

THE BRONTË MUSEUMS AND COLLECTIONS AT HAWORTH, WEST YORKSHIRE

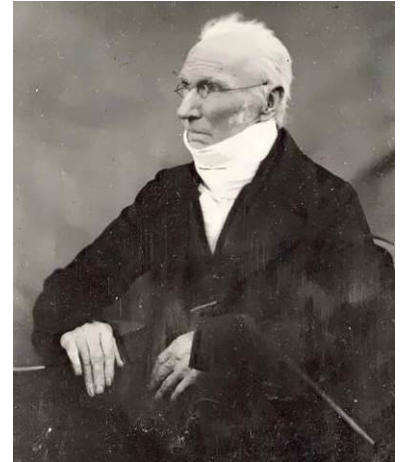
By Claire Mason

The Brontë story is well known but what is not so well known is Haworth's first museum of Brontë relics which opened in 1889 before the Brontë Society was founded. This was a time when collecting Brontë personal items was becoming popular and not that long after the death of Charlotte Brontë in 1855 and her father, Patrick Brontë's death in 1861. After Charlotte died her husband Arthur Bell Nicholls stayed with his ill father-in-law the Reverend Patrick Brontë and cared for him for the remaining six years of his life. Martha Brown, the faithful servant who had nursed Charlotte stayed on to help him with her sisters Eliza and Tabitha. Patrick Brontë had reluctantly relinquished most of his clerical duties to his curate and son-in-law Nicholls.



Left: Portrait Charlotte Brontë by George Richmond dated 1st January 1850, she died on 31st March 1855 aged 38.

Right: Photograph of the Reverend Patrick Brontë taken in about 1860. He died on 7th June 1861 aged 84.



In October 1860 Elizabeth Gaskell, with her daughter Meta were the last visitors to see Patrick Brontë, she had written an authorised account of his daughter's life. Nicholls was unenthusiastic and dreaded having his private life made public but complied with Patrick's wishes. *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* was published in March 1857.

Nicholls expected to succeed Patrick Brontë as Perpetual Curate, and be allowed to remain at the Parsonage, but the Church Trustees voted against him and he resigned. Dismayed and disillusioned by their rejection Nicholls had no wish to remain in Haworth. He packed up his belongings and many of Charlotte's manuscripts and personal effects. Nicholls had also given several items to friends and family servants as keepsakes. On 1st October 1861, the furniture and household contents of Haworth Parsonage were sold at auction. Nicholls then returned to his native Ireland where he lived at The Hill House, Banagher, becoming a farmer and eventually marrying his cousin Mary Bell. He strongly refused to co-operate with would-be biographers who wanted to exploit his connection to the Brontës. He became a bitter and resentful man who never recovered from Charlotte's death, he died on 2nd December 1906 aged 88.



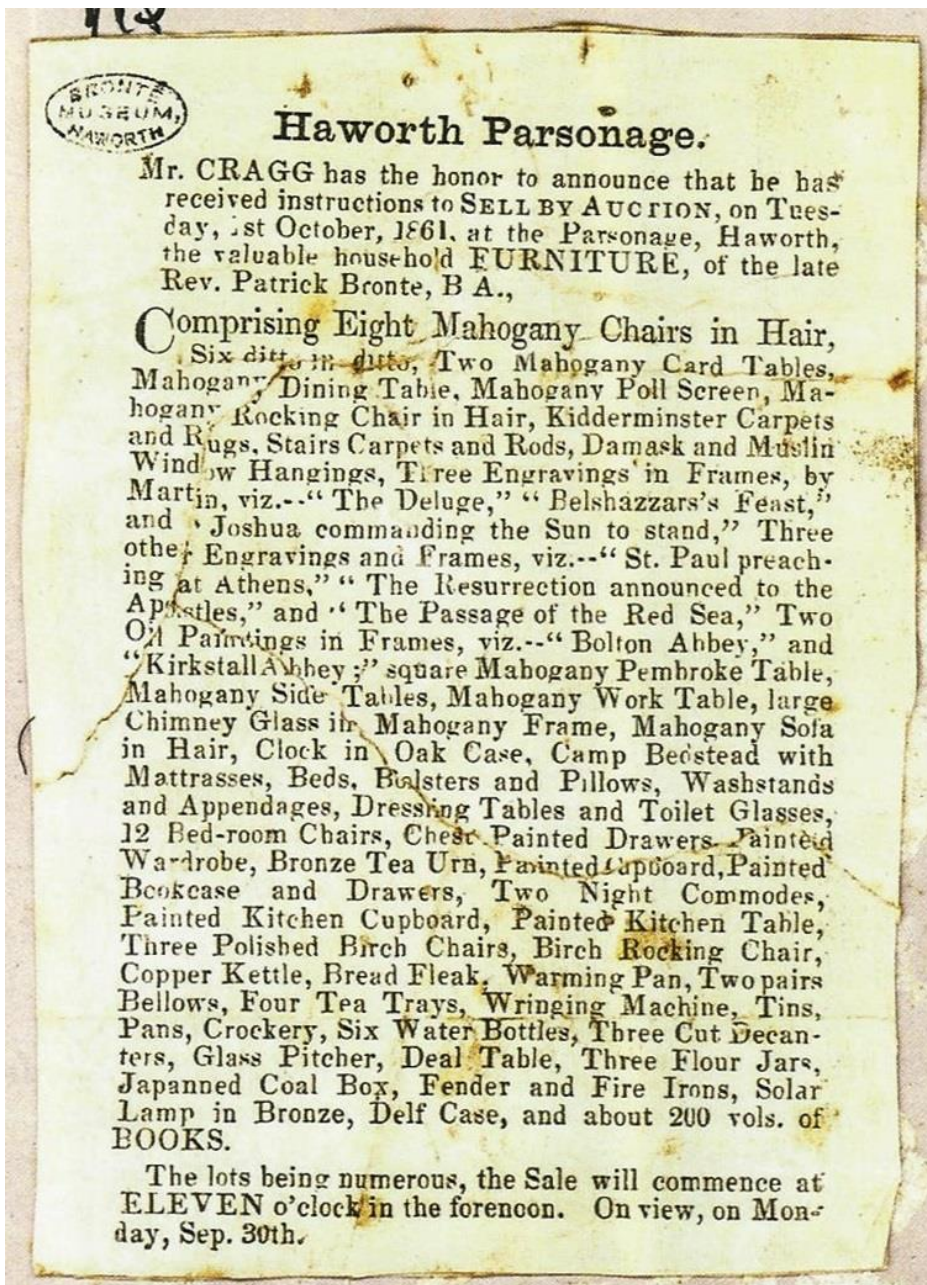
Right: Arthur Bell Nicholls, Charlotte Brontë's, husband and Patrick Brontë's son-in-law. He died on 2nd December 1861 aged 88.

The sale of Brontë collectables in the 1880s

Martha Brown had one of the largest collections of the Brontë sisters' personal belongings which consisted of drawings and paintings and inscribed copies of the novels. The collection had remained virtually intact, although she did sell selected items, presumably on occasions of financial necessity, until her death in 1880 and then her collection was divided between her five surviving sisters all struggling to raise families on limited incomes. When they were sought out by collectors they would often sell items inherited from Martha.

Right: Martha Brown servant and friend of the Brontë family, she died on 19th January 1880 aged 51.





Left: The Bill of sale for the furniture and household contents of the Haworth Parsonage on the 1st October 1861.

Many of these household contents and furniture sold at this auction in 1861 have been returned to the Haworth Parsonage Museum and restored.

Courtesy of the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

In 1886 Martha's recently widowed sister Ann Binns was forced to sell her large collection of Brontë items that she had inherited, and the subsequent auction at Saltaire was one of the first sales of Brontë collectables which included forty-four lots of Brontë personal items. Amongst the principal purchasers at the sale were Francis and Robinson

Brown, cousins of the Brown sisters who were booksellers in Haworth and Keighley, who acquired many of the lots. However, lots they could not obtain were purchased by Alfred Gledhill of Keighley, he had been a collector of Brontë personal belongings over many years and had acquired several paintings, many drawings, and needlework, mostly by Charlotte. He probably bought them from people that were at one time associated with the Brontë family. When his large collection came up for sale in May 1889 it was purchased by the Brown brothers.

The collection included a water colour of Charlotte's favourite dog Floss and an oil portrait of her, apparently the only one painted during her lifetime. There were several letters by Charlotte, one dated Haworth June 13th, 1848 addressed to "My dear Susey," an old friend of the Brontë family, who had left Haworth for a stay at York. Also in the collection was a spotted print dress said to have been worn by Charlotte and her shawl, her brooch, and a lock of her hair, taken after her death, and given to Martha Brown by Nicholls, an autographed copy of 'Jane Eyre,' given to Martha Brown by Charlotte, and her silk patchwork counterpane.

During this period Martha's sister, Tabitha Ratcliffe was happy to show her collection to interested visitors and even sell them if the price was acceptable. The inheritance bequeathed to the other sisters gradually dispersed.

The Browns' Private Museum in Haworth

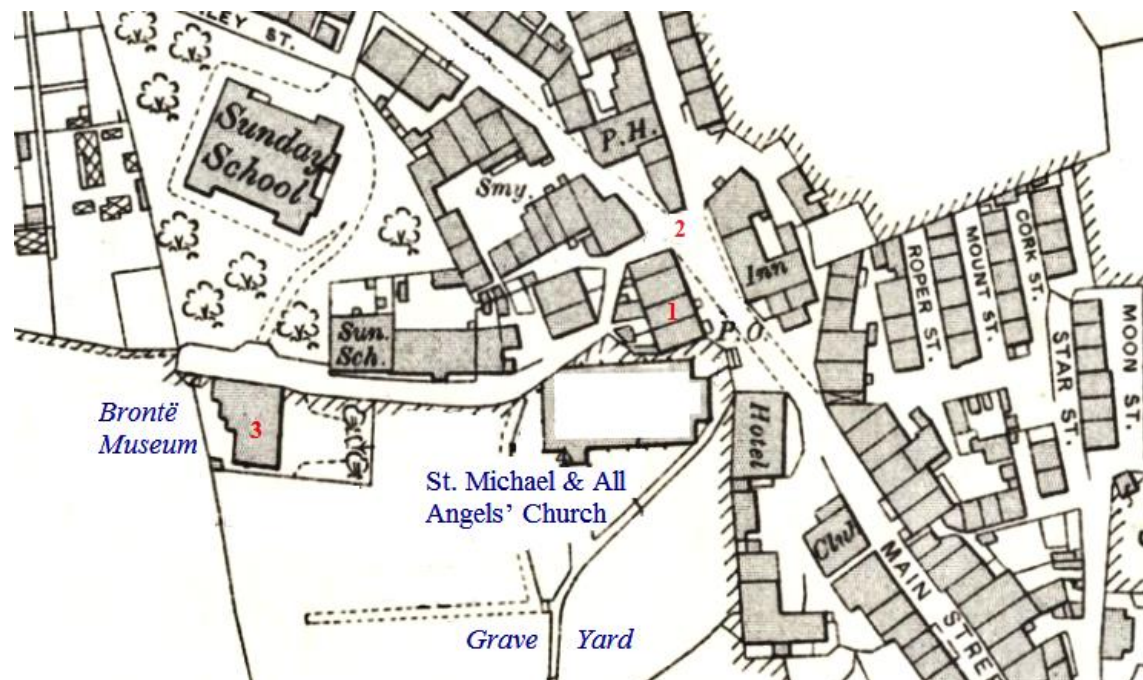
The enterprising Brown brothers now owned a substantial collection of Brontë personal effects and in 1889 opened the first museum of Brontë relics in a room above their Temperance Hotel and Refreshment Rooms at 123 Main Street, Haworth.



Above: This photograph is of the upper part of Main Street Haworth and is dated to about 1893. According to the census returns for 1861, the Temperance Hotel was situated between William Hartley's Ironmonger's and Edwin Feather's Post Office. The tallest of the four buildings to the right of the Church steps is No. 123 Main Street which has a signboard above the window which reads 'Refreshment Rooms'. It is situated between the buildings with signboards reading 'Benzoline' and 'Feather'. The premises have now been taken over by the Haworth Wholefoods. Courtesy of Steven Wood.

Below: Map of Haworth showing the upper part of Main Street, taken from the 1908 25" Ordnance Survey map, sheet CC 10.

1. No.123 Temperance Hotel and Refreshment Rooms, where the Browns Museum was located.
2. Previously the Haworth Tourist Information Centre, where the Brontë Society established their Museum.
3. Brontë Parsonage Museum, the Brontë Society moved into the Parsonage in 1928.



The Browns' private museum of Brontë relics was above their large refreshment rooms that catered for clubs, schools and picnic parties. The museum was not very attractive, the collection was not well displayed and although the Browns sold picture postcards and photographs of Haworth views and the Brontë family the museum did not attract sufficient visitors to stay in business for very long. The Brown brothers did produce a museum catalogue that described the Brontë objects on display. The front cover was illustrated with a drawing of the Reverend Patrick Brontë and contained 12 pages. In total it lists 97 artefacts in some detail but no photographs of the interior of the museum showing any of these objects on display are known to exist.

MUSEUM OF BRONTE RELICS.



P. BRONTE.

DESRIPTIVE CATALOGUE OF BRONTE RELICS

NOW IN THE POSSESSION OF

R. & F. BROWN,

123, MAIN STREET, HAWORTH.

Left: The front cover of Browns' catalogue of their Brontë Museum with a drawing of the Reverend Patrick Brontë.

Right: The back page of the Browns' catalogue advertising postcards.

On the back of the catalogue is a list of views and photographs of Haworth and of the Brontë family. Cabinet photographs were 1/1 (5½ pence) and cartes-de-visite were seven pence (3 pence) post free. It encourages visitors to see the 'Collection of Brontë's Relics', which it claims is the 'largest that has ever been got together'.

The catalogue also advertises a booklet by the Reverend Patrick Brontë entitled 'Two Sermons and a Phenomenon' priced at sixpence (2½ pence) post free. The phenomenon was the Crow Hill Flood which occurred on the moors of Haworth in 1824.

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The following is a List of

Views & Photographs of Haworth

AND THE

BRONTE FAMILY

Cabinets, 1/1; Cartes-de-Visite, 7d.; post free.

GENERAL VIEW OF HAWORTH	THE OLD PEW
CHARLOTTE BRONTE	THE OLD PULPIT
THE OLD CHURCH	THE TABLET
THE NEW CHURCH	OLD PARSONAGE
REV. P. BRONTE	THE BRONTE WATERFALLS
REV. W. GRIMSHAW	THE FAITHFUL SERVANT, MARTHA BROWN
MR. NICHOLLS	CHARLOTTE'S FAITHFUL DOG, "FLOSS"
THE INTERIOR OF THE OLD CHURCH	
THE BRONTE GROUP	

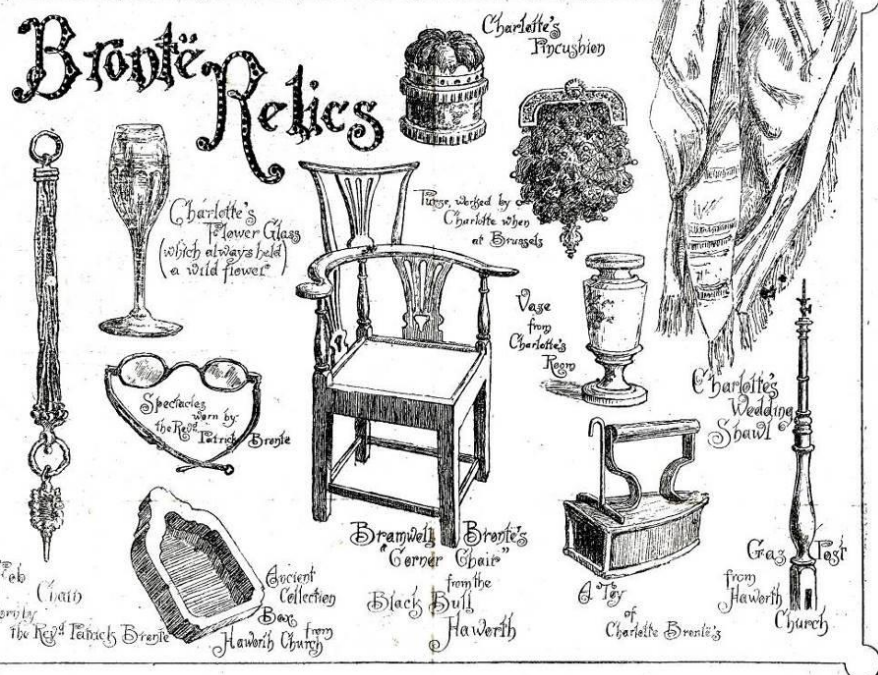
VISITORS TO HAWORTH

Should not fail to see the Collection of Brontë Relics, which is the largest that has ever been got together.

Also a Pamphlet by the Rev. P. BRONTE, entitled,

"TWO SERMONS and a PHENOMENON,"

Or an account in verse of the Extraordinary Disruption of a Bog (better known as the Crow Hill Flood), which took place on the Moors of Haworth on the 2nd day of September, 1824. Price 6d.; Post free, 7 Stamps.



In October 1890 the Browns exhibited their Brontë collection at the Mechanics' annual soirée at Thornton, near Bradford. The committee encouraged owners of Brontë objects to display them alongside the Brown's Museum collection. The Pall Mall Budget published a drawing illustrating 11 of the Brontë objects in the Browns' collection, one of which was Branwell's corner chair from the Black Bull Inn, it is now in the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

Left: Drawing published in the Pall Mall Budget of 30th October 1890 illustrating 11 Brontë objects in the Browns' collection, including Branwell Brontë's corner chair.

Brown's Refreshment Rooms

AND
MUSEUM OF BRONTË RELICS,

123, MAIN STREET, HAWORTH.

Large Refreshment Rooms for Clubs, Schools and Picnic Parties.

The following is a list of Views and Photographs of Haworth and the Brontë family, Cabinets, 1/1; Cartes-de-visites, 7d., post free

Rev. P. Brontë.
Rev. W. Grimshaw.
Mr. Nichols.
The Interior of the Old Church.



[P. BRONTË].

The Brontë Group.
The Old Rev.
The Old Parsonage.
The Old Rectory.
The Old Church.
The Old Parsonage.

General View of Haworth.
Charlotte Brontë.
The Old Church.
The New Church.

The Brontë Waterfalls.
The Brontë Mill.
The Brontë Rectory.
The Brontë Parsonage.
The Brontë Old Rectory.

Visitors to Haworth should not fail to see the Collection of BRONTË RELICS, which is the largest that has ever been got together.

Also a Pamphlet, by the Rev. P. Brontë, entitled: **Two Sermons and a Phenomenon**, or an account in verse of the Extraordinary Disruption of a Bog (better known as the Crow-hill Flood), which took place on the moors of Haworth on the 2nd day of September, 1824.—Price 6d., post free 7 stamps.

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To further advance their enterprises the Browns produced a promotional leaflet advertising the 'Refreshment Rooms and Museum of Brontë Relics' once again with a drawing of the Reverend Patrick Brontë on the front. This however, did not have the desired effect to encourage sufficient visitors to keep the business viable.

Eventually the Browns moved their enterprise to Blackpool, taking their Brontë collection with them. Then in March 1893 they went over to America, to the Chicago World Exhibition setting up their museum not far from Buffalo Bill's Wild West Show. The Browns attempted to sell their Brontë artefacts to rich Americans at the exhibition but failed.

The First Brontë Society Museum

Meanwhile back in Haworth Brontë tourism was becoming very popular, many of the visitors having read Gaskell's biography of Charlotte Brontë, and this created a market for personal belongings of the family. This was a period of active collecting of Brontë artefacts, and people who had purchased items at the Haworth Parsonage sale in 1861 were increasingly sought out by collectors and persuaded to part with their pieces. A few Brontë enthusiasts established the Brontë Society which was founded on 16th December 1893 to promote the

study of the works of the Brontës, to collect and organise a permanent home for the surviving possessions of the Brontës, and to keep them together as a collection before the opportunity was lost for ever. The society rented a small room on the upper floor of the Yorkshire Penny Bank, the building at the top of Haworth Main Street as a public museum to display the collection. This was after the building was taken over by the Yorkshire Penny Bank in 1894, and when they added a short tower and a pyramidal roof in which was carved the name YORKSHIRE PENNY BANK in a rectangular block of stone. Previously the Haworth Mechanics' Institute, founded in 1849, met in the building. On 18th May 1895 the Brontë Museum was officially opened by Sir John Brigg who was a founding member of the Brontë Society and its first President, the day was an important occasion in Haworth and many people travelled from all over the country to be present at the opening.



Above: The building at the top of Haworth Main Street before it was taken over by the Yorkshire Penny Bank in 1894.



Right: This photograph was taken after a short tower and a pyramidal roof was added by the Yorkshire Penny Bank, the name YORKSHIRE PENNY BANK is carved in a rectangular block of stone.



Left: Inside the Brontë Museum which at this time was neatly laid out. Notice the statue of William Makepeace Thackeray, who was one of Charlotte Brontë's literary heroes, on the window sill that overlooks Haworth Main Street, it faced visitors as they enter the main room, and is the same statue that can be seen in the window from the street in the photograph on page 38.



Right: This view of the Brontë Museum shows cases displaying objects belonging to the Brontës and paintings and drawings can be seen hanging on the walls. The entrance door to the museum room can be seen on the right hand side.

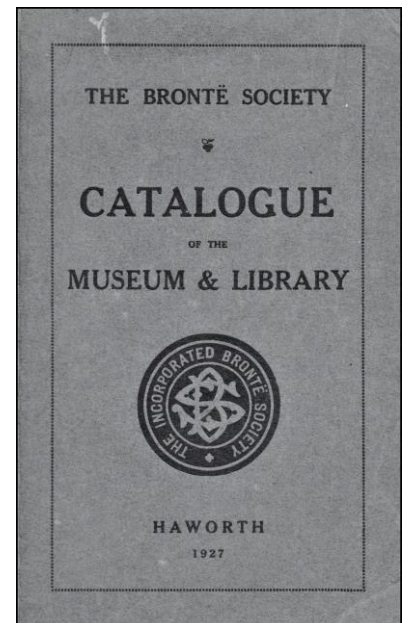
In 1896 the museum had over three hundred exhibits, many of them were donated or loaned and by this time the Brontë Society itself had grown to 260 members. The number of visitors to the museum was also steadily increasing with a recorded number of 10,000 visitors during the summer months of 1897.



Left: Members of the Brontë Society outside the Haworth Parsonage in 1899, at this time it was occupied by the Reverend Thomas William Story who was Rector of Haworth, 1898-1919. He can be seen standing at the back of the group between the window on the left and the main door.

From 1895, the society issued its own publications, encouraging research into the Brontës' works and lives. The Brontë Society Transactions, now known as Brontë Studies is the only journal solely dedicated to Brontë family research. They also publish catalogues of their museum collections and library.

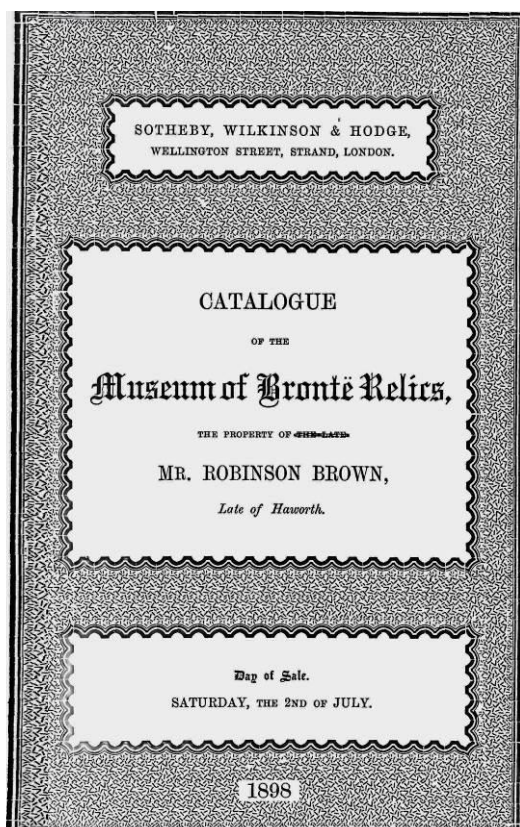
Right: The front cover of the 1927 Catalogue of the Museum & Library published by the Brontë Society.



The Auction of the Browns' Museum of Brontë Relics in 1898

Failing to sell their Brontë collection in Chicago the Browns returned to England to auction it off. The auction was in London at Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge's premises in Wellington Street, Strand on the 2nd July 1898. An itemised sale catalogue was produced of the 'Museum of Brontë Relics' to be auctioned.

A foreword to the 1898 sale catalogue reads 'A large proportion of these relics was given by members of the Brontë family at various times to William Brown (father of Mr Robinson Brown), Sexton at Haworth Church during 20 years of the Rev. P. Brontë's incumbency, and to his niece Martha Brown, who for many years lived with the Brontë family. Those relics which were not inherited from these relatives by Mr Robinson Brown, he acquired from Mr. A. Gledhill, Keighley; Miss Nussey; Mr. W. Scruton, Bradford and others; a few were purchased by him in the locality.'



A further note reads that the collection of 107 lots was to be offered for sale in one lot with a reserve price of £500. It adds: 'If this sum be not realised, it will then be sold in detail as catalogued'. The latter course was taken but the sale failed to attract many serious bidders. The newly formed Brontë Society hoped to buy the collection, but the asking price of £500 was far beyond its means.

Many of the 107 lots failed to find a bidder including J. H. Thompson's signed oil portrait of Charlotte Brontë, lot 28 which is illustrated in the catalogue and her doll's cradle lot 65. Representatives of the Brontë Society were among those present and spent just under £20 on the day, purchasing several Brontë personal belongings. They include an unfinished patchwork counterpane worked by all three sisters' lot 47 which sold for £1. 2s (£1.10), Charlotte's watercolour of Anne's favourite dog Flossy, lot 18 and illustrated in the catalogue for the sum of £12, a lock of Charlotte Brontë's hair taken after her death by Nicholls and given to Martha Brown lot 80 £1. 14s (£1.70), another lock of Charlotte Brontë's hair given by Miss. Nussey to Mr. W. Scruton lot 100 fetched over £3.00. The Brontë Society purchased the remaining items many years later from Francis Brown's daughter.

Left: Sotheby, Wilkinson and Hodge catalogue of the 'Museum of Brontë Relics' auctioned in 1898.

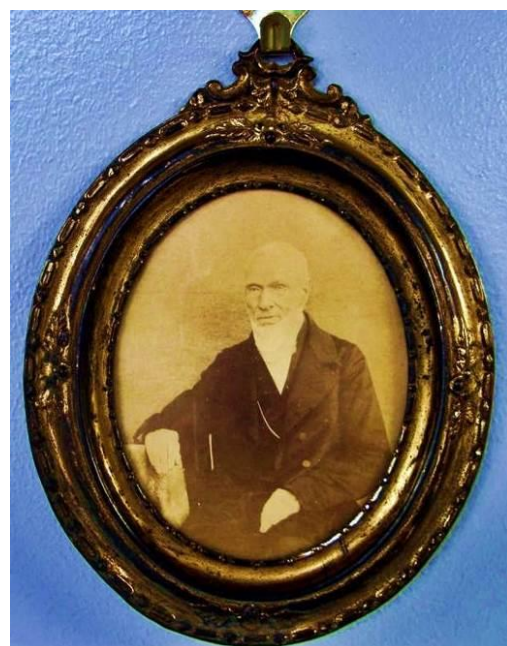
A recent discovery of a Brontë personal possession

One item that came up for sale in the auction was a faded sepia photograph of the elderly Reverend Patrick Brontë mounted in an oval gilt frame. In 1889 it was proudly displayed alongside other Brontë mementos at the Browns' Museum.

This oval framed photograph of the Reverend Patrick Brontë was lot 105 in the catalogue and is believed to have been sold for one shilling (5 pence) which was the lowest amount that could be bid, and was lost to the literary and art world since it was auctioned in 1898.

In 2009 this photograph was rediscovered among papers in an old Ilford film box at a provincial antiques fair still mounted in its original oval gilt frame. With it was a copy of the 1898 auction catalogue.

Right: The oval framed photograph of the Reverend Patrick Brontë auctioned in 2009



An inscription on the back of the portrait, presumably copied from the museum's description, reads, 'Rev. P. Brontë; Various relics including an oval photograph framed and glazed, a small china blue and white plate often used by him and a sword stick. The photograph was owned by Martha Brown and was bought from the Ratcliffes from whom came also the plate. The swordstick is accompanied by a framed certificate from C. Stansfield who sold it to Mr Dixon. It was given by Mr Brontë to John Hudson the elder of Haworth who repaired Mr Brontë's boots for many years and was bought by Stansfield from John Hudson the Younger his son'. Francis and Robinson Brown were cousins of the Brown sisters and presumably obtained the oval framed photograph of the Reverend Patrick Brontë, along with other items from Tabitha Ratcliffe.

The photograph of the Reverend Patrick Brontë was sold in Woking by Surrey fine art auctioneer Ewbank Clarke Gammon Wellers on 24th June 2009 and fetched a hammer price of £1,250, the total cost after auction fees was £1,476. It was bought by a woman from the south of England bidding by telephone. The photograph sold for nearly three times more than expected. Ironically the Brontë Society was once again unable to purchase the photograph due to financial difficulties. However, fortunately for the Brontë Society the oval framed photograph of the Reverend Patrick Brontë was presented to the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth by the unidentified buyer.

Disposal and Recovery of Brontë Collections

Ellen Nussey, lifelong friend of Charlotte Brontë, had hundreds of letters from Charlotte and after her death Arthur Bell Nicholls became concerned that Charlotte's letters to Ellen might damage her reputation and asked for them to be destroyed, but Ellen refused. Later when Ellen attempted to have the letters published she learned that Nicholls held the copyright. Before her death in 1897 Ellen had been approached by Clement Shorter a journalist on the Illustrated London News, to sell her letters to one of his associates Thomas J Wise, later exposed as the greatest literary forger of the age but at this time still esteemed as a collector, and book dealer, to safeguard them for posterity assuring her that they would eventually be deposited in a national collection. They managed to convince her and this seemed a perfect solution. However, to Ellen's horror, it became obvious that Wise was selling her letters at auction and when Ellen complained that she had been betrayed, Wise threatened her with legal action.

Nicholls, living in Ireland, had most of Charlotte's manuscripts and private effects. He had always been unwilling to part with them so it is debatable how Shorter persuaded Nicholls to part with Charlotte's archives. Shorter was researching a new biography of Charlotte that was to come out the following year under the title *Charlotte Brontë and her Circle* (1896) and had deliberately timed his visit to coincide with the fortieth anniversary of Charlotte's death on the 31st July 1895. Shorter was aware that Nicholls had always been fiercely resistant to books about the Brontës, and was surprised to find him genial and accommodating. A more plausible explanation for Nicholls to receive Shorter must be that he was in desperate financial straits. But Shorter was not working alone in the purchase of Nicholls' collection, his associate Wise also wanted to buy any Brontë manuscripts that were available to provide much of the money to acquire them. Shorter interviewed Nicholls at some length and managed to persuade him to part with the greater part of his manuscripts and letters, including the tiny manuscript books of Charlotte and Branwell's childhood. In 1895 Nicholls was seventy-six years old and it would seem that he was prepared to relinquish his collection for financial gain.

Right: One of the tiny manuscript books by Charlotte Brontë dated 23rd August 1830 but completed in October 1830, when she was 14 years old.

Courtesy of the Brontë Parsonage Museum.

Shorter bought the manuscripts on Wise's behalf, retaining the copyright for himself. During the next two years Wise acquired other letters from Nicholls, and like Ellen Nussey he too was under the impression that the material would eventually be given to the nation. Within a year of obtaining Nicholls's collection Wise began re-selling a large part of it through auction houses, scattering it far and wide with those by Branwell often passed off as the work of his sister Charlotte. Shorter exploited his exclusive control of the rights in a series of biographies of the Brontës. Wise and Shorter's transactions with Nicholls have had severe repercussions for Brontë scholarship.



However, Shorter and Wise did not manage to acquire everything of Charlotte's personal effects that Nicholls had been unwilling to part with during his lifetime. After his death in 1906 at the age of 88, his second wife Mary Ann sold at Sotheby's in 1907 many of her husband's remaining possessions of his former wife Charlotte Brontë. Although unable to compete with wealthy collectors, the Brontë Society managed to acquire several items in this sale and a subsequent one in 1914. Another sale was held in 1916 after the death of Mary Ann who died in 1915 aged 85. These lots contained the remaining Brontë manuscripts, personal possessions, furniture and artwork by the Brontës which Nicholls brought from Haworth in 1861.

Perhaps most significant are two paintings that show likenesses of the Brontës thought to have been lost. They came up in the 1914 sale and were purchased by the National Portrait Gallery. The two portrait paintings are by Branwell Brontë, one is of his three sisters and named the 'Pillar Portrait' and the second one is named the 'Profile' portrait. They were found on top of a cupboard in 1906 but the famous group portrait was badly damaged by creases after being kept folded and still bears the marks.

Right: Painting by Branwell Brontë in 1834 entitled 'the Pillar Portrait'. He hoped to become a professional artist, his three sisters are from left to right: Anne, Emily and Charlotte. A self-portrait of the artist, their brother Branwell Brontë was originally included between Emily and Charlotte but later painted over by a pillar. The painting is now in a delicate and fragile state of preservation and is badly damaged by creases being kept folded for many years.



Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.



Left: This is apparently all that remains of a group portrait of the Brontës by Branwell Brontë painted in 1833 of which it formed the right-hand part. The identity of the sister in this fragment is disputed, but it may depict Emily or Anne.

Courtesy of the National Portrait Gallery.

In an interview in 1895, Nicholls told Shorter that he had cut out a portrait of Emily, from a group picture, which he then destroyed, and gave the fragment to Martha Brown, Brontë's old servant, during one of her visits to Ireland. If the fragment can be identified as that given to Martha, then its identity as Emily is beyond dispute. Nicholls' description of Martha's portrait is 'that really fine and expressive painting' which fits the fragment, but so far no-one has been able to prove whether or not Martha's picture was ever returned to Nicholls. In a letter to Reginald Smith, Charlotte's publishers, written soon after the discovery of the group 'Pillar Portrait' and 'Profile' fragment portrait, Mrs Mary Ann Nicholls remarked that she had not realized that the Brontë portraits had remained in her husband's possession, but she did imply that she had already seen the fragment, 'the one of Emily I had seen, & remember Mr Nicholls telling me he had cut it out of a painting done by Branwell as he thought it good but the others were bad, & he told Martha to destroy the others'. It would seem that Mrs Nicholls links the fragment with her husband's statement to Shorter about cutting out the portrait of Emily and giving it to Martha, and therefore connects the two as one and the same picture, though how or when Martha's picture was returned to Nicholls remains a mystery. However, the identity of the sister in this fragment is still in dispute by some.

Wise died in disgrace in 1937, three years after he had been unmasked as a manufacturer of counterfeit first editions. His personal collection of books and literary artefacts was sold to the British Library and it was shockingly found that few Brontë manuscripts remained, considering the huge amount of material which had once passed through his hands.

Since then most of Nicholls' collection that Shorter and Wise purchased by deception from him and for their ill-gotten gains, betraying his trust has been returned to the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth.

The New Brontë Museum in Haworth

After the sudden death of the wealthy Philadelphia publisher Henry Houston Bonnell in 1926 his extensive collection of Brontë manuscripts, poems, French devoirs, letters, first editions and personal effects along with the desk on which Emily wrote *Wuthering Heights* was bequeathed to the Brontë Society. Bonnell was a life member of the Brontë Society and collected Brontë material from the 1890s. During his lifetime his collection was considered one of the most valuable and representative in existence. With his bequest the Brontë Society's collection had now outgrown the small one-room museum.

Right: This photograph shows how crowded the museum had become. A plaster medallion portrait of Branwell Brontë can be seen on the far wall, with drawings and paintings by his sisters on the left.



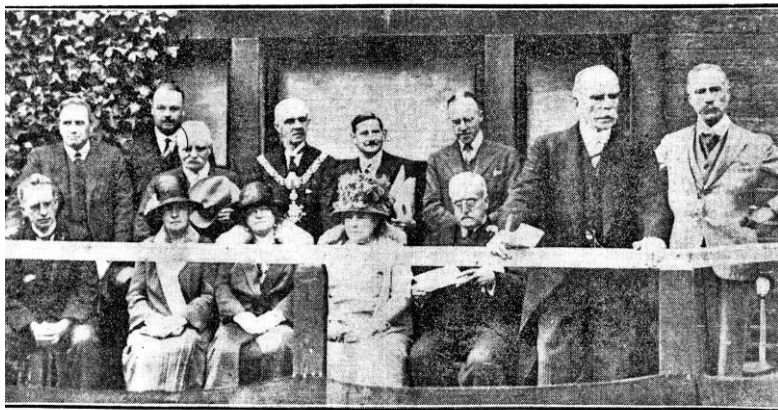
At the Brontë Society's annual meeting in 1927, when their cash assets were just under £50, they approached the Haworth Church Lands Trustees to enquire if they would be prepared to sell the Parsonage. The church authorities indicated that they would be willing to consider selling the Parsonage for the sum of £3,000 which would enable them to build a new home for the rector on West Lane. This was reported in the *Yorkshire Observer* and was read by Sir James Roberts's wife who suggested that he should buy the parsonage for the Brontë Society to provide them with a permanent home for their museum and library. Sir James Roberts, a local man who had made a fortune in the textile industry thought this an excellent idea and paid the asking price of £3,000. He not only presented the building to the Brontë Society but he also contributed a further £1,500 towards the cost of refurbishment and fire-proofing the dining room for the Bonnell collection. The Brontë collection was transferred to the



Brontë Parsonage Museum which was officially opened on 4th August 1928, thousands arrived at Haworth to witness its official opening.

Right: The 4th August 1928 was a glorious day that brought out thousands for the opening of the Brontë Parsonage Museum. The crowd watched Sir James Roberts standing on a platform giving his address.

AT THE BRONTË MUSEUM OPENING.

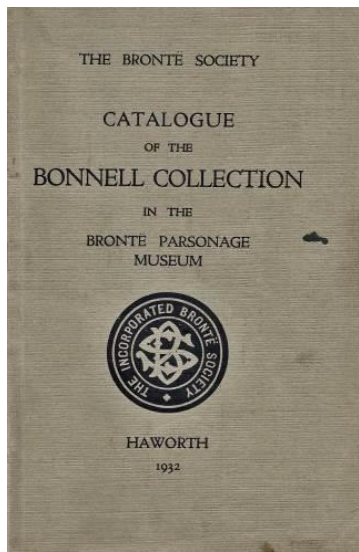


View of the platform during Sir James Roberts' address at the opening of the Brontë Parsonage Museum and Library last Saturday at Haworth. Among those included in the picture are Sir Edward Brotherton (seated next to Sir James), Lady Roberts, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Bradford, the Mayor and Mayoress of Keighley, Mr. Coulson Kernahan (on Sir James' left), and Mr. J. A. Symington (in the centre at the back).

Source: G. Crowther, Keighley.

Left: The opening of the Brontë Museum and Library reported in the Keighley News, Saturday 11th August 1928. The photograph is of the platform erected in the garden for special guests. After Sir James Roberts' address he handed over the deeds to Sir Edward Brotherton the Brontë Society President (seated next to Sir James). Among those included in the photograph are Lady Roberts, the Lord Mayor and Lady Mayoress of Bradford, the Mayor and Mayoress of Keighley, Mr. Coulson Kernahan (on Sir James left), and Mr. J. A. Symington (in the centre at the back). The photograph is by George Crowther who ended his career as editor of the Keighley News from 1950 to 1956. He also served on the Council of the Brontë Society.

Right: Photograph of the dining room at the Brontë Parsonage Museum in 1930. It then housed Bonnell's large collection displayed in glass cases. A framed photograph of Henry Bonnell can be seen hanging on the wall.



Left: Catalogue of the Bonnell Collection published in 1932 by the Brontë Society.

The Brontë collection continued to grow, and today the museum is considered to contain the world's largest Brontë collection. Also the many subsequent bequests allow the Society to bid successfully for Brontë items that come up for sale at auctions. The rooms in the parsonage have been restored by the Brontë Society as closely as possible to their appearance when the Brontës lived there. Much of the original furniture is used and many of their personal belongings are on display.

Right: The sitting room where the family spent time. The portrait over the fireplace is of Charlotte Brontë. Courtesy of the Brontë Parsonage Museum.



The Haworth Parsonage

The Haworth Parsonage has been home to several families but until 1778 there was no official Parsonage at Haworth. This was when the Church Land Trustees acquired the land on which the Parsonage now stands, near the church. It was built of millstone grit, quarried from the moors behind the house and completed in 1779. The house is situated above the village and separated from it by the church and a square garden. At the rear was a backyard with a toilet and a range of outbuildings. A barn that stood across the lane from the Parsonage was also owned by the Parsonage. The Reverend John Richardson (1763-1791) was the first to occupy the parsonage house. He was followed by the Reverend James Charnock (1791-1819). After his death in 1819 he was succeeded by the Reverend Patrick Brontë (1820-1861) and in April 1820 he moved into the Parsonage with his family.

Right: This photograph of Haworth Parsonage was taken from the church tower around 1860. It shows how the building looked after it was completed in 1779.



Left: Haworth old church and Parsonage in about 1860 before the Reverend John Wade carried out extensive alterations to both of them in the 1870s. Note the total lack of trees in the churchyard.

Following the Reverend Patrick Brontë's death in 1861 the Haworth Parsonage was occupied by the Reverend John Wade (1861-1898). By now

the Parsonage house was generally in a poor state of repair, Wade carried out the necessary alterations and repair work that was needed. He also found the Parsonage too small for his extended family and servants, plans were drawn up to extend the Parsonage house and in the late 1870s a two-storey gable wing was added to the north of the Parsonage. Consequently there was a shocked reaction to Wade's alterations to the Parsonage by Brontë devotees.

Right: The Haworth Parsonage in about 1900 after the Reverend John Wade added a gable wing. The barn on the right which was a stonemason's workshop in Brontë's times is just out of shot in the above photograph, it was demolished in 1903. The top of Church Street is visible and part of the Sunday School can be seen at the bottom right hand corner.



The old church of St. Michael and All Angels was also in a poor state of repair. In 1870 he installed a new clock in the old church tower by increasing the tower by a few feet and in 1872 carried out major internal alterations. He also wanted to improve the conditions of the church, which were dark, damp and malodorous, so when Michael Merrall, one of the local mill owners offered £5,000 towards the cost of a new church he gratefully accepted. With the exception of the tower, the old church was demolished in 1879 and rebuilt on the same site. The new church was consecrated in 1881 and is that which exists today. The outcry over the demolition of the old church came largely from outside Haworth and was made by those who were motivated by the Brontë sisters' writings, Wade however, saw the church as a place of worship, not literary pilgrimage. Nicholls was also in favour of the new church, saying that 'it was a house of prayer and not a shrine to his wife or her sisters'.

From the beginning of his appointment in 1861 Wade gained a reputation for antipathy towards Brontë literary followers and regularly refused visitors admission to the Parsonage.

Right: This photograph shows the old church of St. Michael and All Angels shortly after a new clock was installed. The new clean stonework on the upper part of the tower can clearly be seen.



Left: The new church of St. Michael and All Angels after it was rebuilt in the 1880s. The design does not resemble the old church, only the tower with its clock remains from the old church building.

Following on from Wade the Parsonage was the home to three further incumbents, the Reverend Thomas Story (1898-1919), the Reverend George Elson (1919-1925) and the Reverend John Crosland Hirst (1925-1928) was the last incumbent to occupy Haworth Parsonage before it became the Brontë Parsonage Museum in 1928. Very few Brontë devotees were allowed to enter the Parsonage apart from the friends of the families of the successive rectors who have lived there. Hirst the last incumbent was used to visitors but was put off by some of them. In Hirst's time photographs of the interior of the Parsonage was made available as postcards in an attempt to satisfy the curiosity of tourists to Haworth.

Right: Two 1920s postcards of the interior of the Parsonage made available in an attempt to satisfy the curiosity of tourists to Haworth.

The Hirst family was extremely reluctant to leave the Parsonage, they had to stay with Michael Merrall at Law House for some weeks until the building of a new rectory was complete because a gale had delayed the building work. They eventually settled into the new rectory and forgave the Brontë Society, their son William joined the Society and his father became a member of its council.



All of these later occupants witnessed the development of tourism in Haworth, and experienced the trials and tribulations of living in the literary home of the Brontës.

After the Haworth Parsonage was taken over by the Brontë Society it became the home to four museum custodians and their families. Fred Smith who had acted as caretaker of the museum above the Yorkshire Penny Bank handed in his resignation just before the Brontë Society took over the Haworth Parsonage. The Brontë Society appointed 32 year old Harold Gilliam Mitchell an ex-serviceman as custodian. In September 1928, Mitchell and his wife, along with their small son Raymond moved into the few rooms in the Wade wing of the



Parsonage. Mary, Harold's wife became his assistant and they both sorted out the collection of artefacts transferred from the Yorkshire Penny Bank building. They cleaned the building, cared for the contents and arranged the Museum displays. When the museum was open Harold issued tickets to visitors from a little kiosk and sold postcards and souvenirs in the Brontës' old kitchen. On 1st May 1961 Harold Mitchell retired, he had lived and worked at the Parsonage for thirty-three years.

Left: Harold Mitchell standing on the stone steps at the front door of the Haworth Parsonage in 1947. Photograph Courtesy of Ann Dinsdale

After Harold Mitchell's retirement, the post was upgraded and Geoffrey Beard, Assistant Keeper of Leeds City Art Gallery, was appointed as Curator of the Brontë Parsonage Museum, moving into the new flat at the back of the Parsonage with his wife Margaret and their young daughter Helen. However, it is not surprising that Beard, a museum professional in fine arts resigned after finding out that he was expected to do the duty of the doorman, sweep floors and sell tickets on the front door. He must have felt humiliated by the

Brontë Society that they should require a professional person to undertake such duties. This illustrates how inexperienced and unprofessional council members of the Brontë Society were at this time. Needless to say he resigned after a few months to take up a new post at Cannon Hall in Cawthorne, near Barnsley. Following on from Geoffrey Beard the last two custodians to live on the Parsonage premises were Joanna Hutton and Norman Raistrick who was already working at the Parsonage as a doorman so there was none of the misunderstanding which had affronted Geoffrey Beard. He retired on 21st March 1981 moving out of the Parsonage flat in the previous December.



Increasing numbers of visitors led to more staff and the custodian's flat was converted into much-needed office space and a meeting room for the Brontë Society Council.

Left: The Brontë Parsonage Museum owned by the Brontë Society. The Brontës lived here from 1820 until Patrick's death in 1861.

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