orphans in foster homes rather than leaving them to the 'evils' of the workhouse. 'We cannot give you my dear children a real home or a real mother, or a real father but we are doing our best to bring you under the influence of the home to make you feel that life is worth living. There is only one way to be happy, and that is to be good.' Lady Catherine said to 60 children as they left the workhouse for a better life in 1902.

Despite being the Vice President of the Victoria District Nursing Institute in 1910, her push to train more nurses to the same standard as the Queen's District Nurses established by Miss Edith Mackie, was blocked by men on the board. This may have been the reason Lady Catherine decided to set up the St. John's Ambulance Brigade division in Wakefield. It certainly gave her the freedom to pursue her vision for social reform a vision that was supported by more sympathetic and enlightened men.

During the war years Lady Catherine worked with her extensive network of female friends to publish several editions of 'A Yorkshire Cookery Book'. The first, published by subscription was used to raise funds for wounded soldiers and to provide sand-bags in collaboration with the County Directors of the War Effort. Many forgotten recipes using Wakefield Rhubarb can be found within the pages along with other sensible, frugal ideas for hungry stomachs. Lady Catherine's daughter, Mary Milnes Gaskell was heavily involved in the creation of this cook book and is attributed as the author, however Catherine's involvement is well documented. Many of those recipes manifested themselves in donations by the women of Wakefield to all three of Wakefield's war hospitals. Lady Catherine's fruit, vegetables and scones, alongside linens, books and pianos, also found themselves giving succor to the men on the mend.

It was a life-time of dedication to the betterment of others that earned Lady Catherine The Order of St John of Jerusalem. An honour shared with Florence Nightingale. And an honour that has been until now, over looked and forgotten.

After her husband's death in 1919 Lady Catherine returned to her childhood home at Much Wenlock in Shropshire where, as soon as a law was passed allowing women to become A Justice of the Peace, she became one of the first to do so. She lived out the remainder of her life highlighting the injustice of the poor through her publications and died in 1935.



Fig. 25 Alexander Glasgow, *Lady Catherine Milnes Gaskell*, 18 August 1880 (detail). Oil on canvas.