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# London Particular

## The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

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**Dickens's Desk** Most people will know the great man's desk (and chair) has been saved for the nation - the desk at which he wrote *Great Expectations* and *A Tale of Two Cities*. The Charles Dickens Museum has been given a grant of more than £780,000 by the National Heritage Memorial Fund to buy the desk which he used in his final home, Gad's Hill Place, in Kent. (*Daily Telegraph* 30.3.15). As an editorial in DT says, "It's a lot to pay for a desk, but it isn't any old desk. Although they (desk and chair) can already be seen at the Museum, they were in private ownership and might have been sold at auction. Now they have been bought for permanent display. This physical connection with the past is important and it is always fascinating to see where and how our greatest literary figures worked. Dickens's voluminous desk is certainly more robust than the tiny walnut table on which Jane Austen wrote some of her novels at Chawton. How much is that worth?"

**R L Stevenson Comes to Bloomsbury** On Tuesday 30 June, 23 members of the RLS Club of Edinburgh visited the Charles Dickens Museum as part of their four-day visit to London. After looking round the Museum, they were given a tour of the area by Fellowship members which included Coram Fields, the Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital and Gray's Inn. The Fellowship then provided drinks and nibbles at the Museum - which were enjoyed in the garden on the warmest day of the year so far. The Club members were a charming and intrepid bunch - they had previously followed the route of *Travels With a Donkey* through the Cevennes in France (complete with real donkeys), and visited Stevenson-related sites in New York, Australia and Samoa. The following evening they dined at Stevenson's London club, the Savile in Mayfair, where Ian Nimmo, President of the Club, spoke about Stevenson's time in and love of the Club. Professor Michael Slater - the guest of honour - talked of Dickens's own relations with Edinburgh, the only UK city to grant him its Freedom. The evening was rounded off by Paul Graham who gave a potted history of the Fellowship - recalling that there was a branch of the Fellowship in

Edinburgh until 1956. Its demise was attributed in part (in *The Dickensian* of autumn 1956) to the fact that its members had been paying only one shilling as their annual subscription since the end of the war!!

**An Important Find** Scholar Dr Jeremy Parrott has discovered a deluxe set of *All The Year Round*, complete with author attribution. Parrot believes that the set was Dickens's own and had been the property of Charles Dickens Junior. The attributions identify more than 300 authors who were responsible for 2,500 contributions. These include previously anonymous articles and stories by Wilkie Collins, Lewis Carroll and Elizabeth Gaskell. The original office-book recording the names of contributors to AYR has never been found. This exciting discovery of the annotated set owned by Dickens will be a great boon to scholars and students of Dickens's periodicals.

**Dickens on Lectures** Writing to a friend, Chandos Wren-Hoskyns, on 14 Dec 1863, Dickens says, 'Such heaps of intolerable rubbish of conceited words purporting to be Lectures, have I seen and heard, that the very name [of lecture] would have become hideous in my sight, but for Sydney Smith, Owen, and Faraday'. Michael Slater, who sent me this piece, notes that Dickens doesn't include either Carlyle or Thackeray, both of whom were celebrated lecturers. Michael adds: "Anyway, he hadn't heard mine and that's some comfort!"

**Mark Tapley** Following the quote in the last issue from Jerry White's article, "Dickens's Contribution to the War Effort", which included a great deal about the character of Mark Tapley (from Martin Chuzzlewit), I was delighted to receive the following email from Mark Dickens: "I was fascinated to read the article and the description of Mark Tapley. This is because my father (Peter Dickens) always told me that I was named after him. He said Mark was a Dickens character to aspire to and now I know why he was in the forefront of my father's mind. I only wish I had been able to live up to his expectations - but as a Royal Naval officer following a family naval

tradition, I have at least worn the Queen's uniform!"

**A Narrow Escape for CD** An article from the *Times* (10.3.15) states that stories unearthed in the British Newspaper Archive and published in the *Bygone Kent* magazine reveal criminal activity at Gad's Hill. On June 17 1862, the *South Eastern Gazette* reported a "diabolical attempt to overturn Mr C Dickens carriage" by James Stedman, a labourer. The writer was supposed to arrive at Higham, his local railway station, at 10.30 p.m. from London to be met by his groom, James Marsh. However, he missed the train and the carriage was driven back empty. Stedman was with a fellow workman when they saw Dickens's carriage drive to the station. "The prisoner immediately afterwards went into a field and drew the two garden rollers across the road to upset the carriage on its return," the story said. He was later caught by police. Sadly, it is not stated why CD was targeted. Andrew Rootes, the editor of *Bygone Kent*, said Stedman lacked the prowess of the criminal characters in CD's books. "He was a fairly hopeless type of criminal, nowhere as impressive as the list of malefactors in Dickens's novels, but worthy of a minor role," he said.

**Talking of Crime...** In an interview published in the *Daily Telegraph*, the American crime writer, John Grisham, slates the rise of Amazon which he says is destroying the market for authors, driving book prices down. He was asked if, in the age of Twitter etc, an episodic release of a novel might rekindle the fire? "Grisham is a big fan of Charles Dickens, whose serialisations were once as popular as iPhones and his own novels, but he isn't hopeful. He says his publisher tried it a few titles ago, but it didn't work. 'Back in Dickens's time all people had was books. Now they lose interest too quickly'".

**Dickens in a Lather...** A new Dickens adaptation for the BBC – called "Dickensian" - lifts characters from the novels and places them in a soap opera. Half-hour episodes will be 'laced with cliffhangers in a mischievous and irreverent take on the literary giant's work.' *Daily Telegraph* 30.5.15. Scrooge will bump into Fagin down the pub, while Mrs Bumble and Miss Havisham gossip in the street. Tony Jordan, the writer of the series, says, "It will bring a whole raft of new people to Dickens and his characters. You don't need to have read the books or know who the characters are. You can discover them with Dickensian. That makes it incredibly exciting. It's quite a simple concept. Take a selection of Dickens's most iconic characters and free them from the narrative of the book. Let them interact and see what it's like when Fagin meets Scrooge. I'm not going to

pretend to be a Dickens scholar" (Phew, that's a relief – Ed.). Apparently, it is "the most beautiful reworking of the world of Dickens that you could ever imagine, a real treat to watch". (Editorial reaction – I'd rather not say. But as a character in one of RLS's books might have said – "I hae ma doots".)

**Ron Moody** Fans of the 1960s musical "Oliver" will have been sad to read of the death, at the age of 91, of the actor who magnificently played the role of Fagin. That performance was the highlight of his career and I believe he didn't do too much of note afterwards. He did, however, get married for the first time at the age of 60 and proceed to father six children!

**Roger Rees** This versatile actor/director has just died aged 71. He was best known as *Nicholas Nickleby* in the wonderful 1982 Channel 4 TV dramatization of the RSC stage production. He later went to America where he appeared intermittently in *Cheers* and *The West Wing*.

#### **FORTHCOMING EVENT:**

**ANNUAL OUTING** **Hughenden**, Benjamin Disraeli's home in Buckinghamshire, on **Sat 5 September**. Disraeli (Earl of Beaconsfield) was twice Prime Minister. He was also a successful novelist: *Conningsby* (1844), *Sybil* (1845) and *Tancred* (1847) promoted the ideas of the 'Young England' Tories and sought to address the fact that there were 'Two Nations' in England: the Rich and the Poor. Disraeli famously, and not too modestly, said, 'When I want to read a novel, I write one!' We will tour the house and grounds, visit the church where he is buried, and be able to hear a talk on 'Dizzy'. We will depart from Embankment, near the tube station, at 9.00. The property is owned by the National Trust. The cost for members of the Trust will be £21 (but bring your NT card to ensure free admission). For non-NT members, the cost will be £30. Cheques should be made payable to DF, and sent with s.a.e. to Peter Duggan, 6 Citrus House, Alverton Street, Deptford, London SE8 5NP.

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'Joke? Ay; I never see a joke', Mr Honeythunder frowningly retorted. 'A joke is wasted upon me, sir.' (*Edwin Drood*) What would not be wasted on me would be more contributions: Alison Gowans, "Danesydyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – [aligowans@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:aligowans@hotmail.co.uk)