

John Ruskin, Henry James and the Shropshire Lads

Cynthia Gamble

Foreword by **Philip Dunne MP**

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Dr Cynthia Gamble was born and brought up in Shropshire and now lives and works in London. She brings to this new book *John Ruskin, Henry James and the Shropshire Lads* both her local knowledge and her expertise in the works of Ruskin and many other Victorian writers. She is the author of *Proust as Interpreter of Ruskin: the Seven Lamps of Translation* (2002) in which she explores how Ruskin changed Proust's life. She is a Visiting Fellow of the Ruskin Centre at Lancaster University and the Secretary of the Ruskin Society. She has taught French at both school and University levels and is widely in demand as a lecturer in Britain and throughout Western Europe. She is one of the leading authorities on Ruskin.

“This book is informative, evocative, scholarly and at the same time accessible. The author has picked her way through the intricate relationships brilliantly.”

Jeffrey Richards, Professor of Cultural History, Lancaster University

This fascinating book leads us to Shropshire's “beautiful little places” (John Ruskin) that inspired great writers, painters, politicians, diplomats and clergymen. In the first part of the book, John Ruskin, the greatest of the great Victorians, is presented among his stimulating circle of interesting and unusual Shropshire friends such as Broseley-born Osborne Gordon, his sister Jane and her husband John Pritchard; Edward Cheney of Badger Hall, Venice and London. Ruskin's visits to Shropshire from an early age were inspirational: he returned and sketched among the ruins of Wenlock Priory.

In the second part of the book, Henry James, following in the steps of his fellow countryman Henry Adams, discovers Shropshire. James seeks, savours and imbibes impressions in the Abbeys and Castles of Wenlock, Buildwas, Ludlow and Stokesay, not forgetting his rambles high on Wenlock Edge with stunning views over the Shropshire countryside and Wales. Much of the action and inspiration emanates from the little market town of Much Wenlock, home of Dr William Penny Brookes, physician and botanist who inspired the rebirth of the Olympic Games in the late 19th century. The medieval Priory (known locally as the Abbey) was the cultural centre of the town where literati were warmly received by members of the Milnes Gaskell and Wynn families. Among the guests were Turner, Henry James and Henry Adams (grandson of the American President).

The Rev. Osborne Gordon plays a pivotal role in the story. Cynthia Gamble charts his education at Bridgnorth School and his years at Christ Church, Oxford where he first met Ruskin and became a lifelong friend, to life in a parsonage at Easthampstead, Berkshire. Gordon is a most attractive man with many interests: a Chamonix climber, lover of claret but not champagne, a witty conversationalist much in demand as an after-dinner speaker and a frequent guest of the Prince of Wales at his *levées*. Gordon's sister Jane married Broseley-born John Pritchard, a rich barrister and banker and later MP for the Borough of Bridgnorth, and enjoyed her life in a town house in Eaton Square, London and as *châtelaine* of a Shropshire mansion (Stanmore Hall, near Bridgnorth).

The story takes us on many journeys around Europe with Ruskin and his Shropshire friends. The book is beautifully illustrated with much original material provided by the author. It makes us want to look at our own countryside with new eyes and savour its literary history.