

# London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

**"I THUS BECAME IMMESHED IN THE WEB..."** (*Mr Micawber*)

On behalf of the Dickens Bicentenary Committee, Dickens Museum Curator Florian Schweizer has just launched the website:

[www.dickens2012.org](http://www.dickens2012.org)

which all Dickensians are heartily encouraged to visit. The site was produced after liaison with the webmasters of other Dickens sites, so that it will not duplicate material such as biographical, literary and topographical details. (Although, it should be noted, links to such details are provided.) Instead, the site incorporates new technologies such as online forums and polls, Facebook and Youtube areas, an online events calendar and many other areas of Dickensian interest. All told, the site will be *the* online portal for the celebration of the two hundredth anniversary of Boz's birth.

Florian explains: "The website itself has a three-step progression which will affect the content on the site. The first phase involves bringing attention to the website; then, as the site becomes more popular, the content will focus more specifically on the bicentenary. This is where the second phase begins, and all the information regarding the bicentenary will need to be updated continuously to ensure it is up to date. Following the primary events of 2012, there will a third phase in which the website will serve as a testament to the celebration, with multimedia coverage of events, so that they can be enjoyed for years afterwards. The forums will remain active, as well as the calendar, to ensure that the site remains the Dickens hub well past 2012."

Florian is keen to know Fellowship members' thoughts on the site, so please visit, and leave comments and ideas.

\*\*\*\*\*

**FRIENDS OF THE DICKENS MUSEUM:  
Forthcoming events**

*Saturday 12<sup>th</sup> April, Guildhall Art Gallery: Victorian Artists in Photographs: G F Watts and his World.* With an introductory talk by Andrew Xavier, Director of the Charles Dickens Museum. A remarkable collection of photographs of "everyone who was anyone" in Victorian times, including Dickens. There will also be an opportunity to create our own Victorian-style 'Friends' photograph, using props from the basket if we wish. We meet at 2pm outside the entrance to the Guildhall Art Gallery, cost £5 per person including admission fee.

*Saturday 10<sup>th</sup> May: Boat trip to Richmond and back on 110 year-old Henley Steamer.* We will travel upriver from Westminster to Richmond and return (no stop at Richmond). The round trip will take approximately four hours, depending on tides, with commentary and light refreshments. The boat leaves Westminster Pier at 1.00pm. Cost £22 (£20 for Friends of the Dickens Museum). Please book early as places are limited. For further information call 020 7405 2127 ext 214 or email [info@dickensmuseum.com](mailto:info@dickensmuseum.com)

**"I find I am not disagreeably reminded of my dinner..."** (*Edwin Drood*, Chapter 2)

As advertised in the last *London Particular*, there will be a dinner with members of the Thackeray Society at the Reform Club on Thursday 29<sup>th</sup> May. Please contact Joan Dicks (telephone 020 7242 8575 or email [joan@dickshg.freemove.co.uk](mailto:joan@dickshg.freemove.co.uk)) for an application form, The speaker will be Andrew Sanders on *Dickens's London*. NB: This is a black tie event and costs £49.

**The Loquacious Cabman, Part II**

*Readers of the London Particular will remember Allan Clack's item in October 2006 about a cabbie*

who drove him to the Dickens Museum and who spoke incessantly about Boz. Now Allan writes: "What is it about London cab-drivers and Dickens? On another recent journey to the Museum, a young cockney driver enthused over Dickens, and Barnaby Rudge in particular. When we passed through Bloomsbury Square, scene of the ransacking of the Lord Chief Justice's house by the Gordon Rioters, an animated conversation ensued. And when we reached the Museum, the cabbie even turned off his meter so that he could talk some more about Dickens. Can't wait for my next trip to the Museum!"

### Dickens in the News

**Plenty of WAGS, but not from Bill Sikes's Bullseye?** *Oliver Twist* has featured in the news in three separate incidents. Many papers noted that Liverpool's Fashion Week in March would feature an *Oliver Twist*-themed event at the city's Kingdom Bar, well-known haunt of WAGS such as Coleen McLoughlin. While the BBC's new Saturday night TV Series, *I'd Do Anything*, which aims to find actors to play Nancy and *Oliver Twist* in a production of the musical *Oliver*, led to a comment from the host, camp comedian Graham Norton, that the hunt for *Oliver* could raise the birth rate, with prospective parents across the country increasing the surplus population (as it were) by producing their own cute *Olivers*. Said Norton in the *Daily Mirror* of 13<sup>th</sup> March: "The *Olivers* are adorable. People who gave up having kids will say 'Why don't we try again?' Across the country, 1000 ovaries will pop."

But of course, *Oliver*, as a show, embodies all the dangers inherent in the thespian warning "Never work with children or animals". And, as reported in the Southend newspaper, *The Echo*, on 13<sup>th</sup> March, the production by the Southend Operatic and Dramatic Society led to some unfortunate scene-stealing by Bronx, a bull-terrier, playing Bullseye. The dog's owner commented: "He flaps his leg and stamps. He got on stage when Bill was having a romantic moment with Nancy and did his dance, with his leg going up and down. Everyone started laughing."

The distracting dog is no longer involved in the production.

\*\*\*\*\*

The *Maidenhead Advertiser* of 13<sup>th</sup> March ran an article by its Business Editor, Carla Delaney, about her struggles, when she was a young woman, to break into journalism. She writes: "There weren't many female reporters in my office and the plum jobs were done by men. My first opportunity to have a column of my own presented itself as the 'John Huffam' column and

that name remained even though I was doing the work. People were surprised when a female answered the phone." She added that 'John Huffam' were Dickens's middle names, and that it was a long while before ideas from Dickens's era melted in editorial...

\*\*\*\*\*

*The Times* of March 8<sup>th</sup> ran an inspirational letter from a reader, David Taylor, in their "Your Say" column: "For me, the greatest fiction creates a world that is real, transcending that which we acknowledge. It does more than cast light on our lives, it breathes it. Dickens is an obvious example, along with the great Patrick White." This reminded the Editor of the *London Particular* of the time when he too was an admirer of White (before he discovered *Pickwick*), and it seemed appropriate to recall White's own view of Dickens, whose works White read in the Second World War, propping his *Everyman* editions on the steering wheel of a military truck, amid the siege of Tobruk: "I read and read...Detesting, misunderstanding Dickens when I was a boy, I had suddenly cottoned on to him. As blood flowed, and coagulated in suppurating wounds, as aircraft were brought down in flames and corpses tipped into the lime-pits of Europe, I saw Dickens as the pulse, the intact jugular vein of a life, which must continue, regardless of the destructive forces Dickens himself recognised." (From White's autobiography *Flaws in the Glass*.)

Please send any clippings etc to the *London Particular* editorial address:

**Stephen Jarvis, 1 Riverine, Grosvenor Drive,  
Maidenhead, Berks SL6 8PF, UK. Email:  
stephenjarvis@hotmail.com**

\*\*\*\*\*

### A note on Chatham's future, and a note on Chatham's past...

Please make a note in your diaries of the forthcoming **Chatham Dickens Day, Saturday 17<sup>th</sup> May**, a wide and varied celebration of Dickens's close association with the town of Chatham. Cost £25 including coffee, lunch and tea. For further details please contact John Knott on 01634 862688. And, as a final thought, consider Mr Pickwick's views on Chatham and its surrounding towns, as entered in his note-book: "The consumption of tobacco in these towns...must be very great, and the smell which pervades the streets must be exceedingly delicious to those who are extremely fond of smoking. A superficial traveller might object to the dirt, which is their leading characteristic; but to those who view it as an indication of traffic and commercial prosperity, it is truly gratifying."

*Pickwick Papers*, Chapter 2