

London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING 2017 The AGM of the Dickens Fellowship will take place on Sat 22 July during the annual conference in Carrara. The meeting will receive reports from the Fellowship's officers and consider the annual accounts. All the Honorary Officer posts will be up for re-election. Anyone wishing to stand for election should notify the Joint Honorary General Secretary of the Fellowship at postbox@dickensfellowship.org. Anyone who wishes to bring any issue before the AGM should notify the Hon Gen Sec at the address above seven days preceding the next meeting of Council (Sat 8 April 2017).

CONFERENCE 2017 *This will take place in the beautiful Tuscan city of Carrara from Wed 19 – Mon 24 July. Booking details are on the website (www.dickensfellowship.org). We will be following in the footsteps of Dickens, who went to Carrara in 1845 and 'visited the beautiful little theatre there, built of marble' (Letter to John Forster 25.1.45). It promises to be a memorable conference. The deadline for bookings is 31 May.*

City Pickwickians Papers dealing with meetings of the Dickens Pickwick Club from the 1830s were sold at auction from a collection last year. It records debates of the Club in the City of London, whose discussions included extensions of the vote, capital punishment and the National Anthem. They were critical of the young Queen Victoria and a motion was carried that royalty was "the very worst of humbug". Other matters were discussed, including "Why should there not be a new set of gobbing pots?" Names of characters from the book were allocated to club members, likely to include clerks, solicitors, barristers and London's craft trades. Members will be aware that the Pickwick Club of the City of London still flourishes and meets regularly – and they are still allocated names of Dickens characters.

What's she doing there? Our Membership Secretary, Allan Clack, points out there is a public house in the Farringdon Road, a short walk from the Museum, called "Betsey Trotwood", with a splendid painted sign of that lady, as illustrated by Phiz in *David Copperfield*. The entrance doors feature silhouettes of Betsey's head in the glass. Apparently, the pub, formerly The Butcher's Arms, was taken over in 1983 by Shepherd Neame brewery and owes its name not to any particular connection with Betsey Trotwood, but to the close proximity of 48 Doughty Street.

Membership Renewal – Reminder Members should have received a renewal form for 2017 with the last LP. If you haven't renewed, please do so asap. If you've mislaid the form, send your name and address, with your cheque, payable to Dickens Fellowship, or credit card details, to: Membership Secretary, Dickens Fellowship, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX. Fees are unchanged, i.e. £17 for membership, £15 for The Dickensian. If you have renewed, you will have received membership card/programme for 2017.

The Invisible Woman DF member Winifred Johnson from Leeds has some interesting comments on the film "The Invisible Woman" (about CD and Ellen Ternan), which she saw recently. She is usually cynical about "all these Dramas", but in this case, she says, "I thought they caught the atmosphere – the nature of their relationship, very sensitively. Certainly passion on CD's side – but I thought the actress playing Ellen conveyed a convincing mixture of hero-worship, admiration, tenderness, hesitation, dependency... Poor Charles! He wouldn't have had to go through all that misery and secrecy these days would he?! You can imagine the newspaper headline: "*Mr Dickens and his own Little Nell!*"

Too frivolous for Ms Phelps Michael Slater has sent in an interesting quote from the screenwriter Sarah Phelps (*Guardian* 13.12.16). Commenting on her 2011 TV adaptation of *Great Expectations*, she said she cut Joe Gargery's famous line 'What

larks, Pip' because she thought it made him sound daft: 'Just because he's a working class man', she says, 'doesn't mean he's an idiot. As a blacksmith with apprentices' {sic – Orlick was a journeyman Ed.} 'he could have been an intelligent businessman. The whole world turns on his anvil, and he knows it. But to write him as being good, Dickens had to make him thick. But he's not thick.' Certainly the blacksmith was an important man in his village and Joe takes pride in his work. But the whole point about him is that he is a simple man who conspicuously lacks the self-importance of, say, Uncle Pumblechook or indeed Pip himself. I disliked this adaptation for many reasons. Turning Joe into a humourless, resentful man (without 'larks') was one of them. (Ed.)

CD and the Civil War General... General William Sherman (1820-91) was a general on the Union side in the American Civil War (1861-5). He is famous for his "march to the sea", taking his troops from the captured city of Atlanta, Georgia, down to the prosperous port of Savannah. He is recognised for his outstanding command of military strategy, but criticised for the extreme harshness of his "scorched earth" policies. A WWII tank was named after him.

Michael Slater has sent in the following speech given by Robert Stuart MacArthur to the Lotos Club in New York City in 1908: "You will recall the fact that a few years ago Charles Dickens the younger came to this city and gave readings from his father's books. I went early to Chickering Hall and had a seat on the platform. General Sherman, then living in New York, took a seat beside me. He said, 'I am so glad to have an opportunity to hear Charles Dickens, Junior, I owe a debt of gratitude to his father, which I shall never be able to pay. During my march to the sea, after many of my greatest battles, I went into my tent, I took up David Copperfield, Martin Chuzzlewit, A Tale of Two Cities, and others of Dickens's books, and I forgot all the horrors of the battles of the day; I forgot all the terrible anticipations of the day to come. Dickens lifted me out of myself into another world, and in that world there was peace and brightness and joy; and I thank Charles Dickens from the bottom of my soul for the influence of his books and his characters on my military life.'"

... with the strange name!.. Incidentally, CD may have given many of his characters extraordinary surnames, but General Sherman's middle name, TECUMSEH, surely beats all. He attributed this name to his father having "caught a fancy for the great chief of the Shawnees, 'Tecumseh'". Sherman was known by that name until the age of 9, when he was adopted by a

family called Ewing and was then known, more prosaically, as William....

...**CD preferred** Talking of American generals, another quote from an article (TLS, 2014) by Jerry White. "Long before America declared war on Germany in April 1917, expressions of solidarity were sent from American Fellowship branches to HQ in London and duly printed in the Dickensian. When American troops began to gather in significant numbers in late 1917, the Globe newspaper organised trips for them round historic London, with a special component included for Dickensian sightseeing. And ANZAC soldiers in London were reported, when writing home, to favour Dickens postcards over those carrying pictures of their own generals".

Dickens as "Relate" counsellor Linda Blair, a clinical psychologist, wrote an article last month in the *Daily Telegraph* entitled "How to save your marriage". She recommends people should "be guided by Charles Dickens's words in *A Tale of Two Cities*: 'A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other'".

DICKENS DAY 2017 The annual Dickens Day at the Senate House, University of London, will take place on Sat 14 October. The theme this year will be "Dickens and Fantasy". *Details on website*.

OCTOBER MEETING Members will know that the October meeting was scheduled to be a talk from James Cutler on the Fellowship scrapbooks stored at the Museum. Unfortunately, this talk cannot now take place. It is hoped it can be rescheduled for 2018. Instead, on Tues 24 October, DF member and former President Dr Paul Schlicke of the University of Aberdeen will talk to members on **Dickens's Early Sketches**. This will follow the long anticipated publication of Paul's Clarendon edition of *Sketches by Boz* by the Oxford University Press.

Mrs Jellyby, the "telescopic philanthropist" in *Bleak House*, had been known to receive as many as from 150 to 200 letters respecting Africa in a single day. I don't need as many as that, but any contribution or comment would be gratefully received by: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans@hotmail.co.uk.