
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL REMINDER Just to let you know that it is time to renew your membership for 2022. If you have already renewed, or joined through the website, you will have received your membership card/programme for 2022, so please ignore this reminder. A postal application form is available in the "Subscribe" section of the Fellowship website. Fees are unchanged, i.e. £17 for membership, £15 for *The Dickensian*.

WHERE DICKENS WENT WRONG! On **Sat 9 July** we will resume our annual meeting at the Rugby Tavern pub in Great James's Street (near the Museum). This is an opportunity for members to have a light-hearted discussion about some Dickensian topic. This year we invite members to suggest how Dickens could have improved his plots. So if you think Little Nell should have lived; that the reformed Scrooge was committing commercial suicide; or that Mrs Quilp should have chosen her marital partner more carefully – here's your chance. **Please let the editor know (address below)** if you'd like to come along and put your proposal for 5 minutes or so on the day.

CD IN THE WILD WEST On 22 October 1842 Dickens wrote to Dr Southwood Smith and informed him: *'I want to see the very dreariest and most desolate portion of the sea-coast of Cornwall; and start next Thursday with a couple of friends, for St Michael's Mount'*. Dickens began his journey on the 27th and was away for eight or nine days. He was accompanied on this jaunt by John Forster, Daniel Maclise and Clarkson Stanfield. **Plans are afoot in Cornwall to commemorate the 180th anniversary of this visit.** Further details will follow in due course – watch this space!

Exhibitions at Charles Dickens Museum, Doughty Street The Director of the Museum,

Cindy Sughrue, reminds us that the exhibition entitled **'More! Oliver Twist, Dickens and Stories of the City'** – ends **13 March 2022**

.... **Coming soon – Picturing Pickwick: The Art of 'The Pickwick Papers'** exhibition opens **6 April 2022.** *'Picturing Pickwick'* examines the book's illustrations and explores the close, but at times tumultuous, relationship between Dickens and his illustrators. It includes original illustrations of *The Pickwick Papers*, partly written at Doughty Street. The display will also note the international reaction to the novel, exploring how the story came to Sardinia, where it would inspire Anna Marongiu, an artist who created 262 illustrations between 1928–1929. These rich artworks depict scenes from the novel that have rarely been illustrated. *The Pickwick Papers* caused a sensation, inspiring 'Pickwick Clubs' and societies to be set up in its honour. The exhibition features items including an 1837 Pickwick Club Minute Book, which captures the debates of one such society. The exhibition has been generously supported by the Dickens Fellowship, City Pickwick Club, Dickens Pickwick Club, Pickwick Bicycle Club and several individual donors.

Dickens & Tolstoy With Russia very much in the news at present, it was interesting to receive, from DF member **Roberta Berryman**, a quote from George Orwell's famous essay on Dickens, where he compares Dickens and Tolstoy: ***"If I were forced to compare Tolstoy with Dickens, I should say that Tolstoy's appeal will probably be wider in the long run, because Dickens is scarcely intelligible outside the English-speaking culture; on the other hand, Dickens is able to reach simple people, which Tolstoy is not. Tolstoy's characters can cross a frontier, Dickens's can be portrayed on a cigarette card. But one is no more obliged to choose between them than between a sausage and a rose. Their purposes barely intersect."*** Orwell also maintains that Dickens's characters are 'already finished and perfect' whereas Tolstoy's characters 'grow'. (He does not mention Pip in *Great Expectations*, who certainly changes and develops during the course of the story; and

what about Martin Chuzzlewit? Ed.) It would be interesting to hear from those of our DF members whose first language is not English what they feel about the comment that CD *'is scarcely intelligible outside the English-speaking culture'*. Roberta quoted other parts of Orwell's essay too, see next edition of L.P.

CD and Ireland DF member **Sean O Ceallaigh** writes from Dublin enclosing a copy of a periodical called *"Ireland's Own"*, containing an article he has written about Dickens. He reminds us that CD in his youth worked as a Parliamentary reporter and notes that, ***'When [Dickens] heard Daniel O'Connell's speech on 'The Irish Anti-Tithe Riots', he tells us, "I had to abandon my pencil and weep"'***. Sean relates also how CD gave readings in Dublin in 1869, when ***"The Police had to control the crowds around the Rotunda [Hospital]"*** and two hundred extra seats had to be squeezed in. Sean, who is 90 years old, tells me he has been a Dickens fan all his life.

Royalty I like L.P. to be topical when possible. There's been a lot about the royal family in the press recently, but CD hardly ever referred to royalty in his novels. I couldn't resist putting in the one quote I can remember, from *Our Mutual Friend*, where he describes a character as: *'That horrible old Lady Tippins (relict of the late Sir Thomas Tippins, knighted in mistake for somebody else by His Majesty King George III, who, while performing the ceremony, was graciously pleased to observe, "What, what, what? Who, who, who? Why, why, why?")'*

I wonder why... Philippa Gregory, historical novelist, recently admitted in the *Times* that she has *'never finished Nicholas Nickleby, although I've started it several times. I love most of the Dickens novels',* she says, *'and read and re-read Our Mutual Friend, I just don't get on with this one'*. How odd!

Facing facts during Hard Times In a business column in *The Times* last month, the writer was surprised at wording used by Andrew Bailey, governor of the Bank of England, in connection with the surge in inflation: ***'He came over like a modern-day Mr Gradgrind, with a no doubt unintentionally harsh message on pay to struggling families from a very well-paid central banker'***. Obviously, the journalist assumes people will still recognise this allusion to Gradgrind.

A new kind of censorship Royal Holloway, University of London has alerted literature students to aspects of *Oliver Twist* that might be upsetting. A tale of crime, poverty and murder

might cause "anxiety" or "distress". The university claims it has a responsibility to prepare students for "potentially sensitive topics" of "child abuse, domestic violence and racial prejudice, perhaps as a consequence of past experience". The University of Northampton is said to have issued an alert about George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, while the University of Salford did the same for Dickens's *Great Expectations* and Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*. How patronising, to say the least. The logical next step, I imagine, must be to prevent young people from having access to the news, which contains all sorts of nasty things.

An awkward dilemma! Dickens does some research in Liverpool – with a police escort – *'diving into the obscurest streets and lanes of the port'*.to find ways in which sailors ashore are rooked and mistreated (*The Uncommercial Traveller – Poor Mercantile Jack*). Entering a room in the slums, he admits: *'that I occasioned a difficulty in this establishment, by having taken a child in my arms. For, on my offering to restore it to a ferocious joker not unstimulated by rum, who claimed to be its mother, that unnatural parent put her hands behind her, and declined to accept it; backing into the fireplace, and very shrilly declaring... that she knowed it to be Law, that whoever took a child from its mother of his own will, was bound to stick to it. The uncommercial sense of being in a rather ridiculous position with the poor little child beginning to be frightened, was relieved by my worthy friend and fellow-constable, Trampfoot; who, laying hands on the article as if it were a Bottle, passed it on to the nearest woman, and bade her "take hold of that". As we came out, the Bottle was passed to the ferocious joker, and they all sat down as before.'*

A weather report from CD In 'Down with the Tide' (*Uncommercial Traveller*), CD describes *'lying in a Thames Police Galley in the deep shadow of Southwark Bridge, with our backs to the wind, it is true; but the wind being in a determined temper blew straight through us, and would not take the trouble to go round'*.

After the birth of Paul Dombey, his father urges the nurse to "take particular care of this young gentleman, Mrs. - ?" "Blockett, Sir?" suggested the nurse, a simpering piece of faded gentility, who did not presume to state her name as a fact, but merely offered it as a mild suggestion.' May I mildly suggest you send contributions/comments to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans17@outlook.com