
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

99th ANNUAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Conference at Canterbury was a great success, and enjoyed by everyone who attended, from around the world. Special thanks are due to the Canterbury Branch, as hosts.

One highlight was the election of Gerald Dickens as the new President for 2005-7. It was a shock to everyone that, after the banquet on Saturday evening, Gerald learned of the death of his father David. (See below.)

Huge thanks must be given to retiring President, Paul Schlicke, for his splendid work during the last two years.

The new Constitution was passed unanimously. Members should already have a copy, but additional copies, if required, may be obtained from 48 Doughty Street, London, WC1N 2LX.

The joint Secretaries, Tony Williams and Thelma Grove, confirmed at the Conference that they will be standing down after one more year's service. This means that there is a need to appoint replacements in time for the Conference in Summer 2006. A document outlining the tasks involved is available from the Fellowship at the above address.

A full report on the Conference will appear in the Winter 2005 issue of the *Dickensian*.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

Members are reminded that there will be a Fellowship Open Weekend (following on from the success of last year's Open Day) at the Charles Dickens Museum on 29th and 30th October 2005. There will be a programme of short talks and readings at various points in the day.

Please note too that the Conference to mark the

centenary of *The Dickensian* (postponed from 14th May) will now be held at the Institute of English Studies, Senate House, University of London, on 11th February 2006.

The Death of David Dickens

The great success of the 99th Annual Conference was offset by sad news: the sudden death of David Dickens, on Saturday 30th July, one week before his eightieth birthday.

David was a great-grandson of Charles Dickens and had close links with the Dickens Fellowship. He was President from 1995-7 and a Trustee of the Charles Dickens Museum at the same time. David's Presidential address appears in the Winter 1994 issue of *The Dickensian*.

His son Gerald made a moving tribute to his father on the last evening of the conference when he presented a reading from *Nicholas Nickleby* dedicated to his father's memory.

Messages have been sent to Betty, David's widow, and to the family, from the Fellowship. Members may wish to write individually to express their sympathy. Betty's address is 41 Eridge Gardens, Crowborough, East Sussex, TN6 2TB

DICKENS IN THE NEWS

Many thanks to all those who sent in Dickens-related articles spotted in the press. Scarcely a week goes by without a mention of Dickens in the newspapers.

If you see something you would like to share with other members, please send it to the editorial address: Stephen Jarvis, 116

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Middlesex UB8 1JL, UK
Or by Email: stephenjarvis@hotmail.com

The Times of 2nd May reported that the orchard planted by Dickens at Higham in Kent is now open to the public. It added that the 140-year-old garden has been restored, and the walls around the garden have been rebuilt.

An article in the *Evening Standard* of 20th May was devoted to rook pie, which had just been added to the menu at a London restaurant, Conran's Butler's Wharf Chop House. It was noted that this dish – whose flavour is “delicate and reminiscent of pigeon but lacks the gamey intensity that might put some people off” – was mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers*. Interestingly, the rook hunting in the book has an important role in determining the starting date for the adventures of the Pickwickians: the book opens on 12th May 1827, and this is traditionally taken to be a reference to the date on which the young Dickens started work at Ellis and Blackmore. However, it seems to have escaped notice that the book *had* to commence at roughly this period for the rook-hunting scene to take place: only the meat of fledgling rooks is suitable for turning into pies, and they have to be shot when they leave their nests in mid-May – with some authorities saying that 13th May is the optimum date for shooting.

In *The Guardian* of 27th June, an article on Chinese tourists in Britain noted that *Oliver Twist* is a very popular book in China and the title of the Chinese version translates as *Foggy City Orphan*. The director of the Great Britain-China Centre remarked: “When I tell people I live in London they often ask me how bad the fog is.”

The most shocking Dickensian newspaper item of the last few months relates to the London terrorist attacks of 7th July. *The Sunday Telegraph* of 10th July published a large photograph of the plaque in Tavistock Square, where Dickens lived – covered with bloodstains from the explosion on the No 30 bus.

A tribute to Robin Cook M.P. in *The Sunday Times* of 7th August, noted that Dickens had been

an important influence on the late Foreign Secretary. The article noted: “Reading most of Dickens's novels by the age of 10 probably helped to instil his sense of social injustice.”

The simple adjective “Dickensian” of course frequently turns up in newspaper articles. Janet Recknal-Turner spotted a piece in *The Sunday Telegraph Supplement* which referred to “a magical Dickensian haberdashery”, based at Temptation Alley, London W10. (Tel: 0208 9642004)

“Was Dickens a Pimp?”

Allan Clack sent in a follow-up to a news item which appeared in the December 2004 edition of *The London Particular*. A recently published book, *The Great Pretenders* by Jan Bondeson, had received substantial publicity in the press because of the supposed assertion that Dickens had acted as a pimp for the 5th Duke of Portland, providing young females for the Duke's amusement. However, an examination of the book shows that the suggestion was made during a trial for financial improprieties by the Duke – and there was no evidence for Dickens being a pimp other than the testimony of an unreliable witness. The comment was made at the trial: “It was shocking to hear the revered name of Charles Dickens in connection with such a miserable intrigue.” Allan remarks: “Interesting that this minor item in a substantial book led to huge captions on ‘Dickens the pimp’ in the literary reviews... “

Subscriptions

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A Final Thought...

“...all good things perverted to evil purposes are worse than those which are naturally bad [said Gabriel Varden]. A thoroughly wicked woman is wicked indeed. When religion goes wrong, she is very wrong, for the same reason.”

- Charles Dickens, *Barnaby Rudge*