

Russell and Burrows (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, April 1989, 13, 193–196).

Dr Modell writes of the “tension and confusion between general practitioner, hospital doctor and social worker” . . . and the other commentators advocate a meeting and assessment involving all these people as well as teachers and family.

Norris Hansell (1967), a protégé of another Manchester man Gerald Caplan, described “screening linking planning conferences” to bring together all the professionals involved with a person considered to be at risk of institutionalisation, including even bringing in judges by telephone.

We advocated (1973) such a meeting of professionals before admission decisions were made and we continue to practise this.

If professionals get together in this way it seems more likely that the multi-disciplinary action will be one which each will be prepared to support.

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References

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- BRUGGEN, P., BYNG-HALL, J. & PITT-AIKENS, T. (1973) The reason for admission as a focus of work for an adolescent unit. *British Journal of Psychiatry*, 122, 319–329.

Elizabeth Gaskell

DEAR SIRS

I am indebted to Dr Digby Tantam (*Psychiatric Bulletin*, April 1989, 13, 186–188) for re-awakening my long-standing interest in the redoubtable Gaskell family, and in particular in Samuel Gaskell's sister-in-law, Mrs Elizabeth Cleghorn Gaskell, novelist and biographer.

She was, in fact, closely related to other members of the medical profession. Her uncle, Dr Peter Holland, a respected and successful GP in Knutsford, gave her away at her wedding there in 1832. It is more than likely that Mr Gibson, the doctor in *Wives and Daughters*, was modelled on Uncle Peter. His son, in turn, was the distinguished and fashionable Sir Henry Holland, Queen Victoria's and Prince Albert's personal physician.

But of greater importance to the medical historian are the glimpses she gives in her novels of the socio-economic diseases of the period of which she writes. Life is cheap. Alcoholism and prostitution are rife. Cholera and typhus are commonplace. Women die in childbirth. And she reveals in harrowing detail the prevalence of opium addiction. John Barton, the father of Mary Barton in her novel of that name, is portrayed as a man so bitterly humiliated by his abject failure in all departments of his life that he degenerates into the quintessential opium addict. But even more haunting is the intense pathos of her description of the relationship between opium and the grinding poverty and near-starvation of the underprivileged.

“Many a penny that would have gone little way enough in oatmeal or potatoes, bought opium to still the hungry little ones, and make them forget their uneasiness in heavy troubled sleep”, she writes of the Manchester she knew in her day-to-day work as the wife of a Unitarian minister.

On an entirely different note, may I respectfully point out that the correct name of the organisation which Dr Samuel Gaskell helped to found in 1841 was The Association of Medical Officers of Asylums and Hospitals for the Insane, renamed in 1865 The Medico-Psychological Association. It was not until 1926 that a Royal Charter of Incorporation entitled it to style itself The Royal Medico-Psychological Association.

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History of Psychiatry Group