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# London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

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**DR TONY WILLIAMS** Tony was recently presented with a certificate and commendation as Vice President of the Dickens Fellowship, in recognition of his dedication and commitment to the Fellowship over a number of decades. Tony was President of the Fellowship from 2015-2017. He also served as Hon Gen Sec from 1999-2006 and was Associate Editor of *The Dickensian* for many years. In recent years, he has withdrawn from events due to ill health. We all send him our very best wishes and our congratulations on this new award.

**MEET THE AUTHORS** at St George the Martyr Church, Borough High Street, SE1 1JA, also known as the Little Dorrit Church, at **2 pm on Wed 19 March 2025** in aid of the church's Vestry Restoration Fund. **LUCINDA DICKENS HAWKSLEY**, author of several books about her great-great-great-grandfather, Charles Dickens; **LYNN SHEPHERD** author of *The Man in Black*, based on *Bleak House*; and **KATHY GEORGE**, author of *Estella*, based on *Great Expectations*, and *The Scent of Oranges* (based on *Oliver Twist*). Suggested donation of £5 per person.

**THE CHARTERHOUSE MONTHLY MEETINGS** In January, our President, **Lucinda Dickens Hawksley**, and **Cindy Sughrue**, Director of the Charles Dickens Museum, jointly presented 'Dickens & St Giles'; in February our former HGS, Paul Graham, reflected on 'The Dickens Fellowship in 1925: a Year of Triumph & Tragedy'. Check your membership card for future talks.

**ANNUAL CONFERENCE** The Dickens Fellowship 118<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference and AGM will take place at **Canterbury** on **14-16 July 2025**. For further information follow link on Home Page of website: [www.dickensfellowship.org](http://www.dickensfellowship.org); or email [Jacqueline.Stamp99@gmail.com](mailto:Jacqueline.Stamp99@gmail.com) or ring +44 7812 995736. **NB THE DICKENSIAN** Spring edition 2025, and index (2024), should be issued in April.

**No longer a dead white male?** I note (*Times* 20.11.24) that "schools should cut down on theatre and museum trips and remove references to middle-class activities such as skiing holidays. 'Pupils from deprived backgrounds are alienated by jam-making and rocking-horses and house purchases being used in exam questions', said Lee Eliot Major, a professor of social mobility. The miners' strike, the Jarrow march and working-class heroes such as Charles Dickens and Mary Anning should be covered instead". I understand the point to an extent, but CD and palaeontologist Mary Anning seem a strange pairing. So do jam-making and rocking-horses. Rather odd, but a boost for CD anyway...

.... **but still needing a trigger** Students at the University of Roehampton have been given a trigger warning that nudity will feature in a module including Botticelli's Birth of Venus. Ex Monty Python star Terry Gilliam called this "absolute pathetic b\*\*\*\*\*s" (which it is). Perhaps they feel she should be fitted with a wetsuit. In 2022 a *Times* investigation found that universities had removed more than 1,000 books from reading-lists, to 'protect' students from 'challenging content'. Shakespeare (*Romeo and Juliet*), Dickens, George Orwell (1984) and Jane Austen were among those deemed to warrant warnings.

**Joan Armatrading** In the latest "History" magazine, singer-songwriter/guitarist Joan Armatrading chose CD as her "History Hero": "I particularly love Dickens's use of words – it's poetry really - and the language he used is the language we use today. I subconsciously lean on Dickens because ... I try to use words that have meaning and flow. I also admire him for all he did to help the less fortunate. I particularly like 'Hard Times' where Mr Gradgrind tells his class not to daydream - my whole existence is about daydreaming, as was Dickens's. It's how you create: you have to imagine something before you can make it tangible".

**A very appropriate witness** DF member Terry Wickens has sent in the following: "During the hearing of a case in the High Court of Justice

before Mr Baron Huddleston and a jury, Mr Dickens, a son of the famous novelist, counsel for the defendant, said he should call as a witness a Mr Pickwick. Baron Huddleston: Pickwick is a very appropriate witness to be called by Dickens. (Laughter). Mr Dickens: I fully believe that the sole reason why I was instructed in this case was that I might call Mr Pickwick. (Laughter). And it might interest your lordship to learn that this gentleman is a descendant – the grand-nephew, I believe – of Mr Moses Pickwick, who kept a coach at Bath; and I have very good reason to believe that it was from this Mr Moses Pickwick that the name of the immortal Pickwick was taken... You will remember that that very eccentric and faithful follower of Mr Pickwick – Sam Weller – seeing the name outside the coach, was indignant because he thought it was a personal reflection upon his employer, and he was accordingly anxious to inflict condign punishment upon the offender. (Laughter)."

**Mixed views of the Isle of Wight!** DF member (and former Hon Gen Sec of DF) **Edward Preston** has kindly sent in a newspaper cutting, from the *Isle of Wight Observer*, which notes that "A 175-year connection between CD and the IoW is being celebrated with the launch [on 3 May] of an interactive walking trail, designed by Isle of Wight Ramblers, in partnership with Ian Dickens, the writer's great-great-grandson, and Dickens historian Sue Lowday. The 6¼ mile Dickens Trail starts in Shanklin, taking in locations where CD stayed during his 1849 visit, including his holiday home. The trail winds over the Downs, descends into Ventnor and concludes in Bonchurch"...

...CD was equivocal, to say the least, about Bonchurch. He found it delightful at first - *there are views which are only equal to the Genoese shores of the Mediterranean... The sea-bathing is delicious*". Later, however, he found the climate debilitating: *"The first salubrious effect of which the Patient becomes conscious is an almost continual feeling of sickness, accompanied with great prostration of strength, so that his legs tremble under him... An extraordinary disposition to sleep (except at night, when his rest, in the event of his having any, is broken by incessant dreams) is always present... extreme depression of mind and a disposition to shed tears from morning to night. He is incapable of reading, at all times."* He concludes, *"It's a mistake! Of all the places I ever have been in, I have never been in one so difficult to exist in, pleasantly. Naples is hot and dirty, New York feverish, Washington bilious, Genoa exciting, Paris rainy – but Bonchurch, smashing. It's not hot, it's not close, I don't know what it is, but the prostration of it is awful."* I think one needs to allow for a great deal of Dickensian exaggeration here...

**Topical?** CD didn't have much to say in his novels about politics, but he certainly knew about bullies – Josiah Bounderby springs to mind (*HT*) crushing the wretched Stephen Blackpool when he appeals for help; Jonas Chuzzlewit bullies and attacks his wife and Tom Pinch; Daniel Quilp (*OCS*) terrorises everyone he meets; Major Bagstock (*D&S*) is the bane of his 'native' servant. Who's put all this in my mind, I wonder?

**Bank of Mum & Dad – reversed** I knew CD was dunned for money by his own father, John Dickens, and other relations. I hadn't quite realised just how bitterly CD resented this until I read the following in *The Selected Letters of Charles Dickens* (Ed. Jenny Hartley). He writes to his friend, Thomas Mitton in July 1843: ***"My dear Mitton, He is certain to do it again. There was no help but to pay it, as you so kindly did. But he is sure to do it again. Even now, with the knowledge of him which I have so dearly purchased, I am amazed and confounded by the audacity of his ingratitude. He, and all of them, look on me as a something to be plucked and torn to pieces for their advantage. They have no idea of, and no care for, my existence in any other light. My soul sickens at the thought of them"***.

**Key news from the Museum:** Dr Cindy Sughrue reminds us that CDM is now celebrating its centenary year. It has begun the year with a new special exhibition, **Dickens in Doughty Street: 100 Years of the Charles Dickens Museum**, which runs until **29 June 2025**. It celebrates the Museum's collections, from rarely-seen items that featured when the Museum first opened through to our most recent acquisitions, including letters, personal effects and many portraits of CD.

**Farewell Cindy** Dr Cindy Sughrue OBE, Director of CDM since 2015, is retiring. Cindy has done great work for the Museum, including coping with the difficult Covid years. She has also been a good friend to LP, sending many contributions. We wish her a very happy and fulfilling retirement. Welcome to **Frankie Kubicki**, Deputy Director, who will take over as Director this month. Frankie joined CDM as Curator 8 years ago. We wish her every success in her new role.

**"Leave the bottle on the chimley-piece, and let me put my lips to it when I am so disposed." (the glorious Mrs Gamp, MC) - or leave me a contribution/comment, please, to be sent to my chimley-piece at: 'Danesdyke', 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET or by email: [aligowans17@outlook.com](mailto:aligowans17@outlook.com).**