
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

“ON A (B)LOG, EXPIRING FROG...”

An exciting opportunity has arisen for a member to write the Fellowship's soon-to-be launched blog!

Practically no technical knowledge is required, as software will be installed to allow the blog to be updated quickly from a browser. The main requirements are enthusiasm, an ability to write well, an insatiable interest in Dickens, and the time to update the blog on a regular basis. (Say, at least once a week.)

Prospective bloggers should submit a few samples or 'dummy' entries, demonstrating their ability to write, for consideration by the Management Committee. They should also choose an appropriate name for the blog, perhaps incorporating a pseudonym. For instance, "Expiring Frog"; or, inspired by a Dickensian character associated with writing notes, we might see the likes of "Lines by Augustus Snodgrass"; or, perhaps a lesser-known alias of Dickens could be used, leading to "Thoughts of Timothy Sparks"; or perhaps it could be time to revive a Dickensian plagiarist, such as "Bos." (For more on the original plagiarist of this name, see *Dickens in the News*, below.) Please send your sample blog to Hon. Gen. Sec. Joan Dicks, email: joan@dickshg.freemove.co.uk

London Meetings 2009: Suggestions Please!

The London programme for 2008 has now begun, as indicated on membership cards. We are now in the early stages of planning next year's meetings, and would be happy to consider suggestions for talks, demonstrations, readings etc. In particular, we would be open to the idea of "Mixed Programme" or "Medley" evenings, featuring a succession of short contributions by members.

We would also welcome suggestions for topics which help to set the historical context for the novels. For instance, a member might do a quick "show and tell" talk about an item which requires an explanation in modern footnotes to the novels – such as, what are the "halves", "Hessians", and "painted tops" cleaned by Sam Weller in the White Hart yard?

Please send any suggestions for meetings to The Hon. Gen. Secretaries, The Charles Dickens Museum, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX

FRIENDS OF THE DICKENS MUSEUM: Forthcoming events

Thursday 12th February: *Actors, Writers and Artists in Dickens's Time – An Evening of Talks by Visiting Speakers*

Wednesday 12th March: *Wine Quiz. An evening of wine tasting and a Dickens quiz.*

If you are interested in coming to these events please contact the Charles Dickens Museum on 020 7405 2127 ext 203, e-mail info@dickensmuseum.com

ALSO: Please note in your diaries, THURSDAY 29th MAY – DICKENS AT THE REFORM CLUB. A rare opportunity to dine at the prestigious Reform Club in Pall Mall.

Members of the Dickens Fellowship and Friends of the Charles Dickens Museum are invited to join members of the Thackeray Society dining club for an evening of fine food and wine in the library of the Reform Club. The speaker will be Professor Andrew Sanders talking on "Dickens and London". This is a black tie event and will cost around £50 per head. Booking forms will be sent out in April. For further information, please contact Joan Dicks: joan@dickshg.freemove.co.uk

A REMINDER...

As mentioned in the last *London Particular*, the performance on Wednesday 20th February of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* by the Warehouse Theatre Company in East Croydon will feature a post-show discussion in the auditorium with the director, cast and crew. Fellowship members Jan Recknal-Turner and her husband Paul have booked tickets for that night in the hope that other members will join them. For further information about performances and prices call the Box Office on 020 8680 4060 or visit the website www.warehousetheatre.co.uk

Dickens in the News

The Daily Telegraph of 7th January ran a long article by A.N. Wilson, *Comedy is the Best Antidote to Tragedy*, which explored the idea that Dickens coped with the horrors of life by the use of laughter and the grotesque: "His was the most glorious artistic apogee of a generalised English irony – witness the manner in which the population at large made Hitler a comic creation during the Blitz...Now we live in a different atmosphere. Esther Rantzen encourages the Artful Dodger to ring Childline. Mr Dombey and Mr Murdstone would be urged to seek family therapy. Mr Dorrit, rather than languishing in the Marshalsea, would find that his investments in Northern Rock had been compensated by the Chancellor of the Exchequer. Probably we are all much nicer in consequence, but with our *You and Yours* culture of whinge, we have lost our sense of humour. In consequence, we are less noble than Dickens."

On 19th January, *The Guardian* ran a lengthy piece on *Sweeney Todd*, the new movie about the demon barber starring Johnny Depp. The article noted that the movie is based upon *The String of Pearls*, published by Edward Lloyd, better known to Dickensians for his plagiarisms such as *The Penny Pickwick*, *Nickelas Nickelbery* and *Oliver Twiss*, all written by 'Bos'. The likely author of both *The String of Pearls* and the Bos canon was Thomas Peckett Prest, who made a name for himself as a composer and musician prior to becoming a hack writer. However, the article mentioned a forthcoming work, *The Wonderful and Surprising History of Sweeney Todd* by

Robert L. Mack, which suggests that *Martin Chuzzlewit* may well have inspired certain aspects of the Todd legend. It is perhaps significant that Tom Pinch worries that John Westlock will "begin to be afraid that I have strayed into one of those streets where the countrymen are murdered; and that I have been made into meat pies or some such horrible thing." It is also noteworthy that Poll Sweedlepipe is not only a hairdresser, but has premises next door but one to a mutton-pie shop. "An illustration by Phiz shows the two establishments nestling side by side. Mack suggests that the proximity of the shops in the narrative, combined with Phiz's illustration and with earlier references to cannibalism in the text could have provided inspiration for an author casting around for a plot."

The Sunday Times of 13th January ran a feature on television costume drama, which began by discussing various tongue-in-cheek designations for genres. "Swords 'n' Sandals" denotes action-packed heroic dramas about Greeks and Romans; "Clogs 'n' Shawls" means sagas about downtrodden but spirited northern lasses, in the tradition of Catherine Cookson. So how should Dickensian dramas be classified? The article suggested that Boz might be filed under "Fog 'n' Orphans"...

Please send any clippings or other submissions to the *London Particular* editorial address:

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A Final Thought...

*Can I view thee panting, lying
On thy stomach, without sighing;
Can I unmoved see thee dying
On a log, Expiring frog!*

Ode to an Expiring Frog by Mrs Leo Hunter,
Pickwick Papers, Chapter XV.

Postscript to the Final Thought: The *London Particular's* Editor was recently looking through an old book *Memories of Malling and its Valley* by C H Fielding, and he was surprised to discover that 'Moses' was Kentish dialect for a young frog. As we all know, 'Boz' is a corruption of 'Moses' – but one wonders whether Dickens, having grown up in Kent, was aware of the additional froggy connotations of his nom-de-plume?