

# London Particular

The Newsletter for the Headquarters Group of the Dickens Fellowship

## HQ MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS

A very warm welcome to all the new Headquarters members of the Dickens Fellowship. You are among some 539 people from all walks of life and all corners of the world who have so far subscribed as HQ members for 2004.

At the start of March there were still 166 members who had yet to renew their subscriptions, about 20% down on the number of outstanding subscriptions at the same time last year. Those wishing to renew are urged to pay their subscriptions now. If the pink renewal form sent before Christmas is no longer available, a cover note will do.

The subscription for Headquarters members' is now £12, or £8 for a second member at the same address. Subscription to *The Dickensian* is £10 (plus £6 for copies to be airmailed outside of Europe).

Further information from the Headquarters office at 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX.

### Forthcoming events at The Swedenborg Hall

#### **Tuesday 20th April**

Members' Evening: A Dickensian 'Call My Bluff' organised by Alan Watts (see overleaf).

#### **Thursday 6th May**

'Dickens's Public Readings' - a talk by Professor Malcolm Andrews, of the University of Kent. Malcolm is well-known to members as editor of *The Dickensian*, and a frequent speaker at Fellowship conferences and meetings. He has a book in progress on Dickens's public readings.

#### **Tuesday 15th June**

'Dickens the Journalist: the Art of Chroniclicity' - a talk by Dr John Drew. John teaches at the University of Buckingham, and shared the editorial work on volume four of Michael Slater's edition of *Dickens' Journalism*. His recent book on *Dickens the Journalist* has provided a very valuable account of this, now increasingly-recognised, aspect of the author's work.

## CAROL CHAPMAN 1950-2004

Readers of this newsletter will be saddened to learn of the death, at the tragically early age of 54, of Carol Chapman, on 8 February this year.

Visitors to The Charles Dickens Museum in Doughty Street will often have seen Carol talking to visitors and undertaking handling sessions with items from the Museum's collection, and they will have appreciated her enthusiasm and excitement about all things Dickensian.

A Member of Headquarters, a co-opted Trustee of the Museum, and a dedicated fundraiser for the Museum, Carol will be deeply missed, especially by her husband Peter, children Amanda and Nicholas, and other members of her family.

It is planned to create a permanent memorial in recognition of Carol's devotion to the Museum.

Contributions may be sent to the Curator, at The Charles Dickens Museum, 48 Doughty Street, London, WC1N 2LX.

## CARLYLE AND DICKENS

Members of the Fellowship undoubtedly know Dickens well, but may wish to renew their acquaintance with Thomas Carlyle, the great philosopher and historian, who had such a powerful influence on his age, and on the inimitable.

A series of 'Dickens and Carlyle Evenings' is planned for later this year, to be held at Carlyle's House, 24 Cheyne Row, London SW3 5HL, and The Charles Dickens Museum at 48 Doughty Street.

The evenings will last from 6.30 to 8.00 pm and will consist of readings by the Dickens Fellowship's joint secretaries, Thelma Grove and Tony Williams, and a chance to visit the properties where the two writers lived.

Refreshments are included in the ticket price of £10. The evenings will take place at Carlyle's House (020 7352 7087) on 26 May and 1 Sept, and at the Dickens Museum (020 7405 2127) on 24 June and 24 Sept.

Tickets are available after Easter.

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### CALL MY BLUFF

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**Alan Watts is running a game of 'Call my Dickensian Bluff' at the member's meeting on 20 April at the Swedenborg Hall.**

It promises to be an entertaining and undoubtedly enlightening evening for even the most knowledgeable of Dickens enthusiasts. For those unfamiliar with the game, it usually involves players presenting true and false definitions of an unusual word, leaving others to deduce the correct version. In this instance, individual words are replaced with quotations from Dickens.

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### DICKENS IN THE NEWS

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**Scarcely a week goes by without mention of Charles Dickens in the newspapers. Here is a selection of recent instances. If you spot any Dickens-related articles that may interest other members, please let the *London Particular* know.**

In early March *The Independent* ran a story on 'The Ghost Club', England's oldest paranormal organisation, co-founded by Dickens in 1862. The society met to commemorate the bungled shooting of the Hammersmith Ghost. One winter's night in 1804, a vigilante fired a gun at a blood-curdling spectre he believed to be an apparition that had terrorised the neighbourhood. But the visitation turned out to be an innocent bricklayer, walking home in white overalls, and the killing triggered one of the most curious legal wrangles in British criminal history. The gunman was sentenced to death, but this was eventually commuted to one year's hard labour.

The *Liverpool Post* reports a moment of comedy as writer Jimmy McGovern attempted to unveil a plaque in honour of Dickens in that city. A sharp gust of wind caught a ceremonial curtain, bringing a wooden pole crashing down on the writer's head. McGovern managed a giggle through the pain as he battled with the curtains for "what seemed like hours" the paper says. One wag in the crowd was heard to ask, "What the Dickens is going on?"

Meanwhile, the *Daily Express* (among others) told how Labour Party chairman Ian McCartney had caused a row after describing shadow chancellor Oliver Letwin as a "21st Century Fagin". The paper even quoted actor Ron Moody, who played Fagin on the big screen, as saying the remark was "disgraceful". But Mr McCartney rejected the criticisms, saying he had spent his whole life fighting anti-Semitism.

And finally, *The Guardian* in February brought news of new laws to combat the exploitation of children by "modern day Josiah Bounderbys" (the factory owner in *Hard Times*).

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### 'PLEASE SIR ...'

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**Still on *Oliver Twist*, there have been rave reviews for Neil Bartlett's adaptation of the novel at the Lyric theatre in Hammersmith.**

The production runs in London until 27 March, then goes to Guildford (6-10 April), Bath (13-17 April), Newcastle (20-24 April), Edinburgh (27 April-1 May), Warwick (4-8 May) and Brighton (11-15 May).

More information from the Lyric on 08700 500 511.

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### COMMEMORATION SERVICE

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**Contrary to the information given on the membership card, the Commemoration Service on 9<sup>th</sup> May will once again take place at the Church of St George the Martyr, Borough High Street (Little Dorrit's Church), renovation work there having been postponed.**

As usual, the service will begin at 10.30 a.m. and be followed by lunch at the George Inn. Peter Duggan will be circulating further details in due course to those who live in or near London. Any members wishing to attend the lunch who do not usually get information about London events through the post should get in touch with Peter - contact details are provided on the membership card.

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### HAVE YOUR SAY

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**Any feedback on the contents of this newsletter, or suggestions for future items to be included should be sent to: Matthew Davis, Flat 3, 3 Lime Grove, Shepherd's Bush, London, W12 8EE ( 07932 632 099 ).**

Those members with internet access will find the Fellowship's website an invaluable source of up-to-date information on the organisation's activities, links to other sites and information on Charles Dickens. Use the website address at the bottom of this page.