Authenticating the Text: A Footnote in *Mary Barton*

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For students of both English literature and history *Mary Barton* remains one of the key fictional accounts of the tensions and antagonisms characterizing the relationship between the powerful and the powerless in the world’s first industrial society. The novel appears to offer a vivid and accurate portrait of the lives of the industrial working classes, their struggles, grievances and feelings; a fiction that has resonances with those pioneering investigative writings — Kay, Chadwick, Engels — on the social pathology of the early Victorian city. It is widely assumed that having lived in Manchester for some fourteen years before starting the novel, Elizabeth Gaskell had acquired an intimate knowledge of the town’s industrial organization, its political and cultural institutions, and its economic problems, and that this experience informed and shaped *Mary Barton*. Indeed, the view that Mrs Gaskell provides a realistic depiction of Manchester life deepens our admiration of the novel. Living in Manchester she knew the town and was in a position to provide deeper insights into its structures, physicality and psychological dynamics than those outsiders who merely visited ‘Cottonopolis’. As Craik has asserted ‘Manchester is not only the setting for *Mary Barton*, it is its world’.

There is certainly detail in the novel that suggests a discerning knowledge of Manchester and the careful researches of generations of scholars has done much to identify the factual base on which the novel rests. A small library of books and articles and, most obviously, the growing number of endnotes that editors have provided to the reprinted editions of the novel, support the view that Mrs Gaskell

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drew on contemporary events, people and places in her representation of an urban society in conflict. However, in spite of this historical contextualization, the different events and sources that influenced Mrs Gaskell in her writing of the novel remain problematic. It is, for example, unclear why only certain places are identified in the novel, or, why some individuals are introduced into the story and named whilst others remain anonymous. More surprisingly, in the effort to establish the sources of her fiction less attention has been given to those footnotes included in the novel itself, a device that was not usually associated with fiction, even in those novels that engaged themselves with the ‘Condition of England Question’. The inclusion of footnotes raises a number of questions. What function do they have in the novel? Why was it thought necessary to corroborate some contemporary places and people with a footnote while others were not provided with one? Who was responsible for including the footnotes and at what stage of the novel’s composition were they included? Gaskell students have not discussed these footnotes in detail, and it is through these largely understudied features of the novel that I want to examine the wider questions of Mrs Gaskell’s perception and analysis of her adopted town, and the way in which contemporary events contributed to her fiction.

The majority of the footnotes included in Mary Barton, of course, are concerned with the dialect spoken by its working-class characters. They offer simple translations and literary pedigrees to those words and expressions that Mrs Gaskell introduced to strengthen the realism of her depiction of the Lancashire working class and the legitimacy of its culture. Although the evidence on the authorship of these footnotes is not conclusive, it is generally assumed that given her husband’s interest and expertise in the Lancashire dialect they were provided by Mr rather than Mrs Elizabeth Gaskell. More problematic are the small number of footnotes that appear to have been included to convince the reader

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3 For instance, James Crowther, a Manchester porter, is the working-class botanist whose achievements were recalled by Mrs Gaskell in the opening paragraph of Chapter 5. His funeral was the occasion for a long article in the Manchester Guardian, 13 January 1847, recollecting his botanical achievements.

4 In the first edition (Chapman and Hall, 2 vols) there are 106 footnotes. A number of small changes are made to the footnotes in the Tauchnitz copyright edition. The majority of the footnotes provide a translation of the dialect, supplemented in some instances, with an indication of the word’s historical and cultural pedigree. This is done by identifying usage in the works of earlier English writers: Chaucer (7 notes) and Wickliffe (5 notes) are the most cited sources. These footnotes did not cover all the dialect words that might have puzzled readers.
that the novel was about real working-class life though for many events and people in the novel which might have warranted a footnote, none were included.\(^5\) In all, the first edition of *Mary Barton* contains only four non-dialect footnotes. Of these, two refer to real individuals — Samuel Bamford and Thomas Wright — who are introduced in the novel as exemplars of the working class,\(^6\) whilst the other two notes refer to specific places in Manchester: Manchester Cathedral\(^7\) and an unidentified graveyard. It is the latter footnote that is the principal focus of this paper. In examining it I want to suggest that though much work has been done to contextualize the novel historically, further work is necessary. In short, if we are to understand how Mrs Gaskell’s own perception of Manchester determined both the imaginative and physical landscapes of *Mary Barton*, then the novel’s footnotes should not be regarded as a marginal feature.

The description of Ben Davenport’s funeral is a disturbing scene that closes one of the most powerful chapters in the novel. Having made the point that the funeral procession was a dignified affair, Davenport’s final resting place is shown to be nothing more than a common grave, as far removed from the middle-class idea of a grave as the Davenport’s cellar was from the comfort and security of the middle-class home. It was a harrowing conclusion: the final resting place of those migrants, who had arrived in Manchester in search of a better life for themselves and their families, was to be little more than a hole in the ground, a grave shared with strangers. Moreover, there was little suggestion that the grave would be marked with a permanent memorial, that it might become a special place which a family could visit, to mourn and to keep the memory of the departed alive. It was a painful and disturbing scene. If many Victorians still believed that death was only a beginning, Davenport’s earthly existence had come to a miserable and uncivilized end. Aware that some readers may have had doubts about this squalid form of interment in consecrated ground, Mrs

\(^{5}\) On Mrs Gaskell’s use of the reports of the Unitarian Domestic Mission see M.C. Frycedst, ‘Mary Barton and the Reports of the Ministry to the Poor: a new source’, *Studia Neophilologica*, 52 (1980), 333–6.


\(^{7}\) This footnote (Ryburn edition, 71) informs the reader that what was referred to as the ‘Oud Church’ was now the Cathedral of Manchester. The parish church of Manchester, or the Collegiate Church as it became in the fifteenth century, was dedicated to St Mary, St George and St Denys. Until the beginning of the eighteenth century it was the only church in the township of Manchester. The building of new churches led to the Collegiate Church being referred to locally as the old or ‘Owd’ Church. Throughout this period Manchester remained part of the extensive Diocese of Chester. This changed in 1847 with the creation of the Diocese of Manchester, when the Collegiate Church became the cathedral. The declaration that the change had occurred would place the footnote at a date not earlier than September 1847, a date that suggests that some, if not all, of the footnotes were added after the manuscript was completed. This footnote was removed from the third edition.
Gaskell attached the following footnote which further underlined the scene's significance in her readers' minds.

The case, to my certain knowledge, in one churchyard in Manchester, there may be more.8

To appreciate why this footnote was included and to identify the graveyard, it is important to understand aspects of the development of Manchester in general and of Chorlton-on-Medlock, the suburb in which the Gaskells lived, in particular.

By the opening years of the nineteenth century the disposal of the dead was already recognized as a problem in Manchester. At its most fundamental level it was a problem caused by a failure of the supply of existing burial space to keep up with demand. The underlying demographic arithmetic was simple to state but more difficult to respond to. Manchester's population increased at a breathtaking speed during the industrial revolution. A local census in 1773 had counted some 22,000 people in the township. When the returns from the first national census were published in 1801, it was 70,000. Subsequent censuses described a curve of apparently relentless growth: by 1851 Manchester township had some 187,000 inhabitants with a further 130,000 living in the immediate surrounding districts. Significant numbers of these ‘Mancunians’ may not have been born there but most were to die in this ‘wilderness of a large town’.9 Even assuming that mortality rates remained constant, the sheer increase in population meant larger numbers of dead to bury: a crude death rate of 30 per 1,000 would have produced 2,100 deaths in 1801 while by 1851 the total would have exceeded 5,610 in the township and 9,510 in the wider city. In fact the actual numbers of bodies requiring disposal was far higher.10 Additional land needed to be provided for the safe disposal of the dead.

Another well-known feature of this increase in population was the geographical expansion of Manchester as ever increasing numbers took up residence outside of the main town. This was especially evident on the southern side of Manchester where Ardwick, Chorlton-on-Medlock and Hulme were among the first suburbs to be intensively settled. Chorlton-on-Medlock was where the Gaskells began their married life in 1832, and they were to remain there, though in different houses, for the rest of their lives. At the beginning of the century the district was all but untouched

8 Mary Barton (Ryburn edition), 91.
9 Ibid., 136.
10 A government return relating to the Manchester township in the 1820s indicates an increase in burials from 3,287 in 1821 to 5,973 in 1830. PP 1831–32 (729), xlv, 2–3. The problems of calculating reliable mortality rates (and burial rates) for Manchester during this period has proved as difficult for historians as it was for contemporaries. See the caveats in Barbara Hammond, ‘Urban death-rates in the early nineteenth century’, Economic History, 1 (1928), 419–28.
by the industrial forces that were transforming the land north of the River Medlock, a resident population of a mere 675 being scattered across some 700 acres. At this time it was economically and administratively separate from Manchester. Within a generation all this changed. The population increased to over 8,000 in 1821, and by the time the Gaskells moved there it exceeded 20,000, making it easily Manchester’s largest suburb. Chorlton continued to grow, fed by migrants from outside as well as from inside Manchester. In 1841 Chorlton-on-Medlock was home to 28,336 people, a community that was larger than the towns of Chester, Lancaster, Bury or Wigan. Not all of the district was built up by this date but with some 5,000 houses, open spaces were less evident. Problems that had been exclusive to Manchester were now to be found in its suburbs. In a wide-ranging survey of Chorlton’s public health problems in 1844 the surgeon, P.H. Holland, noted the absence of open spaces. By that date, only one large open area of land was available to the community, an area that was to become more widely known as the setting for the opening scene of *Mary Barton*. This was called Greenheys fields which is being annually encroached upon by buildings, and which is private properly, habitually trespassed upon ... It is exceedingly desirable that steps should be quickly taken to secure for the public both open places for exercise and amusement, and for making the greatest possible use of our country walks. In Greenhey fields there is a space of open ground of about 40,000 square yards, worth, perhaps, £600 a year, very well suited for such a purpose, and which if not secured soon, will probably soon be built over.11

Chorlton-on-Medlock had developed initially as a middle-class residential district but by the second quarter of the century the appearance of cheaper terraced housing indicated a distinctive working-class presence. However, in the east towards Ardwick and in the south towards Rusholme, there was an affluent area of substantial houses, terraces and semi-detached residences. These included some very large villa properties; houses that were designed by architects, houses standing in grounds that suggested the employment of outdoor as well as indoor servants, houses with conservatories, houses that exuded wealth. Even in the 1840s this part of Chorlton still had a rural feel to it. The houses in which the Gaskells lived — Dover Street, Rumford Street and finally Plymouth Grove — were situated on the edge of this less developed part of the township, from where it was still possible to look out over open fields.12

11 P. Holland in *First report of the commissioners for inquiry into the state of large towns and populous districts. PP 1844*, xviii, Appendix 60.
12 The above draws heavily on the Ordnance Survey large-scale plans which remain one of the essential documents for beginning to understand the Manchester represented in *Mary Barton*. The map was surveyed between 1844 and 1849, and published in 1851. Future editors might follow the lead of another local novelist and include appropriate maps when reprinting the novel: see Mrs G.L. Banks, *The Manchester Man* (Manchester: J. Heywood, 1896), 466.
But industrial towns were nothing if not dynamic, and development could lead to a rapid redrawing of social boundaries. By the 1840s parts of Chorlton were experiencing many of those environmental problems long evident in the town of Manchester itself. Industry began to intrude. In particular the areas nearest to the River Medlock saw an influx of poor families, in some cases pushed out of their homes as a result of redevelopment. Charles Burton, the rector of All Saints, Chorlton-on-Medlock's first Anglican church, pointed to the transformation that was taking place. The focus of his remarks was Little Ireland, a small area of cheaply-built terraced streets situated by the Medlock. It had become notorious for the conditions in which its many Irish families lived. In 1847–48 the district was cut through by the building of a new railway line and station. Although the railway was welcomed by some observers as an early agent of slum clearance, it contributed little towards the reduction of slum living; the problem was merely moved elsewhere. In this instance, Burton claimed that those made homeless by the railway had moved the short distance into Chorlton-on-Medlock.

The construction of the railway terminus in Oxford-Street having required the destruction of a mass of property tenanted by the Irish of the very worst character, has transferred a swarm of nearly 2,000 persons across the river Medlock, who (by occupying houses formerly inhabited by separate households, of respectable operatives, are hoarded together in crowded and filthy lodging houses, where often from ten to twenty persons are indiscriminately blended in single sleeping rooms) have thrust out once thrifty tenants to the more distant suburbs, and have doomed the banks of the Medlock to its present condition, and extreme depravity.

But the disappearance of open spaces and a deteriorating housing stock were not the only signs of the increasing pressures being placed on the district's fragile infrastructure. The uncontrollable expansion in population increased the pressures on the existing burial grounds. The disposal of the dead was another problem that crossed the Medlock. During the eighteenth century the building of new churches in the centre of Manchester had increased the number of churchyards but the additional space proved insufficient for the numbers requiring burial. To ease the pressures on the available land and reduce the costs of interment, pit burials — the burying of a number of bodies in a single grave — were introduced in some

churchyards. This method of burial required the opening of a long trench in which a large number of coffins could be placed with a minimum of earth separating and covering them. The numbers accommodated depended on the size and depth of the pit; in some churchyards the graves were dug to a depth of 20 feet. Significantly, this was not a method of burial reserved exclusively for paupers. Joseph Aston's description of this 'expeditious and economical method of interring the bodies of the dead' is as unsentimental as it is unvarnished.

A very large grave, or more properly, a pit for the reception of mortality, is dug, and covered up, (when not in actual use for the deposit of the remains of the dead) with planks, which are locked down in the night, until the whole is filled up with coffins piled beside and upon one another. The cavern of death is then closed, and covered up with earth; and another pit is prepared, and filled in the same manner. 16

What Aston did not disclose was that depending upon the demands for space, such graves might be re-opened after a short number of years, the remains removed and the ground prepared for a new cohort of corpses.

It was in the town's principal burial ground — the Collegiate Church — that these problems were most evident. During the second half of the eighteenth century the Collegiate Church authorities had been compelled on a number of occasions to find ways of extending the churchyard. New parish burial grounds were opened in response to the burial crisis. 17 Finally, in 1819 the churchyard of the Collegiate Church had become so overcrowded that it was agreed to close it for thirty years. If that year was to become memorable for other reasons in Manchester's history, at least one commentator felt the closing of the churchyard of the Collegiate Church was sufficiently important to rank alongside the events of Peterloo:

This year, so defac'd by a radical storm,  
Gave birth to a permanent, real reform,  
A faculty asked for (it long had been wanted)  
A thirty years’ fallow, the Bishop now granted,  
To inclose the old churchyard — no grave to be broke,  
Till time has, for thirty times, worn winter's cloak.  
Till that time is o'er, adieu to Infection!  
Till that time is o'er, adieu Resurrection!

16 J. Aston, A picture of Manchester (1816; repr. 1969), 84–5.  
17 Additional parish burial grounds were opened in 1768 (Hunts Bank), 1787 (Ashley Lane) and 1815 (Walkers Croft). See Petition to consecrate a burial ground in Hunts Bank, 1768, M39/2/14/1; Indenture between Reverend H. Owen and Churchwardens, 1787, M3/2/102B; Petition to consecrate additional burial ground at Manchester, 1815, M/3/2/89A (Manchester Central Library Archives). For other city-centre graveyards such as St. John’s see R. Loxham, Illustrations of parish churches: the district churches and chapels of the town and townships of the collegiate parish of Manchester in the county of Lancaster (1837–38) 2 vols.
Till that time is o'er, no more will Tin Brow
Sights shocking humanity, bring to our view,
Till then will no bodies be dragged from their graves.
And, to make room for others, be thrown to the waves!
No more will the fish of the Irwell be fed
With wreck of the grave, with the flesh of the dead.18

In case any of his readers doubted the truth of his doggerel Aston
attached a footnote explaining that pressure on space in the
churchyard had been such that when 'a sexton found that a grave
was full, he had no alternative but that of taking out as much of
the shocking remains, as would make room for the corpse waiting
for interment. The river served in lieu of a charnel-house'.
Premature interment was a much discussed fear shared by all
classes but less was said about the premature disinterment of the
dead, with its disturbing images of the violation of the body.

Despite the opening of new churchyards, the ever-increasing
numbers of dead posed an alarming problem. Such pressures help
to explain the opening of the town's first suburban cemetery in
1822.19 Situated in Chorlton-on-Medlock, the Rusholme Road
Cemetery was managed by a private company. Significantly, given
the religious complexion of the town and the efforts that were
being made to challenge the power represented by the Anglican
church, it was primarily developed as a burial place for Nonconformists. Although Nonconformists were not compelled to
use the Anglican church for burials, as they were with marriages,
the numbers and size of their own burial grounds meant that many
had little choice but to be buried in Anglican churchyards.20 The
burial service would have been conducted by an Anglican
minister.21 The opening of the Rusholme Road Cemetery
represented an important moment in the choices available to an
increasingly confident local Nonconformist population. Even so,
the demand for additional burial facilities was not satisfied, and
in the following years two further commercial cemeteries were
established in the suburbs of Harpurhey and Ardwick.22 Such

18 Metrical records of Manchester, in which its history is traced (currenre calamo) from the days
of the ancient Britons to the present time (London, 1822), 73. Petition to stop burials in the
old churchyard for thirty years, 1819, M39/2/14/1-2 (Manchester Central Library Archives).
19 Chorlton-Row cemetery, for the use of persons of all denominations (Manchester, 1821).
20 The evidence of the parish registers and surviving registers and gravebooks from other
Manchester churches make it difficult to state with confidence the proportion of the dead
not buried in Anglican churchyards during these years. It is a problem that has frustrated
demographic historians: see J.T. Krause in M. Drake (ed.), Population in industrialization
(London: Methuen, 1969), 120.
21 The long and acrimonious struggle over Dissenters' burial rites is outlined in G.I.T.
Machin, Politics and the churches in Great Britain 1832 to 1868 (Oxford: Clarendon Press,
1977). On the religious rites surrounding funerals see Geoffrey Rowell, The liturgy of
22 The Harpurhey General Cemetery was opened for burials in 1837 and the Ardwick
Cemetery Company in 1838. See W.A. Deighton, The Manchester General Cemetery:
Harpurhey, from 1836 to 1911 (Manchester, [1912]); William Lees, The Ardwick Cemetery
from 1836–1906 [1906].
developments were not welcomed by an Anglican clergy, reluctant to see their traditional responsibilities (and fees) lost to the new cemeteries.

However, for large sections of the urban labouring classes there was often little discussion over where one was buried. Choice was a function of income, and considerable numbers were unable to command the necessary resources for a respectable funeral. In spite of their protestations over 'the imprudence, indecency and extreme danger of interring the dead in the midst of crowded towns', the new cemeteries, revealingly, allocated land for cheaper communal graves. Even so, for many of those in the central districts of the town, burial still meant a common grave in a feculent churchyard close to where one had lived or died. The opening of new cemeteries alleviated rather than solved this particular aspect of the public health crisis affecting early Victorian Manchester.

By the 1840s the sanitary dangers of churchyards had become a prominent item on the national public health agenda. Edwin Chadwick, whose disturbing Report into the sanitary condition of the labouring population (1842), did much to raise the consciousness about public health, believed that the issues surrounding the disposal of the urban dead were so serious that he made them the subject of a separate parliamentary inquiry. Other campaigners shared his concerns. The investigations of the Quaker doctor, George Walker, published in books such as Gatherings from the graveyards (1839), presented alarming evidence of overcrowded churchyards saturated with the dead; descriptions that must have upset the stomachs and sensibilities of those readers who managed to turn its pages. Unsurprisingly, Manchester voices were to be heard in this urban chorus of alarmed witnesses. Not all burial grounds were insanitary but in the larger towns many had long lost those features that made the rural churchyard the peaceful, final resting place of family and neighbours, a central and vital communal space. Miasmatic churchyards were hardly places in which to mourn or muse; they were public spaces more likely to prompt a sanitary report than to inspire an elegy.

It is in the context of these concerns that the burial of Ben Davenport needs to be set. It was the insanitary state of churchyards and the uncivilized burial of the dead in common graves that Elizabeth Gaskell was testifying to in the footnote. But which churchyard did she have in mind? Given the nature of the burial crisis in Manchester, it might be assumed that the churchyard referred to was in the city centre. However, by the

23 W.A. Deighton [1912], 9.
24 Supplementary report on the results of special inquiry into the practice of interment in towns by Edwin Chadwick, PP 1843 [509] xii.
25 Supplementary report (1843), 24.
second quarter of the century burial in common graves was becoming the practice in the newer suburban churchyards. One such church was All Saints in Chorlton-on-Medlock. Its rector was Charles Burton. Situated in the centre of Grosvenor Square, All Saints church had welcomed its first congregation on 12 April 1820 and the churchyard admitted its first corpses in the following week. The churchyard began to fill, though until the middle of the 1830s the number of funerals rarely exceeded two a week, a modest number compared to the city-centre burial grounds or the nearby Rusholme Road Cemetery. The rate increased strikingly in the mid-1840s: between 1835 and 1841 the average annual number of interments was 164; between 1842 and 1848 it was 731.26 Such numbers meant that Burton, who conducted many of the services, was officiating at sixty funerals a month. It was a busy time: Christmas week, 1847, for example, saw him bury thirty-four people, beginning with eleven funerals on the Sunday, the most favoured day for working-classes funerals, and ending with five funerals on the Saturday (Christmas Day). As less than half of the family graves had been sold at this time, a substantial number of these burials would have been in common graves.27 The churchyard presented an inverse picture of the town’s social geography: affluent families being buried in the centre, their family graves positioned closest to the church, while the working classes were buried in increasingly congested conditions towards the edges. Moreover, whilst the middle classes could expect to remain in their memorial-marked plots there was no such assurance for those buried in the cheaper common graves.

Situated at the centre of a busy square, All Saints was a very public churchyard and its burial methods must have been difficult to ignore. Complaints began to be made. In 1849, one resident living close to the church was sufficiently anxious to alert the authorities to the offensive practices occurring there:

Large holes are made within a few yards of the footpath in which the bodies of the poor are placed, the charge for each interment being 8s 6d. In these pits some 25 or 30 bodies are packed in layers of three each, on which a sprinkling of soil is thrown, and until the pit is filled up, a few loose planks only are used as a cover! Of course, the deleterious gases from this mass of corruption easily escape, circulating their deadly poison in the surrounding neighbourhood! On enquiry I find that the bodies of those who die from cholera are also placed in these holes! Surely such a dangerous and offensive nuisance in the midst of a dense population should not be tolerated, why not cause these wholesale interments to take place in cemeteries at a distance from town? The dangerous nuisances of bone boiling is put down, why, therefore, should any other trade causing a similar nuisance be endured?28

26 Calculated from All Saints Burial Books (Manchester City Archives: M320/115/1-3).
27 Accounts for opening graves ... in All Saints, Chorlton-on-Medlock 1837-48 (Manchester Central Library Archives: MS F 929.3273 M22).
28 Manchester Guardian, 22 September 1849.
Alarming as this indictment was, it was not new. The opening of common graves close to the public footpath at All Saints had attracted complaints before cholera once again helped to catalyse interest in Manchester's public health. In the winter of 1847–48 the problems arising from the common graves at All Saints had been discussed by the Chorlton-on-Medlock Committee of Manchester Corporation. Meeting in Chorlton Town Hall, directly opposite the church, its members did not have to go far to verify the problem. Common graves were to be seen 'which after the reception of one or more corpses, are only covered by a wooden lid, locked down, and, of course, allowing the deleterious gases evolved in the decomposition of animal matter, readily to escape to the surface'. Further investigation established that when the land in the centre of Grosvenor Square had been sold for use as a church, restrictions had been placed on burials within nine yards of the boundary palisades. The land which had become the busiest part of the churchyard was meant to have been an 'ornamental plantation'.

But the problem of the common graves at All Saints was easier to identify than to resolve owing to the sour relationship that existed between Charles Burton and the Chorlton authorities. In the early 1840s the Chorlton Commissioners had tried to make Burton meet the costs for paving part of the area around the church. Burton was adamant that he was not liable for the charges and the dispute which followed ended in Burton taking the Corporation to court where he was awarded damages and costs. In spite of various approaches to the Corporation — these included Burton sending bailiffs to Chorlton Town Hall to collect the money owed him — they refused to pay him. It was a complicated case, made even more so by Chorlton-on-Medlock being subsumed into the new municipal borough. Burton was unlikely to be amenable to a request to stop using a part of the churchyard from a Corporation that he believed had cheated him.

Reluctant to use their legal powers, the Corporation sought the assistance of James Prince Lee, the recently appointed Bishop of Manchester. A deputation which included the Mayor, Elkanah Armitage and the Town Clerk, Joseph Heron met Prince Lee, who agreed to mediate. Burton responded by venting his irritation in

29 Proceedings of Committee of the Council for Chorlton-on-Medlock, 4 January 1848, 338 (Manchester Central Library Archives: M10/9/6/3). Chorlton-on-Medlock ceased to be administered officially as a separate township in 1842 following the establishment of the borough of Manchester.

30 Manchester Guardian, 8 July 1848.

31 Chorlton-on-Medlock Police Commissioners 12 May 1841, 13 December 1842, 21 February 1843 (Manchester Central Library Archives M10/9/6/1).

the press. 33 Defending his use of the churchyard he argued that he had tried to maintain a shrubbery but had found this impossible due to the district's smoke pollution. No explanation was offered as to why common graves had been opened but as the increase in burials coincided with the paving dispute, some residents must have concluded that the two matters were not unconnected. On the central issue of the risks to the public health, Burton deflected criticism by pointing out that burial close to the public street was the rule rather than the exception in Manchester churchyards and that in his opinion the relative openness of All Saints meant that it was safer than many in the city. No one had complained to him of 'unhealthy odours' emanating from All Saints whilst at the nearby Rusholme Road Cemetery he had 'often heard complaints from persons residing around its walls'. Burton also raised the question of money. If part of his churchyard was no longer to be used for burials, he would need to be compensated for the loss of income. There also remained the unsettled question of his lawsuit. Burton proposed to stop burials within five yards of the outside railings if he could be suitably compensated and the Corporation would pay him the money they owed him. The intervention of the Bishop, however, undermined Burton's negotiating strategy, and with an obvious reluctance — 'I must feel honoured in expressing my determination to be guided by such directions as I may receive from your Lordship ...' — he agreed to stop burials within six yards of the churchyard railings. There was no mention of financial compensation. 34

This public quarrel was taking place in the spring and summer of 1848 and, as Chorlton residents, such a dispute could hardly have escaped the attention of the Gaskells. At the very least, they would have seen the controversy discussed in the local press. Moreover, both Elizabeth and William Gaskell were very familiar with the area surrounding All Saints. Grosvenor Square with its town hall and dispensary was the public centre of Chorlton-on-Medlock. 35 During the 1840s it saw the building of a number of new churches and chapels, and also the conversion of some of the original houses into shops. Among its residents were John and Mary Robberds, in whose house Mary and William had courted. 36 In 1840 the area took on particular significance for local Unitarians

33 Manchester Guardian, 12 July 1848.
34 Proceedings of Committee of the Council for Chorlton-on-Medlock, 15 August 1848, 40 (Manchester Central Library Archives: M10/9/6/4). The effective control of town graveyards had to await the passing of the Burial Acts in the early 1850s. Burials at All Saints were restricted initially to existing family graves. Some 16,500 persons were buried in the churchyard before burials finally ceased in 1881.
35 On the development of the area see D. Brumhead and T. Wyke, A walk round All Saints (Manchester: Manchester Polytechnic, 1987).
with the opening of Manchester College in the square’s oldest and grandest house situated on the corner of Ormond Street and Cavendish Street. The college had been originally founded in Manchester in 1786 but had later moved to York. On its return to Manchester it settled in Grosvenor Square and it was here that a small number of students were taught by an illustrious staff which included James Martineau and Francis Newman. William Gaskell served as one of the college’s secretaries from its opening until 1846 when he became Professor of History, Literature and Logic. Working as he did in a building directly opposite the graveyard it is unlikely that its condition escaped his notice, especially as he had to walk past it each day on his way from and to Upper Rumford Street. Burial in common graves was continuing in other churchyards but given the timing and place of the debate about All Saints it is difficult to resist the conclusion that it was this local churchyard that Mrs Gaskell had in mind when adding the footnote to her description of Davenport’s burial.

Offensive though the conditions in All Saints’s churchyard were, they were not the only signs of mortality that presented themselves to the Gaskells. As the wife of a clergyman death must have intruded more frequently than it did into the lives of most middle-class women. The Gaskells’ home in Upper Rumford Street was almost within sight of Rusholme Road Cemetery, and few days could have passed by without the appearance of mourning relatives and friends making their way to funerals or to visit the graves in this busy cemetery. The Gaskells may also have been aware of the filthy and congested conditions in some of the city-centre churchyards including Cross Street Chapel. Such conditions may throw light on to the most important death connected with Mary Barton, that of her son, William. His loss is widely recognized as a trigger to the writing of the novel, working on it became a means of draining away the grief that his death had provoked.

37 Originally founded as the Manchester Academy in 1786, the college’s second period in Manchester lasted from 1840 until 1853. On the college’s years in Grosvenor Square see V.D. Davis, A history of Manchester College from its foundation in Manchester to its establishment in Oxford (London: Allen and Unwin, 1932) ch.7; and Barbara Smith (ed.), Truth, liberty, religion. Essays celebrating two hundred years of Manchester College (Oxford: Manchester College, 1986).


39 Further evidence of pit burials in Manchester and Salford at this time is provided in the Report on a general scheme for extra-mural sepulture, PP 1850 (1158), xxi, 42-3.

40 The Cross Street Chapel graveyard was finally closed under the Orders in Council in 1854. A later cross section of the churchyard provides some idea of the depth and the number of burials in graves, see S. John and P. Guest, ‘Mapping Manchester’s sewers, Manchester Region History Review, ii, no. 2 (1988–89), 41. The remains of those buried there were removed during the recent redevelopment of the chapel, Manchester Evening News, 7 February 1996.

41 Mary Barton (Ryburn edition), 236.
Chapel, Warrington may have been due in part to her knowledge of the conditions that existed in Manchester. If one accepts that there were important psychological consolations associated in visiting the grave of a loved one, it may be that the consequence of burying her child in the 'dull, dreary chapel-yard' at Warrington was to stretch and transform her period of grieving, possibly keeping green the grief that helped to sustain her creative impulses. We can only surmise that had William been buried closer to the family home in Manchester then Mary Barton might have been a different novel, perhaps a story with fewer death-beds.

The Davenport funeral in Mary Barton still has the power to disturb. It would certainly have shocked contemporary middle-class readers for whom the necessity of a respectable funeral was a fundamental social fact of life. The very inclusion of a footnote at this point in the text adds emphasis to its significance, forcing the reader to pause and consider more carefully the horror of the scene as a real rather than a fictional experience. Mrs Gaskell's unequivocal declaration — 'to my definite knowledge' — added to the integrity of the text, satisfying the reader that such degrading and uncivilized observances were daily occurring in Manchester. The addition of the footnote also suggests that the scene had a particular significance for Mrs Gaskell as there were many other aspects of working-class life in the novel that might have warranted a confirmatory footnote. It is also significant that she chose not to remove it when correcting the text for subsequent editions.

The facts of Davenport's premature death and burial underlined those inequalities that defined the new industrial society, the tensions and resolution of which lie at the heart of Mary Barton. In a chapter where this argument was stated most explicitly, the final scene left the reader in little doubt that far from bringing to an end those economic divisions, death provided a further social space in which they were articulated. Long before the nineteenth century the funeral had already become an important part of the world of public display, money spent on the rituals associated with death confirming social identity. The Victorians extrapolated these social trends. Money appeared to have become the final arbiter in this rite of passage. Etiquette manuals provided guidance on the appropriate funeral, its costs depending upon the individual's economic status. The clothing industry was sensitive to funeral


customs. All the fashions of the day had their mourning versions. At the same time, the indignities associated with a pauper's funeral were magnified, transforming it into a social stain that families would go to extraordinary lengths to avoid. The social failure of pauperism was further underlined by the legalizing of paupers' bodies for dissection.

However, it is important to remember that burial in a common grave was not only the lot of paupers. Necessity demanded that most working-class funerals were far less ostentatious ceremonies than those that defined the middle-class funeral, and they often ended with a cheap coffin being lowered into a communal grave. The contrast between Davenport's interment and the lavish and costly arrangements that marked the funeral of Ogden, the alcoholic shopkeeper, may have been left for the reader to recognise but, as with those pungently different smells and tastes of the foods available at the Davenports (bread and gruel) and the Carsons (broiled steaks and buttered rolls), there was little doubt what moral judgment Mrs Gaskell wanted her readers to make. The new industrial society could not even provide a decent Christian burial for the poor. 'The poor', as Engels put it bluntly, 'are dumped into the earth like infected cattle'.

Nonetheless, even though Ben Davenport was buried as a pauper, Mrs Gaskell suggests that there were aspects of the funeral — its simplicity and lack of show and affectation — that could be approved of. The Davenports, like many working-class families, had belonged to a burial club until poverty compelled them to give up the weekly payments. But in line with one of the novel's central themes, the harshness of this family crisis is softened by the help provided by neighbours and friends. Less is known about the different forms of mourning practised by the urban working classes but given their economic vulnerability, the majority, including some of those who had saved towards providing a respectable funeral, would not have been able to afford the increasingly elaborate clothes and other expenditures associated with the public culture of mourning. The purchasing of special clothes for different family members was hardly feasible in most working-class families. However, some form of mourning dress was worn and importantly, in a novel which repeatedly invites the reader to

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46 The popular view associating surgeons with bodysnatching and dissection is alluded to by John Barton, *Mary Barton* (Ryburn edition), 99.

compare the direct and practical assistance provided within the working classes with the remote or casual philanthropy of the middle classes, Mrs Davenport's dress is lent to her by Mary. It serves as a small but revealing reminder of those largely undocumented networks of support operating within working-class communities. The transfusion of charitable funds between the classes was well publicised — though not as its critics pointed out in *Mary Barton* itself — but here was an example of the help that the working classes arranged for themselves. The lending of clothes — it was noted at other points in the story, as when John Barton is given by Mrs Davenport a shirt to wear for his trip to London — was but one form such assistance took. This was a further instance of those semi-private virtues which, according to Mrs Gaskell, outweighed the more public vices of the working classes. In detailing this kind of mutual assistance she was revealing not only an awareness of those survival strategies that existed among the urban poor but, by implication, interrogating her comfortable readers about the help that they were providing. Charity offered a vital way of connecting the 'two nations', and the pious middle-classes, sealed away in their suburbs, had to do more than espouse respectability or practise passive philanthropy. Davenport's (un)Christian burial added to those questions directed at the nature and purpose of what might be regarded as (un)Christian charity. 48

Whilst the general question of where the money might come from to assist the poor is not examined in *Mary Barton*, Mrs Gaskell does make it clear that she has little sympathy with 'the gorgeous hearses and nodding plumes' of respectable funerals. Even in the 1840s such showy displays were not without their critics and Mrs Gaskell was sympathetic to the view that the dominant culture of mourning and funerals should be simplified. 49 Earlier in the novel she criticises overpriced London funerals and unnecessary funeral expenditure, clearly believing that money would be better spent on the living than going into the pockets of undertakers and those other businesses that provided the paraphernalia of mourning. 50 It was an issue on which she would have found much in common with Dickens whose own views on the excessive commercialization of death were frequently expressed in both his fiction and non-fiction writings.

In general, mourning obligations fell more heavily on women than men, and in large middle-class families such duties meant that women were frequently to be found in mourning clothes, the

48 The provision of the infirmary order earlier in the chapter is a case in point.
49 For example see [Thomas James], 'Cemeteries and churchyards', *Quarterly Review*, 73 (1844) 438–77.
50 *Mary Barton* (Ryburn edition), 117.
degree of mourning being determined by their relationship to the deceased. Even Mrs Gaskell could not avoid such obligations though in debating its function in the novel she did recognise that it was not simply a form of unnecessary expenditure but also an aid in the process of mourning. Yet for her middle-class female readers, it was Mrs Davenport's very presence at the grave rather than her borrowed mourning dress that would have struck them. By the early Victorian period it was no longer assumed that female relatives would have to attend the committal, a custom rooted partly in the notion that the burial was too emotionally disturbing an event for the female constitution to bear. Emotions were to be controlled, kept out of the public gaze. Mrs Davenport's attendance would have reverberated among her female readers, conscious as they would also have been of the profound difference that her new status would mean to the rest of her life.

Yet, disquieting as the details of Davenport's burial must have been to her readers, it should be appreciated that Mrs Gaskell's description of the event was considerably muted. A more harrowing picture of Manchester's graveyards, far more shocking than the descriptions she had provided of the dwellings of the poor, might have been included. No allusion, for instance, was made to the problems experienced by working-class families in having to keep the deceased in an overcrowded home, often for a considerable period of time, whilst the funeral arrangements were settled. In middle-class homes the availability of space made it possible to develop rituals of mourning — to shield children from the 'unnecessary sight and sound of death' in a way that was all but impossible for working-class families. Further details might also have been provided about the nauseous conditions of urban graveyards. Mrs Gaskell's reticence was not unusual. In describing the city's pauper graveyards Engels's biting analysis of Manchester reached the point where language gave out. When public health investigators prefaced their reports on burial grounds with apologies for disturbing the sensitivities of their readers it is hardly surprising that the congested urban graveyard should not have been regarded as an acceptable theme in the polite novel.

51 Mary Barton (Ryburn edition), 68.
53 Considerable evidence is presented in the Supplementary report of a special inquiry into the practice of interment in towns (1843) though, according to P.H. Holland, the practice may have been less of a danger to the living in Manchester than in some other towns.
54 Mary Barton (Ryburn edition), 106.
56 Graveyards, especially in connection with body snatching, were a familiar feature in the popular fiction produced by writers such as Reynolds, see T. Thomas (ed.), The mysteries of London: G.W.M. Reynolds (Keele: Keele University Press, 1996).
role as a reader for Bentley's, Manchester's other important novelist, Geraldine Jewsbury, left little doubt that such subjects lay outside the boundary of conventional fiction. She reacted strongly to the subject matter of a novel, *Black Moss*, declaring its details on graveyards distasteful:

I don't think people wd care to read a story all about Fevers, Funerals, and a wicked undertaker. It makes me feel as tho' one were assisting at one's own funeral — and there is a broken drain thro' which the horrors of the Churchyard filter into the village Brook — Do you think all that pleasant reading?

However such omissions would be filled in by some readers able to elaborate on the silences from their own experiences of death.

Neither did Mrs Gaskell refer to the difficulties that were becoming evident in organizing a walking funeral amidst the whirl and bustle of city life. Mourners might have to follow the coffin through busy streets to an unattractive and insanitary churchyard, traffic noise muffling the words of the clergyman as he spoke the all too familiar committal service. In concentrating on the Victorian celebration of death it is easy to underestimate the extent to which the absence of respect for the dead was becoming a feature of urban society. As the evidence from All Saints suggests, many burials must have taken place at the same time: the poor were buried in cheap coffins, sometimes in groups in a single service, with no guarantee that the common grave would be marked with even a simple headstone, or that their bones would remain undisturbed. In contrast, those with the financial resources were able to arrange funerals that met all the requirements of public respectability: the necessary mourning clothes could be obtained, a fine coffin could be transported in a horse-drawn hearse through quiet suburban streets to a cemetery, where a family grave had been purchased, and the deceased would be buried in perpetuity. For those living in towns ensuring a respectable funeral, including the purchase of a permanent grave, became the cause of much anxiety, an attitude that helps to explain why so many working-class families struggled to belong to burial clubs and friendly societies. All this contrasts with the apparent simplicities of rural society, a threatened world whose values are echoed in the novel when Alice Wilson speaks of her long dead sister secure 'in a grassy grave in the little churchyard beyond Burton'.

58 *Report on a General Scheme for Extra-Mural Sepulture*, PP 1850 (1158), xxi, 52–5. The streets were quieter on Sundays, a factor that should not be forgotten when explaining the timing of funerals among the working classes. Alice Wilson was buried on a Sunday (Ryburn edition, 315).
60 *Mary Barton* (Ryburn edition), 212.
Although it would be easy to dismiss the non-dialect footnotes as a hasty and incomplete afterthought to the novel, this paper has argued, through the examination of one of them, that they have more than a peripheral relevance to understanding questions that are important to Gaskell students. Of course, one can read Mary Barton without recourse to the footnotes but as with the editorial notes that have been added to subsequent editions of the novel, one’s appreciation is enriched by considering them. Both the factual and the dialect notes contribute to the process of authenticating the story, confirming in readers’ minds the credibility of Mrs Gaskell’s observations and analysis, and deepening the feeling that this was not fiction but a discourse about, and a product of a particular reality. Footnotes were one way in which she was able to legitimise her story. They also provided her with a distinctive space in which to speak directly to her readers in addition to those occasions in the text of the novel itself. But footnotes were unexpected communications; readers, after all, expected to see an empty space at the bottom of the page rather than additional information. The footnote broke the rhythm of the narrative, allowing the reader to hear more clearly her voice, testifying to the point that what she was describing was real, based on her personal experience or other evidence. In short, they helped to confirm to the reader the author’s integrity as a witness, a reliable observer of contemporary industrial society. However, given the uncertainties that remain about the footnotes — Were they all added after the manuscript was completed? Were more to be included? Which ones were included by her and which by her husband? — it would be misleading to depict Mrs Gaskell as a writer challenging established literary conventions by including them. Footnotes were not a common literary device, even among those novelists whose fiction contributed to the ‘Condition of England Question’. A more consistent author with a clearer view of the possibility of the footnote would probably have transferred other material from the body of the novel to the bottom of the page.61

This examination of a single footnote in Mary Barton emphasizes the need to continue the historical contextualization of the novel. In particular, the footnote referring to All Saints Churchyard suggests that it may be worthwhile giving consideration to re-focusing a significant contextual frame of the novel: its geography. Mary Barton must be viewed as a novel about Manchester but as this paper has suggested it is important to acknowledge the town’s complex economic and social geography if we are to recreate a more sharply defined copy of Mrs Gaskell’s own mental map of

61 The reference to Sir J.E. Smith’s ‘Life’ is an obvious example: Mary Barton (Ryburn edition), 62.
the city. Comparing her geographical representation of the city with other contemporary accounts — Engels is an obvious example\textsuperscript{62} — reminds one that if Mrs Gaskell did have a comprehensive knowledge of the city, she chose not to present it in the novel. Many of those aspects of Manchester which caught the imagination of visitors in the 1830s and 1840s — its size, its physical geography, the astonishing speed of its development, its archetypal buildings — are understated or entirely missing from the picture of Manchester presented in the novel. As a description it is surprisingly flat and uninformative. The much quoted description of Berry Street — the location of the Davenport’s cellar — provides little sense of the buildings that dominated and shaped that part of the city. The new railway station, for example, arguably the greatest symbol of change and intrusion in the Victorian city-centre, is not mentioned. As we have seen, one of the reasons why an already inadequate housing stock was deteriorating, forcing families to crowd in to cellars, was the building of the railways. Even when the occasion arises to provide a closer view of the town — for example, George Wilson’s two-mile walk from the Davenports’ cellar to the Carsons’ villa, the opportunity to explore the changing physical layout of the city, which could easily have been used to comment on its social geography, is missed.

The Gaskells, like the majority of Manchester’s middle-classes in the 1840s, lived in the suburbs. More specifically they lived in Chorlton-on-Medlock, a district which was becoming one of the inner-city suburbs and one no longer entirely insulated from those problems that the middle classes had moved away from the city centre to escape. Of course, other parts of Manchester are mentioned or alluded to in Mary Barton but it should not be surprising to discover that the district of the town that Mrs Gaskell was in a position to observe most closely had a special place in the novel. After all, her class and gender necessarily limited her direct experience of working-class life. Greenheys Fields was within easy walking distance of the Gaskells’ house as was the location of the Carsons’ villa. The churchyard at All Saints was also near by. In fact the map of the city presented in Mary Barton is curiously limited for an individual who is assumed to have an extensive knowledge of Manchester. The geographical detail, such as it is, focuses largely on the southern side of the city and along its main thoroughfares, leaving considerable areas unmentioned or unexplored. Mrs Gaskell is much more likely to have observed working-class people and ‘the wild romances of their lives’ on the pavements of Chorlton than on the streets of the Irish ‘New Town’

or Ancoats. This is not to propose, from the examination of a single footnote, that *Mary Barton* should be re-titled 'A Tale of Chorlton-on-Medlock Life' but this short study does suggest that it is important to recognize the degree to which it was 'A Tale of Manchester Life viewed from Chorlton-on-Medlock'.