

**NAXOS**  
AudioBooks

Elizabeth Gaskell  
**Cranford**

THE  
COMPLETE  
CLASSICS

UNABRIDGED

Read by **Clare Wille**

CLASSIC  
FICTION



NA685012D

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<b>1</b>	<b>Chapter 1 Our Society</b>	5:44
<b>2</b>	There were one or two consequences arising...	5:43
<b>3</b>	Captain Brown had taken a small house...	6:21
<b>4</b>	When the trays reappeared with biscuits and wine...	4:28
<b>5</b>	<b>Chapter 2 The Captain</b>	4:24
<b>6</b>	Such was the state of things when I left Cranford...	4:29
<b>7</b>	My next visit to Cranford was in the summer.	6:09
<b>8</b>	That afternoon we perceived little groups in the street...	6:23
<b>9</b>	Miss Pole, Miss Matty, and I, meanwhile...	5:45
<b>10</b>	We were both startled when Miss Jenkyns reappeared...	5:44
<b>11</b>	<b>Chapter 3 A Love Affair of Long Ago</b>	6:49
<b>12</b>	However, it so fell out that Fanny had to leave...	7:43
<b>13</b>	And now I come to the love affair.	5:40
<b>14</b>	<b>Chapter 4 A Visit to an Old Bachelor</b>	5:57
<b>15</b>	We had pudding before meat...	5:41
<b>16</b>	When we came back, nothing would serve him...	4:55
<b>17</b>	Soon after this I took my leave...	5:11
<b>18</b>	The next day Miss Pole brought us word that Mr Holbrook...	2:58
<b>19</b>	<b>Chapter 5 Old Letters</b>	5:45
<b>20</b>	Miss Matty undid the packet with a sigh...	5:55

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21	There was a great gap before any of the rector's letters...	7:18
22	I can't quite remember the date...	5:16
23	<b>Chapter 6 Poor Peter</b>	5:22
24	Miss Matty drew herself up, and as soon as we were alone...	5:56
25	Presently my mother went to my father.	5:21
26	'The next day Deborah was at home before I was myself again.'	7:06
27	'Well, my dear, it's very foolish of me...'	6:15
28	<b>Chapter 7 Visiting</b>	6:51
29	My prophetic soul foretold a visit that afternoon...	5:00
30	The spring evenings were getting bright and long...	6:32
31	Presently the door was thrown wide open...	3:58
32	<b>Chapter 8 Your Ladyship</b>	5:52
33	In coming out of church, the first Sunday...	6:03
34	The expenditure on dress in Cranford...	6:45
35	We were all very silent at first.	4:53
36	As a proof of how thoroughly we had forgotten...	5:47
37	<b>Chapter 9 Signor Brunoni</b>	4:51
38	Miss Pole was always the person...	7:09
39	The next evening we were all in a gentle flutter...	5:15
40	But we had not time for more conversation...	5:27

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<b>41</b>	<b>Chapter 10 The Panic</b>	5:49
42	One afternoon, about five o'clock, we were startled...	4:48
43	When Lady Glenmire came, we almost felt jealous of her.	5:27
44	Miss Pole was very much inclined to install herself...	5:53
45	But when the evening came...	4:42
46	Still this was no confession...	5:00
<b>47</b>	<b>Chapter 11 Samuel Brown</b>	5:11
48	Before Miss Pole left us, Miss Matty and I...	5:30
49	We were all of us far too full of the signor's precarious state.	4:46
50	'My father once made us,' she began...	5:11
51	'Have you been in India?' said I, rather astonished.	8:04
<b>52</b>	<b>Chapter 12 Engaged to be Married</b>	5:31
53	We were sitting – Miss Matty and I – much as usual...	7:39
54	Mrs Forrester surprised us in our darned caps...	5:49
<b>55</b>	<b>Chapter 13 Stopped Payment</b>	6:02
56	It was a very uncomfortable subject to me...	6:01
57	I never saw a man's countenance fall so suddenly...	5:24
58	We inspected the fashions...	3:56
59	We had neither of us much appetite for dinner...	5:44
<b>60</b>	<b>Chapter 14 Friends in Need</b>	5:45

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61	I found Miss Matty very quiet, and not a little sad...	4:34
62	Miss Matty had a few little peculiarities...	5:04
63	'Please ma'am,' said Martha...	4:05
64	The next morning, very early, I received a note from Miss Pole...	6:44
65	When the ceremony had been gone through...	6:06
66	I am not going to weary you with the details...	6:45
67	<b>Chapter 15 A Happy Return</b>	5:10
68	But to return to Miss Matty.	4:32
69	About a year after Miss Matty set up shop...	7:10
70	Martha was beginning to go about again...	7:02
71	Long, long into the night far, far into the morning...	4:26
72	<b>Chapter 16 Peace to Cranford</b>	7:14
73	There had been some talk of establishing Martha and Jem...	5:24
74	When I got back to Miss Matty's...	6:33

**Total time: 7:02:35**

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# Elizabeth Gaskell

## Cranford

When it was published, and for quite some time afterwards, *Cranford* was described as charming, delightful, a refreshing escape from the cares of life, a gentle satire. It was in effect dismissed with patronising praise for its femininity. To some extent, its author has suffered in a similar fashion, her literary and socio-literary skills being overwhelmed by the saccharine thrown over the books by those praising her tenderness. In short, Elizabeth Stevenson (1810 – 1865) was sidelined by history because of her sex and the expectations of her time.

The author of *Ruth* (1853), *North and South* (1855) and *Wives and Daughters* (1865) contributed in part to her own anonymity. Her first novel was published without a name (although this was not unusual) but significantly, when she

became known as a writer, she signed herself Mrs Gaskell, thereby not only assuming the name of her husband but quashing what remained of her own individuality under the marital title, too. The sharp, ironic, loving narrator of *Cranford* (1853) – who might fairly be said to represent Elizabeth – is given the almost symbolically indeterminate name of Mary Smith. Such concerns for convention and self-negation seem wildly inappropriate for a writer whose many and vastly differing works contain impassioned and deeply humane concerns for the welfare of the working class, sympathy for those normally considered beyond compassion and calls for social reform combined with a delicacy of understanding and a sense of humour that should rightfully place her alongside Austen and Dickens.

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Dickens was one of those – along with Thackeray, Charlotte Brontë, Ruskin, Eliot and Carlyle – who recognised her talent. They had all been struck with *Mary Barton*, and Dickens essentially told the author that he would be happy to serialise her next work in his magazine when she could provide it. *Cranford* was the result, and in it, Stevenson/Gaskell moved away from the urban life she had come to know in Manchester (and had written so powerfully about in *Mary Barton*) and returned to her youth, creating in the lightly fictionalised Cranford a memoir of her time in Knutsford in Cheshire.

She had been born in London, but her father – a teacher, preacher, boarding-house keeper and keeper of records at the Treasury – could not look after her himself when her mother died, so he sent her to live with Hannah Lumb, his sister. Elizabeth grew to be beautiful and to possess that sweetness of manner so admired by Victorian men. But beneath this exterior were a heart and mind of

conviction and purpose. She shared her father's strong Unitarian faith, becoming a Sunday school teacher herself; and her future husband – William Gaskell – was also a Unitarian minister. Through him, she found herself working with his parishioners in Manchester, and it was here that she first encountered what poverty and cruelty the new industrial revolution could visit upon its workers. She became involved in various charitable schemes, but also pushed for far-reaching social reform, a theme she pursued in her fiction. She seems to have started writing in an attempt to distract herself from the death of her first child, an incident that echoes her parents' losses – they had eight children, but only two survived. When Elizabeth's brother died, lost at sea, she went home to nurse her father through a depression that eventually killed him. This tragedy is also given a fictional counterpart in *Cranford* with the disappearance of Peter Jenkyns and the effect on his mother and father of his running away to sea.

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*Cranford* itself is a series of short stories based on the lives of a group of middle-aged to elderly widows and spinsters, living in a deliberately unfashionable manner in a village twenty miles from the industrial town called Drumble (in reality Manchester). It details their lives – the rules for calling upon each other, the delicate social distinctions, their games of cards, their evident poverty and their genteel discretion about it – and reports upon the small delights and minor catastrophes that fill their days. They are told in a beautifully judged understatement in the first person by a younger lady, Mary Smith, who is the friend of Miss Matty. In style and intention it is a comprehensive shift from the industrial world Gaskell had outlined before, but among her many strengths was an ability to write in many different manners, such as ghost stories, full-scale novels, romances and a widely acclaimed biography of her friend Charlotte Brontë. While *Cranford* is in some senses nostalgic, it is written in the full knowledge that

change is coming to the good people of the village whether they like it or not, and is surprisingly unafraid to shock (deaths and bankruptcies for particular example).

At the same time, for all the delicacy with which it reports on the characters, it is full of satire and authorial asides that are as enlightening as they are entertaining. One character's method of eating is tellingly described as being not unlike a cow's; another is represented as being like a sulky cockatoo. It is brimming with understanding of the essential moral goodness of the people while never allowing this to become sentimental or cloying, and it achieves this because its sympathies are never overlaid with any kind of improving precept or idealisation. As a result, any misfortunes are not only unexpected but extremely moving, and the understated response to them all the more affecting. These are not people behaving according to a template of acceptable behaviour, but doing what they believe to be right, despite the cost



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to themselves and in marked distinction to the prevailing capitalist ethics to be found just up the road in Drumble. There are also moments of extraordinary stylistic invention, sequences where the narrative becomes almost stream-of-consciousness in its fluidity.

Cranford has the right to be regarded as a classic piece of social comedy, considered alongside *England, Their England*, for example. But with its unusual narrative structure, rich characterisation, ironic detachment, lightness of touch and

ability to move readers with what could have been regarded as the minor afflictions of the upper-middle classes (never the easiest group to render sympathetically), it also deserves to be considered one of the finest pieces of short fiction in English. It is indeed charming, delightful and tender. But it is also astute, intelligent and poignant, as those who knew Elizabeth Stevenson should have realised.

**Notes by Roy McMillan**

Cover picture: Illustration by A.R. Quinton in *Ditchfield, Cottages and Village Life*  
Courtesy Mary Evans Picture Library



**Clare Wille** has been working as an actress and voiceover artist since graduating from RADA in 1997. Her recent theatre work includes *Seeing Without Light* at the Drum Theatre, Plymouth Theatre Royal, and *Look Back in Anger* with London Classic Theatre Company. Her TV credits include Five's sketch show *Swinging*, BBC 2's rolling news spoof *Broken News*, CITV's *Girls in Love* and appearances in *Vital Signs*, *Life Begins*, *All About Me*, *Where the Heart Is* and *Doctors*. Most recently, she played Pru in Victoria Wood's *Housewife 49* and DS Rachel Dawson in *Heartbeat*.

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# Elizabeth Gaskell

# Cranford

Read by **Clare Wille**

In the village of Cranford, decorum is maintained at all times. Despite their poverty, the ladies are *never* vulgar about money (or their lack of it), and always follow the rules of propriety.

But this discretion and gentility does not keep away tragedy; and when the worst happens, the Amazons of Cranford show the true strength of their honest affections.

A masterpiece of social comedy, *Cranford* is as moving as it is funny, and as sharp as it is tender.

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Produced & recorded by Roy McMillan at Motivation  
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Edited by Sarah Butcher

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