

-Welcome to Red house-

## Brontë Connections - *The Secret's out* Exhibition



Just what were Charlotte Brontë's connections with Red House and the local area?

Discover how fact and fiction interweave at Red House in *The Secret's Out* exhibition.

What secret was the quiet parson's daughter, Charlotte Brontë, keeping on her visits to the Birstall and Spennings Valley area?

What revelations did the pages of the newly published novel *Shirley* have in store for local people?

Charlotte Brontë, one of our most famous authors, tried to keep her identity secret when she published *Jane Eyre* (1847) and *Shirley* (1849) under the male pen name of 'Currer Bell'. Only a handful of people knew her secret but it was soon revealed, first of all in the Spennings Valley area.

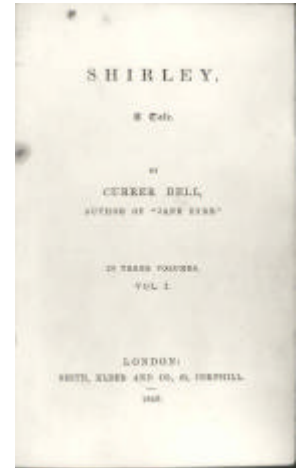


### ***What a Sensation!***

Local people must have been astonished to discover that the quiet 'Miss Brontë' was the author of the hugely successful *Jane Eyre*. Imagine how they felt on then discovering that the Spennings Valley area was the setting for her latest novel, *Shirley*.

## ***Are Red House and the Taylors in Shirley?***

Many characters, places and events in *Shirley* were locally inspired. *Shirley* caused quite a stir as local people thought they had discovered themselves or their neighbours in the story!



**Red House** is described in detail as '*Briarmains*' in *Shirley*.



'Those windows would be seen by daylight to be of brilliantly-stained glass – purple and amber the predominant hues ...' (*Shirley*)

'... a night-eruption of Vesuvius; very ardently it glows ...' (*Shirley*)



The radical and boisterous Taylor family of Red House were described as the 'Yorke' family in the novel. Charlotte described them so well that her lifelong friend Mary Taylor wrote:

'There is a strange feeling in reading it of hearing us all talking'.

(Mary Taylor to Charlotte Brontë, 13 August, 1850)



Mary's father, Joshua Taylor, appears as 'Hiram Yorke' in the novel:

'... a man difficult to lead, and impossible to drive' (*Shirley*)

Mrs Taylor was very displeased with her dour representation as 'Mrs Yorke' and in a letter to her son she '**abused Miss Brontë for writing *Shirley*.**'

Mary Taylor appears as 'Rose Yorke' and her character relates strongly to what we know of Mary:

'Rose has a mind full-set, thick sown with the germs of ideas her mother never knew' (*Shirley*)

## ***Lifelong Friendships***

**The Secret's Out** reveals the close connections Charlotte Brontë had with the Spenn Valley area. Local people and places appearing in *Shirley* became well known to Charlotte during her schooldays and friendships with Mary Taylor of Red House and Ellen Nussey of Birstall.



In 1831 Charlotte (aged 14) met Mary and Ellen (both 13) at Miss Wooler's private boarding school for young ladies at Roe Head, near Mirfield.

Mary and Ellen came from well-established cloth manufacturing families, living near each other and sharing the same social circle. At Roe Head they were to acquire a middle-class ladies' education. Charlotte came from a poorer clerical family some distance away at Haworth. Charlotte's purpose at school was to prepare her self to become a governess.

Miss Margaret Wooler ran the school with her sisters.



## ***Keeping in Touch***

After leaving school in 1832, Charlotte, Mary and Ellen met when they could and wrote hundreds of letters.



The Rydings, Birstall

Charlotte enjoyed many visits to Ellen's homes, Rydings and later Brookroyd. On stimulating visits to Red House the Taylors made a very strong impression on Charlotte:

'...the society of the Taylors is one of the most rousing pleasures I have ever known.' (Charlotte Brontë to Ellen Nussey, 15 April 1839)

**Digital Audio Handsets bring alive the letters of Charlotte Brontë and her local friends through dramatised extracts**

**The Secret's Out** explores the expectations that society had on 19<sup>th</sup> Century women, through the lives of Charlotte, Mary and Ellen, highlighting the different paths they followed. Mary, against all conventions, pursued an unusually independent life; Ellen lived a conventional middle-class spinster's life; Charlotte was often torn between her sense of duty and desire for independence.

Visitors browse through decorative 'Flipbooks' finding out about '*Love and Marriage*' and '*Women at Work*' in Victorian times.



The '*Journey Through Life*' 19<sup>th</sup> century style interactive board game is fun and educational – visitors can discover what their fate could have been as a 19<sup>th</sup> century woman.

In *Letters* visitors can see tiny envelopes sent by Charlotte to Ellen, as well as an original Charlotte Brontë letter, Mary Taylor's writing box and curious early 19<sup>th</sup> century writing artefacts. Visitors can try their hand at 19<sup>th</sup> century style 'crossed letter' writing.



*The Gilded Cage* displays rare and delicate artefacts relating to woman's role in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. A middle-class woman's place was considered to be in the home, where they were expected to create an ideal family life. There are beautiful items of sewing equipment, skilful Berlin Woolwork and patchwork; delicate Valentine cards and a rare 1830s paper doll.

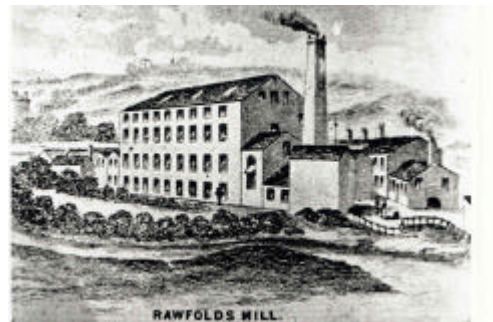
*Valley of the Shadow of Death* reveals objects relating to Victorian rituals surrounding death, including a rare funeral biscuit mould and wrapper, and mourning jewellery. Branwell, Emily and Anne Brontë all died during the time that Charlotte was writing *Shirley*,

## ***Shirley Country***



The '*Shirley Country*' Audio-visual Display imaginatively highlights local people, places and events featured in *Shirley*. Many fictional settings in *Shirley* are believed to be inspired by real local places, such as Red House (*Briarmains*); nearby Oakwell Hall (*Fieldhead*); and Birstall Parish Church (*Briarfield Church*).

The presentation vividly shows how Charlotte based a dramatic scene of an attack by machine breakers on Hollows Mill in *Shirley*, on the real Luddite attack on Rawfolds Mill, Liversedge in 1812.



With the introduction of new machinery, cloth shearers (croppers) were being thrown out of work and into poverty. Some grouped together secretly (Luddites), intent on forcibly preventing the introduction of shearing machines.

On 11 April 1812 over 100 Luddites attacked Rawfolds Mill, smashing windows and battering at the door, intent on breaking the hated shearing machines inside. Mill owner William Cartwright and a handful of men successfully prevented entry and after a furious 20 minute battle the Luddites withdrew leaving two dying men behind. William Cartwright inspired the character 'Robert Moore' in *Shirley*.

**In *The Secret's Out* you can discover other people and places featured in *Shirley*. Perhaps you might even follow the '*Shirley Country*' trail.**

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