
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

CONFERENCE 5-8 August, Portsmouth & Isle of Wight – now full but a waiting-list is in operation. **Guided tour of Charterhouse**, London, **Aug 24**, when Prof Cathy Waters (our current President) will hand over to her successor, Lucinda Dickens Hawksley. **Christmas lunch - 7 Dec** at the George and Vulture, London.

THE DICKENSIAN We can now inform subscribers that the Winter 2023 issue of *The Dickensian* is in production. It has been a difficult time with a wholesale change in the editorial team necessitated by illness. The newly appointed (acting) editorial team is now overseeing production of the outstanding issues: we are aiming to publish Winter 2023 edition this month (July) and the Spring 2024 edition in August, to be followed swiftly by Summer 2024. We thank subscribers for their patience. We are making every effort to get *The Dickensian* back on schedule as soon as possible.

NEWS FROM THE CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM: Special Exhibition - now open and runs until **12 January 2025**. **Faithful Companions: Charles Dickens and his Pets** During Dickens's lifetime, pets became a preoccupation of Victorian society. A man of his time, Dickens was himself a keen owner of animals. From the imposing dogs of his last home, Gad's Hill Place, to his three pet ravens, these animals provided the author with amusement, companionship and protection. They also provided Dickens with inspiration for his stories and articles, which chronicle the Victorians' burgeoning obsession with their pets. The exhibition explores the tales of Dickens and his pets, from Grip the talking raven to Bob the cat who extinguished Dickens's reading light to get more attention. Dickens's homes and work were full of animals and this special exhibition will, for the first time, explore the stories of Dickens's own pets and some of the famous animals from his novels.

A TALE OF TWO CITIES – a free talk onsite and online with Lucinda Hawksley Saturday 13 July at 2pm BST. *"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times..."* So began one of Dickens's most famous works, consistently ranked as one of the greatest novels of all time. From the contrasting landscapes of London and Paris to the profound questions of justice and sacrifice, it was a story into which Dickens poured his sharp wit, his political frustration and his vivid descriptive power. Lucinda will read extracts from the tale as she leads a discussion into the wider themes of the story. How did Dickens's travels around Europe come to shape the novel? What does the book say about his own political hopes and fears? And how was his private life influencing the tale? This is a hybrid event - you can join us live onsite at the CD Museum or virtually. This event is free to attend or you can choose to make a donation. [Click here to book an onsite seat.](#) [Click here to book an online ticket.](#)

There's no escaping the shadow of Dickens ... claims an article in *The Times* by Susie Goldsbrough (August last year): *"Dickens is dead. But is he? Everywhere I look at the moment I see Dickens. Zadie Smith has just reincarnated him in her first historical novel... Olivia Colman recently camped it up as Miss Havisham in Great Expectations, while a new season of Oliver Twist spin-off - Dodger – returned in time for Christmas. Fiction is stuck in a perpetual 1870, hovering anxiously by the big man's deathbed, unable to give up, well, the ghost. Why? Perhaps it's because the novel died with Dickens. The writing is never likely to be repeated because we don't read enough any more. Apparently only 17% of under-25s read in their everyday lives; phones have won, for now at least and I just hope this life-sucking mass addiction will eventually be regulated and constrained. And then perhaps we'll read again. And when that happens, the Victorians will be waiting: Cranford, Dr Thorne, Villette, The Mill on the Floss. 'The irreplaceable and unrepeatabe', is what Dickens biographer, Claire Tomalin, called him. 'The brilliance in the room'. He's still in the room, probably, somewhere near you on a shelf. An impatient man, waiting."*

And where's Ellen? DF member **Edin Volk Dervisefendic** tells me: "The Swedish national radio channel presented in March a thirty-minute programme about Dickens and the most significant features of his life, featuring three academics from Lund University. As a regular listener of Swedish Radio, I can say that Dickens was not a frequent guest on its programs, so this documentary was a surprise in every way. The participants all were truly inspired and spoke very highly of Dickens. But one thing at the end was very significant. When talking about a secret relationship that was supposed to remain hidden, none of the guests said the name that the listener expected to hear. We can only speculate about the reasons why only 'The Woman' was mentioned, but on the other hand it can serve as an idea for the editor (Anna Hammarén) to make a special documentary about Ellen Ternan!"

Dickens and cricket DF member **Maria Michael** notes that Wisden Cricketers' Almanack 2024 has an article on 'Literary cricketers' by James Runcie. Runcie mentions Dickens's love of cricket and the various references to it in *Barnaby Rudge*, *Great Expectations*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *The Pickwick Papers*. Runcie thinks it likely that Dickens's cricket XI would be full of larger-than-life characters such as Ian Botham. *As a postscript to this, I wonder what CD would have made of this sentence from a Times article (31 May): "One of the game's most high-profile figures has said 'Cricket must move away from its alcohol culture or it will continue to alienate Muslim fans'". [Ed.]*

CD and names A letter in the *Times* (25 May) comments: *'Those searching for the origin of the word "boffin" (Feedback, May 25) might consider Nicodemus Boffin in Charles Dickens's Our Mutual Friend. He is described as "an odd-looking old fellow". Dickens's genius for eccentric names is at its fullest in this novel, which also features Silas Wegg, Melvin Twemlow and John Podsnap.'* Under the title "Deathly inspiration", another letter (30 May) comments: ***'Further to the letter on Charles Dickens's genius for eccentric names, the author took much of his inspiration for his characters' names from graveyards: "Little Dorrit" was inspired by a headstone in the graveyard next to Rochester cathedral.'***

Dickens on drink Dr Leon Litvack, editor of the Dickens Letters Project at Queen's University Belfast, comments on CD's drinking habits after the discovery of a previously unknown letter. He was invited to attend a meeting of the fledgling St David's Society, a society of teetotal Welshmen. He apologised for not being able to go and wrote "Let me assure you that it would have been a

pleasure to me to have shared in your temperate festivities and that I have a high respect for the great objects which your society promotes". He proposed that the society's president make a toast on his behalf with a glass of water: **"Cold water – the element which in old times destroyed the people of the earth [Noah's flood], and which, in these later days, is working out their regeneration"**. "Dickens was 'a merry drinker'", Dr Litvack says, who spent the equivalent of £15,000 a year in today's money on alcohol and kept a cellar of 500 bottles at his home. [At parties] he loved to spike his punch and see what effect that had on his guests. He criticised the illustrator, George Cruikshank, for re-writing a fairy story to promote abstinence and "prohibition of the sale of spirituous liquors". Dr Litvack said: "It was a kind of wokery of the 19th century. I think he thought telling people not to drink was patronising and people had a right to enjoy themselves". *Being "merry" to the extent of spiking people's drinks was going a bit far for modern tastes! [Ed.]*

...and smoking I recently visited a manor house whose rooms included a gentleman's study, complete with a table containing a decanter of whisky and a glass, a book and a pipe. It did look cosy, I must say. It reminded me of an article by Dominic Sandbrook in *The Times* in March, describing various sorts of pipe and quoting from the Sherlock Holmes story, *The Adventure of the Copper Beeches*, where Holmes picks up "the long cherry-wood pipe which was wont to replace his clay when he was in a disputatious rather than a meditative mood". If Dr Watson is to be believed, though, the great man's favourite was a "disreputable" and "oily" clay pipe, the "companion of his deepest meditations". Watson was not alone in seeing pipe-smoking as a comfort to a deep thinker, since Dickens had advised his readers that a certain cure for melancholy was to "smoke a large pipe and drink a full bottle". These words made a great impression on the young Vincent van Gogh, who told his sister that whenever he was feeling suicidal, he followed the advice of the "incomparable Dickens". To be prescribed on the NHS? Perhaps not.

"Halloa, halloa, halloa! What's the matter here! Keep up your spirits. Never say die. Bow wow wow. I'm a devil, I'm a devil, I'm a devil. Hurrah!" At the risk of being as repetitive as *Barnaby Rudge's* raven, Grip, may I ask again for comments or contributions, please, to be sent to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET or by email – aligowans17@outlook.com