

London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

REVISED OPENING HOURS AT THE CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM

Members will be aware that they are entitled to free entry at the CDM in Doughty Street, on production of their membership card. CDM opening hours have been changed for 2016 and are now: Tues – Sun 10am – 5pm (last entry 4pm). **The Museum will be closed on Mondays** – except for public holiday Mondays when it will be open 10am – 5pm.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL - REMINDER

Members should have received a renewal form for 2016 with the last LP. Fees are unchanged, i.e. £17 for membership, £15 for *The Dickensian*. If you haven't renewed, please do so asap. If you've mislaid the form, send your name and address with cheque payable to Dickens Fellowship, or credit card details, to The Membership Secretary, Dickens Fellowship, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX. If you have renewed, you will have received membership card/programme for 2016.

Dickens and the war effort (Cont'd) Here's another quote from DF member Jerry White's article (TLS August 2014): 'A soldier in France wrote to the *Sheffield Daily Independent* in 1916 to say he had dreamt of Dickens after re-reading *A Tale of Two Cities* which he had found a comfort "in this land of death". In his dream, Dickens was visiting the trenches, on horseback and in khaki: "How the men cheered!" Another, returned from Egypt and the Dardanelles, wrote that books were the "chief want of the private soldier's life" and Dickens was their favourite.'

Philip Larkin cont'd In the last LP, I quoted some rather stern views on CD from Larkin in his *Letters to Monica*. He criticised CD for being "hectic and panic-stricken... constantly jerking your attention with queer names, queer characters etc". It was not all adverse criticism, however. Later he wrote to Monica about *Bleak House* (16 August 1954): 'every Chesney Wold paragraph is splendid, & every Inns of Court

paragraph too. I am enjoying it. It's as if someone had said to Dickens, Charley, I want a good long novel with plenty of dry old lawyers, and a miserable country house in Lincolnshire where it's always raining, and a mysterious affair about a girl, that everyone knows a bit of but no one knows all of – might make her tell part of the story ... I'm sure C.D. got it in a flash, & fitted the Jellabys [sic] & Smallweeds & Turveydrop in later. They aren't nearly as stirring as the rest, or (to me) interesting ...'.

Journalistic Howlers An article in the *Daily Telegraph* (3.12.15) describes how bills were run up by various famous people at a Savile Row tailor's. The article states: "Charles Dickens, *not famous for his dress sense*, is known to have paid off the debts of his eldest son, after he had run up a substantial bill with the tailors. Dickens's signature can be found on a cheque drawn on his Coutts bank account." A "historian", James Sherwood, is quoted in the article, saying: 'Dickens was never a customer himself – *he was notoriously parsimonious and he didn't really care much for his clothes*.' Not a great description of a man who was a dandy, famous for fancy waistcoats, and who also constantly gave money to feckless family members and devoted enormous energy to raising money for innumerable other causes.

Dickensian This BBC TV series, in which scriptwriter Tony Jordan has "*taken a selection of Dickens's most iconic characters and freed them from the narrative of the book*", is nearing its end – though I believe there are many more episodes lurking in the wings. Many people I've spoken to have enjoyed it very much and I'm told there has been a marked increase in visitor numbers to the Charles Dickens Museum, which is great news. Some of the acting has been superb, particularly the episode where Honoria Barbary (the future Lady Dedlock) gives birth, helped only by her sister - both actresses (Sophie Rundle and Alexandra Moen) were excellent; some fine acting also from Mrs Cratchit (Jennifer Hennessy) in a scene with the endearing Stephen Rea as Inspector Bucket. I liked the "back story" from *Great Expectations*, where we see Miss

Havisham being courted and deceived by Compeyson but it was rather too long-drawn-out. (People who didn't see *Dickensian* might be interested to know that these two, who are always just "Miss Havisham" and "Compeyson" in the book, were given first names – "Amelia" (fair enough) and *Meriwether!*)

Many characters, however, bear no resemblance to CD's originals and the actors are hampered by dull, modern, soap-opera-type dialogue which reduces them all to very ordinary people with CD's sparkle surgically removed. They're not funny, they're not monstrous – they're just sort of "soapy". Mrs Gamp is now just a nice old lady who likes a drop of gin; Mr & Mrs Bumble are simply embarrassing; Bill Sikes is an affectionate lover (or should I say "boyfriend") to Nancy – I could go on. This was supposed to be a way of introducing people to CD, but they won't know much more about him now than before *Dickensian* was aired and will probably wonder what all the fuss is about. Nice sets and costumes, though.

Dickensian cont'd... Frances Wilson (*Daily Telegraph* 4.12.15) calls Jordan's idea "essentially philistine and can only dilute the power of the author... Cutting and pasting great works is like being shown a pebble and told it is a cliff".

She adds, "As an academic, I saw something similar going on in English departments. Undergraduates, we were told, could not be expected to read an entire novel by Dickens and so it was best to give them something short, like *A Christmas Carol* or a passage or two from *Great Expectations* to examine in detail." Obviously the soldiers in the trenches (see overleaf) were made of sterner stuff.

Aid for Borrioboola-Gha? *Telegraph* journalist Philip Johnston wonders if Mrs Jellyby will feature in *Dickensian*. Mrs J is of course the "philanthropist" in *Bleak House*, so obsessed with establishing settlements in Africa that she neglects her own children. Johnston was reminded of her while reading that the Department for International Development (DfID) was using some of the UK aid budget for flood barriers in Serbia, at a time when Cumbria was in desperate straits through – well, flooding, actually. He says, "If the DfID is Mrs Jellyby, then the rest of us are John Jarndyce, that paragon of decency (or poor sap, depending on how you look at it) who stumps up for any cause, good or bad, large or small: 'everybody knew him, who wanted to do anything with anybody else's money', Dickens wrote. He could be describing the British taxpayer."

"**Old Curiosity Knocking Shop**" DF member Janet Recknell-Turner recently spotted this delicately-titled snippet in the *Evening Standard*: "*The secret Covent Garden {Wellington Street} retreat used by Charles Dickens to escape his wife and entertain the actress Ellen Ternan can now be rented on Airbnb at £174 a night. The cosy one-bedroom apartment sits above the Charles Dickens Coffee House and overlooks cobbled Tavistock Street.*" This was the editorial HQ of "*All the Year Round*", where CD used to work on the magazine and occasionally stay overnight. I think it very unlikely he used to meet Ellen there. Edgar Johnson in his biography of CD says, "*The move into London {from Gad's Hill} made it easier for him to see Ellen, who was now established with her mother at No. 2 Houghton Place, Ampthill Square, just off the Hampstead Road. Here he was able to visit her, coming up from Wellington Street...*"

CENTRAL PROGRAMME SPEAKER SWAP
Please note that the meeting on **Tuesday 19 April** will now feature Professor Malcolm Andrews, who will commemorate the 180th anniversary of the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* with a talk on *Illustrating Pickwick*. This talk was originally scheduled to take place on **Thursday 12 May**, when we will now welcome Professor Michael Slater MBE, who will speak on *The Waugs and Dickens*.

NOTICE OF AGM The AGM of the Dickens Fellowship will be held on Saturday 23 July at the Kings College Conference Centre at the University of Aberdeen to consider the reports of the Honorary Officers and discuss the business of the Fellowship. The current elected officers: Joint Honorary General Secretaries, Honorary Treasurer, and Honorary Editor of *The Dickensian* have all indicated that they wish to stand for re-election. Any member wishing to stand for any of these posts should inform the Fellowship, using the e-address: postbox@dickensfellowship.org by week commencing Monday 6 June.

There's nothin' so refreshen' as sleep, sir, as the servant girl said afore she drank the egg-cupful of laudanum.' (Sam Weller) Even more refreshen' to me would be some more contributions for LP, to be sent, please, to: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans@hotmail.co.uk