

FRIENDS OF ELIZABETH GASKELL'S HOUSE

## CHRISTMAS MEETING

Sunday 2 December 2018

# The Victorian Christmas

A day of illustrated talks by Anthony Burton

11.30 The day begins. (House opens 11.00. Tea and coffee available in the Tea Room.)

### 11.50 CHRISTMAS CUSTOMS

Some say that the traditional English Christmas was invented by the Victorians. Not so, but the Victorians certainly tried to re-instate many neglected old customs (the wassail bowl, the yule log, the boar's head), and Elizabeth Gaskell would have known about these efforts at cultural revivalism.

1.00 LUNCH, including CHRISTMAS PIE.

### 2.00 CHRISTMAS LITERATURE

Publishers produced special gift books for the Christmas trade. Dickens's *Christmas Carol* (1843) was the best known example. Elizabeth contributed to this Christmas literature, especially by supplying stories for the Christmas numbers of Dickens's magazines.

### 2.40 CHRISTMAS DECORATIONS

In Elizabeth Gaskell's time, tinsel, glass baubles and fairy-lights were yet to come, and greenery (holly, ivy, etc) was the standard way of decorating your home for Christmas. The Christmas tree was a new fashion in the 1840s: the Gaskells may have had trees, Elizabeth certainly knew people who did.

3.20 TEA, including TWELFTH-NIGHT CAKE

### 4.00 CHRISTMAS CAROLS

Early Victorians encountered Christmas carols usually by hearing them bawled out in the streets by ballad-sellers. Gradually, however, traditional carols were rescued from the long memories of country people. Elizabeth, with her antiquarian interests, fondly remembered the voices of country children singing carols.

4.30 Day ends

£18.50 Including lunch and tea, but not tea/coffee beforehand