Dickens Down Under

The occasional newsletter of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship
ISSN 1174-5797 (paper) · ISSN 1179-383X (online)
Issue 117: November 2017
Edited by Jeni Curtis

Dickens Down Under

©The Editor, for the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship, 2017. The authors of *Dickens Down Under* assert their moral and legal rights with respect to their works in accordance with the Copyright Act 1994.

Dickens Down Under is published by the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship, 38 Otara St, Christchurch, New Zealand 8053, on an occasional basis, with around four issues a year (the first was March 1996). It is free to members of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship, and non-members may subscribe for $30.00 per year within New Zealand and $35.00 per year outside New Zealand, subscriptions to be paid in advance.

A version in portable document format (pdf), readable by Adobe Acrobat Reader (available free from www.adobe.com), is available from jeni.curtis@gmail.com at no charge.

Contents

From the Pen of the President

In two weeks' time we will enjoy our Christmas festival night and then our Dickens Fellowship year will come to an end.

It has been another wonderful year of afternoon programmes, evening activities, dinners, overseas visitors and, for some, wonderful conference experiences. We have all been thoroughly entertained.

The grave tones of *Great Expectations* held our attention for most of the year. A big thanks to all who produced, acted in or worked behind the scenes with costumes, props and sets, to make these afternoons so rich.

In our recent, final afternoon we were entertained by the delightful production of Charles Dickens's operetta, *The Village Coquettes*. This amusing operetta was superbly produced, for us, by Annabel Gormack and Kathleen Campbell. It was filled with humorous acting and delightful singing. For the occasion we were fortunate to have two guests, one who played the music and one who filled our meeting room with her beauty and magnificent, soprano voice. We also enjoyed the solo singing of both Peter and Harold Oakley, and the group singing of our other talented members.

It is not important to be talented to be a valued member of the Dickens Fellowship; we all contribute in our own way, be we active or as a member of the audience, but we are fortunate to have so many talented people among our membership and I would like to acknowledge and thank those that contribute to this special journal, *Dickens Down Under*, and to Jeni Curtis for the many hours she spends to bring it altogether.

This year we have experienced the loss of several of our members. Their deaths have saddened us and we have missed their presence and contributions at our sessions. On behalf of the fellowship, I would again like to pass on our sincere condolences. I know that loss of loved ones can be even more difficult at this time of year.

The world around us continues to surprise and shocks us with political unrest and natural disasters. With Christmas coming on I am aware of the effects of these things on so many people around the world.

From the Pen of the President

In *The Christmas Carol*, Dickens wrote,

> "I will honour Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year. I will live in the Past, the Present, and the Future. The Spirits of all Three shall strive within me. I will not shut out the lessons that they teach."

With these words in mind, let us be strong and continue to work towards a fulfilling and safe future for ourselves and our world.

Christmas greetings to you all.

Kathie La Rooij

The Ghost of Christmas Present and Scrooge

Reports on Past Meetings

October Programme Report

The October programme, prepared by Esmé Richards, was based on *Tom Tiddler's Ground*, published in the Christmas edition of *All the year Round* in 1861. Esmé began with a short introduction, explaining that, of the seven chapters, only the first and the last two were written by Dickens. The stories are based on a visit Dickens had made to the famed hermit of Hertfordshire, "mad" James Lucas, as described in *Dickens Down Under,* Issue 114, March 2017. The lynchpin of the story, Mr Traveller, is described as visiting Mr Mopes, a hermit, based on James Lucas himself.

Esmé had prepared a programme of three sketches, two talks, and a reading. Many of the scenes involved readings and those appointed the task were Pauline Francis-Fox, Jeni Curtis and Kathie La Rooij.

Sketch one, from chapter one, was "Picking up Soot and Cinders" by Charles Dickens. In the first scene, landlord of "The Peal of Bells," (Peter Lewis), suitably clad in waistcoat, bow-tie and apron, waited upon Mr Traveller (Chris Richards), who declared that a hermit must be an abominably dirty, intolerably conceited, slothful thing.

Scene Two, also from chapter one, took place at Tom Tiddler's ground, where Mr Traveller looked through the window bars to find the hermit, Mr Mopes, lying in soot and cinders. As a rat ran over him, it tickled the

Mr Traveller (Chris Richards) and the waiter (Peter Lewis)

Reports on Past Meetings

hermit's face, his eyes opened, and he sprang up towards his visitor! Looking the real thing in a longish, woolly wig and wrapped in a grubby blanket, Graeme Yardley gave not only Mr Traveller a start but the audience as well.

A stand-off ensued: Mr Traveller said he knew the hermit liked to be looked at, Mr Mopes stated he would never tell anyone why he lived as he did, each declared the other to be uncouth, the one told the other to leave his premises, and the other refused! Even when threatened with a gun, Mr Traveller coolly sat smoking his pipe, continued on, remonstrating on the immorality of the hermit's "miserable drivelling" and his having become "a deteriorated spectacle calculated to give the Devil (and perhaps the monkeys) pleasure."

Ros Calvert gave a talk next on Victorian Children's games,[1] informing us there is one called "Tom Tiddler's Ground" where someone stands on a heap of stones and tries to catch those around him or her. Other games mentioned

1 See page 24.

Mr Mopes (Graeme Yardley)

Reports on Past Meetings

were "Potato Race," "Follow the Leader" (not unlike "Simon Says"), skittles, football with a cloth or leather ball, and quoits, as well as a game played with quoits called "Ring Toss" with more than one stick to throw quoits over and each with a different score. There were also marbles, made of clay or actual marble, not glass. There was a game called "Hunt the Ring" where participants sat in a circle, passed around a string with a ring attached and, when it stopped, they had to guess who had the ring. There were spinning tops, hoops with sticks to roll them along with, and skipping ropes, among others.

Esmé gave a reading from chapter three, called "Hard Labour For Life," taken from "Picking Up Terrible Company" which was written by Amelia B. Edwards. A Frenchman, François Thierry, had committed a political offence and was condemned to the galleys. The excerpt told of his transportation to Toulon where he became "Prisoner Number Two Hundred and Seven," was "married" to his cell-mate by their being clapped in joined irons then told the punishments due escapees.

Ros Calvert

Reports on Past Meetings

"Picking up Waifs at Sea" was written by Wilkie Collins and comprised all of chapter four and was the theme of the second sketch. Scene One, "Voyage on The Adventure" opened with Captain Thomas Gillop (Peter Oakley), the commander of the ship, being surprised and then infuriated by the ship's surgeon, Mr Jolly (John Spain), informing him another passenger would soon be joining them. Realisation that a birth was imminent had not decreased the Captain's anger towards Mrs Smallchild when the steward's mate (William Oakley) appeared and informed Mr Jolly that another such passenger, Mrs Heavysides, was also about to increase the ship's population!

Captain Gillop (Peter Oakley), Mr Jolly (John Spain) and Mr Heavysides (Maurice Jalfon)

Reports on Past Meetings

"Two New Passengers" was the subject of scene two and of much discussion and dilemma when an hysterical Mrs Drabble, the stewardess (Vanessa Grenfell) was led onto the quarterdeck by Mr Jolly and placed on a chair amidst a gathering of the captain, the first mate (Henry Oakley), and cabin passengers, Messrs Smallchild, Sims and Purling (Ros Calvert, John Sullivan and Robert Calvert-Griffin respectively). Mrs Drabble was beside herself because she was unable to recall which babe belonged to which mother!

"Maternal instinct" did not solve the problem as neither mother protested when their blue-eyed, blonde-headed babies were swapped! Mr Smallchild was content to let the Captain make a decision. Mr Simon Heavysides (Maurice Jalfon), a steerage passenger, already having seven children and poor

Captain Gillop (Peter Oakley), Mr Purling (Robert Calvert-Griffin), Mr Sims (John Sullivan), Mrs Drabble (Vanessa Grenfell) and Mr Jolly (John Spain)

Reports on Past Meetings

circumstances, said Mr Smallchild could take both of them! It was therefore decided by the Captain that the lighter infant would go to the Smallchilds and the heavier to the Heavysides.

The reader informed us that the parsons and lawyers did nothing subsequently to change the situation and that Mr Heavysides's off-spring, so called, bemoaned the fact that Mr Smallchild became a rich man and Heavysides Junior considered he looked more like a Smallchild while the latter's son looked more like Heavysides!

Chris Richards gave an informative and interesting talk on "The Collins' Contribution." [2] Wilkie Collins (1824–1889) commenced a nightly story-telling regime whilst still at school and began to write while an apprentice. He later studied law but did not practise it, his main income being earned from his writing. In 1856, Dickens recognized his talents and encouraged Wilkie to join

2 See page 27..

Miss Kitty (Relda Oakley) and Bella (Eilish Moran)

Reports on Past Meetings

him on the permanent staff of *Household Words*. Wilkie's long-lasting fame was achieved with his four novels, *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale* and *The Moonstone*, the first of which was published in *All The Year Round*.

Dickens took an interest in Wilkie's younger brother, artist Charles Collins (1828–1873) in 1852, perhaps influencing his subsequent turn to writing. His most successful results were humorous essays, several articles in *Household Words*, three series in *All The Year Round*, and three novels in the 1860s. His skills were often criticized by Dickens, although the public admired them. In 1870, at his then father-in-law, Dickens's, request, he drew the illustration for the cover of the first number of *Edwin Drood*, but was too unwell to do more. The influences of the Victorian period values can be seen in both the Collins brothers, often overlaying their own personalities, but the control of Charles Dickens himself is always evident. Clearly the Collinses concocted their contribution but Dickens dissected their dialogue.

Sketch three was from chapter six, "Picking Up Miss Kimmeens," and was called "Midsummer Holidays." Miss Kitty Kimmeens was played by Relda Oakley and Eilish Moran took the part of Bella the housemaid. The self-helpful, steady and loving, little Kitty was left alone with Bella for the school holidays, Miss Pupford, whose establishment it was, being otherwise engaged and the five remaining pupils having gone home. "Wouldn't you like your Bella to go too?" asked the crafty maid, making it seem Kitty's idea that she go and visit her "sick brother-in-law," and within five minutes she was gone! Kitty began to brood, wondering if anyone cared for her, and if so why they left her. Her thoughts becoming increasingly warped; she saw people as untruthful, hateful even! Then she sprang from the chair, repudiating her negativity and looked abroad for wholesome sympathy to bestow and receive.

At the end of the programme, Jeni Curtis thanked Esmé for an interesting and varied afternoon's entertainment.

VSG

Harry Furniss: The Tinker's Philosophy (1910)

Reports on Past Meetings

November Programme Report

The programme, following the business section of the November meeting, was devoted entirely to the dramatized presentation of the libretto of Charles Dickens's comic operetta, *The Village Coquettes*. Written very early in Dickens's writing career, this was his one and only attempt at a musical production and he was to later feel very dissatisfied with it and would not even hold a copy of it within his library. Despite this, we all enjoyed a thoroughly entertaining afternoon, actors and audience both. Annabel Gormack took on the role of producer, assisted by Kathleen Campbell, and Peter Oakley was musical director. Earlier in the year, Annabel's first task was to obtain an original copy of the work and arrange for the printing of copies to be made available for members, whilst Peter Oakley sought to locate whatever musical scores he could locate and in this he was greatly assisted by Michael Rogers, our representative in London. (Please see Annabel's introduction to the operetta,[1] and also see an introduction as given at our March meeting and printed in our March issue, number 114, of *Dickens Down Under* for details of the writing and initial performances in 1836.)

The libretto was written by Charles Dickens and the music was by John Hullah. Our cast of actors was not expected to sing; instead, under Peter Oakley's baton, four solo pieces were sung by members, Harold Oakley and Peter Oakley and guest singer, Elisabeth Alberts, while guest pianist, Craig Wilkinson, accompanied on the keyboard. The final musical number, in the final scene, was sung together by our soloists, joined by Ros Calvert, Jeni Curtis, Bernie Frankpitt, and Marla Hughes.

Annabel Gormack and Kathleen Campbell

1 See page 33.

Reports on Past Meetings

The operetta of two acts was set in an English village in the autumn of 1792, with three rural scenes in Act One and five scenes in Act Two. Briefly, it is the story of two village maidens, Lucy Benson (Jeni Curtis) and her cousin, Rose (Eilish Moran)—the Coquettes—who are betrothed to George Edmonds (Vanessa Grenfell) and John Maddox (William Oakley). But at harvest time, the two girls transfer their affections to Squire Norton (John Sullivan) and his London crony, the Honourable Sparkins Flam (Chris Richards). The Squire tries to persuade Lucy to elope with him but her father, Old Benson (John Spain) overhears him and banishes him from the farm. The Squire, in retaliation, threatens to not renew the farm's lease which is due the following day. Flam's proposed abduction of Lucy at the Harvest Home Ball that night, to assist the Squire, but really for his own benefit of a monetary reward, gives rise to mix ups and melodrama after the comic character, Martin Stokes (Graham Yardley)

John Maddox (William Oakley)

Young and Old Benson (Marla Hughes and John Spain)

Reports on Past Meetings

intervenes. Needless to say all is sorted by the end of Act Two and the rustic sweethearts are finally reconciled.

Annabel opened Act One, scene I, reciting what would have been the opening musical number, "Hail to the Merry Autumn Days." The farm workers and villagers were gathering in the rick-yard after a full day of toil in the fields as they neared the end of harvest time. Included here was Henry Oakley, who played various roles as villagers and a servant. Sheaths of wheat and farm implements decorated the fairly simple sets. While enjoying refreshments the chatters turned to the recent attentions of the Squire and his London friend, Sparkins Flam, towards Lucy and her cousin Rose, and how those attentions

Squire Norton (John Sullivan)

Mr Sparkins Flam
(Chris Richards)

Reports on Past Meetings

were encouraged by our sweet heroines, much to the chagrin of their former *beaux*, George Benson and John Maddox. After the Squire and Flam joined the group, Lucy, responding to the Squire's approaches, said that it was hard to forget her first and early love, as the other cast members faded away, leaving just Lucy at the rear of the stage, while our guest soloist, Elisabeth Alberts, sang Lucy's song, "Love is Not a Feeling to Pass Away." This device of leaving only the actor, whose song was being sung, on stage with the soloist, proved most effective and was employed for all the solo numbers.

Scene 2, on open ground near the village, opened with George Edmunds entering, musing sadly on how the fallen leaves were such a contrast to the

Mr Martin Stokes
(Graeme Yardley)

George Edmunds (Vanessa Grenfell)

Reports on Past Meetings

green and bright leaves of early spring which were on the tree when he had first meet Lucy in the same spot. Harold Oakley then sang "Autumn Leaves," while Edmunds stood sadly nearby. As the attentions of the Squire and Flam increase towards Lucy and Rose, the ire of their former *beaux* rose to a degree that Rose was fearful of murder if the men should confront each other. Meanwhile the audience was becoming aware of the insincerity of Flam's advances towards Rose.

Scene 3, in the farmyard kitchen, Old Benson, Lucy's father, was seated listening to what Martin Stokes, a neighbouring farmer friend, with much hesitation and frequent asides, had to say about the Squire's intentions towards

Above: Rose (Eilish Moran) and Lucy Benson (Jeni Curtis)

Right: Villager (Henry Oakley

Reports on Past Meetings

Lucy. He also told him that he had been told that the Squire boasted that Lucy was prepared to elope with him whenever he gave the word. Old Benson was incensed and left to find the Squire to confront him. Meanwhile, Young Benson, Lucy's brother (Marla Hughes), entered looking for Lucy. Finding Martin Stokes there alone, Martin suggested that she might be with the Squire. When the Squire arrived, Young Benson put to him that his treacherous intentions towards Lucy could well have serious consequences to an old man in his declining years. After Young Benson left, the Squire began to think about what the consequences of his action would be on the old farmer. Peter Oakley here sang the solo, "The Child and the Old Man Sat Alone," while the Squire pondered nearby. Lucy arrived and the Squire begged her to leave with him that night. Later, when Old Benson arrived and saw the two together, harsh words were exchanged and the old man banished the Squire from his farm. But the Squire had the last word. The farm belonged to him, the lease of the farm ended the following day and

Rose (Eilish Moran) and Mr Sparkins Flam (Chris Richards)

Reports on Past Meetings

the Squire would not renew it. He told Benson that he and his family would be banished from the only home they had ever known.

Act Two, Scene 1, opened in an apartment at the Hall, the Squire's home. The Squire was having second thoughts about banishing Benson and his family from the farm. Lucy and Rose arrived. Lucy told the Squire she could not desert her original lover, assuming this would make him think again about allowing her family to stay on the farm. But no, the Squire would keep to his resolution of renewing the lease. In the meantime, Flam had received an official letter from London, demanding payment of a debt. Flam thought that he would do his friend, the Squire, a good deed for which he hoped for monetary remuneration. This he could use to repay the debt he owed. He would lure Lucy out of the Harvest Home Ball that evening and whisk her away to a distant place where the grateful Squire would join her. He was unaware that this was no longer part of the Squire's plans. He wrote a letter which he planned to give to the Squire,

Mr Sparkins Flam (Chris Richards) and Martin Stokes (Graeme Yardley)

Reports on Past Meetings

who would no doubt be eternally grateful, once the plan was executed. He put his note in an envelope not realising he had mixed the notes, putting in the letter about the owed debt into the envelope intended for the Squire.

We were aware that things were slowly getting out of control when Martin Stokes arrived, under pretence of giving called-for assistance to Flam. Flam told him about his plans for the abduction, not mentioning names and Martin, incorrectly, assumed it is to be Flam's desire, the lovely Rose, who was to be abducted, rather than Lucy!

Scene 2 was very short and found the Squire in the village seeking out Old Benson and George Edmonds to repair the mischief he had caused. His song about the joys of living in the country was recited by the Squire.

George Edmonds (Vanessa Grenfell), Lucy (Jeni Curtis),
Old Benson (John Spain) and Rose (Eilish Moran)

Reports on Past Meetings

Scene 3 was back in the rick-yard of the opening scene. The Squire arrived to tell Benson that the lease was renewed, but Bensen rejected the offer, thinking that it was payment for his daughter Lucy. The Squire told him that Lucy had convinced him that morning of her love for Edmunds and that he, the Squire, honoured her too much to injure her, or Old Bensen. They shook hands.

Scene 4 was set in the moonlight on the avenue leading to the Hall. The house was gaily lit for the Harvest Home Ball. The backdrop for this scene had the back flat draped in a very star-filled piece of cloth on which was trained torch light to portray the moon. It was very simple but very effective. Martin Stokes, after a short converse with Flam, assured him that the planned abduction was all under control, while aside, he confided to us that he did not intend to carry out

Old Benson (John Spain), John Maddox (William Oakley), Squire Norton (John Sullivan), Mr Sparkins Flam (Chris Richards) and Martin Stokes (Graeme Yardley)

Reports on Past Meetings

this assignment at all. Flam departed. The villagers passed by with greetings, on their way to the ball. Martin waited to waylay John Maddox and Rose, the innocent victim. When they eventually came along, happily reconciled again, Martin told them of the plan for the abduction of Rose. Startled and terrified to hear this, she screamed and fell into Maddox's arms. Little by little, with Maddox, her betrothed, on one side and Martin Stokes on the other, the two men strove to calm her and assure her they would take care of her and prevent any mischief from befalling her. At last she was calmed, entreating both men to "hold me fast, Mr Stokes,—don't let me go, John," as they left the stage. Lucy entered, sad at having to appear bright but sad at heart, pinning for her *beau*, whom she thought she had lost. She sang, or, rather, our guest soloist Elisabeth sang, "How Beautiful the Eventide."

The final scene was set in the brilliantly lit ballroom. Lucy felt too hot to dance and preferred to sit by an open window. Flam followed her out. Martin surreptitiously slipped Flam's note to the Squire, without revealing himself. A scream was heard from the garden. Edmunds entered in a dishevelled state with Lucy in his arms. He delivered her to her father and Rose, who comforted her as Flam, his clothes torn and his face and hair in disarray, was led in by

Bernie Frankpitt, Harold Oakley, Elizabeth Alberts, Peter Oakley, Marla Hughes, Rose Calvert and Jeni Curtis

Reports on Past Meetings

Maddox and Martin. Flam was surprised when the Squire renounced him as rascal and a scoundrel. Aside to the Squire, he told him, "that's right, keep it up," thinking that the Squire was putting on a pretence of having no knowledge of the attempted abduction. He told the assembled villagers, "tis false; it was done with his consent. He has my letter in his pocket acquainting him of my intention." But when the letter was produced, it was found to be the one that Flam had received about his dishonourable debt and his disgraceful character. The Squire ordered Flam from his home as Flam realised his mistake. He took his leave with a "bye-bye, Norton! Farewell, grubs!" and he was gone.

The production ended with a song sung by the entire musical group, as mentioned at the beginning of this report, led by Peter Oakley, singing "No Light Bound." It was a fitting end to a most entertaining afternoon. Annabel then thanked the members of the cast, presenting the two ladies of the cast and Elisabeth Alberts, the soloist, with a posy of flowers each, while each member of the cast and the musical group received a memento of chocolate. Kathie la Rooij proposed a vote of thanks to Annabel, Kathleen and Peter which was seconded by a hearty round of applause.

ESR

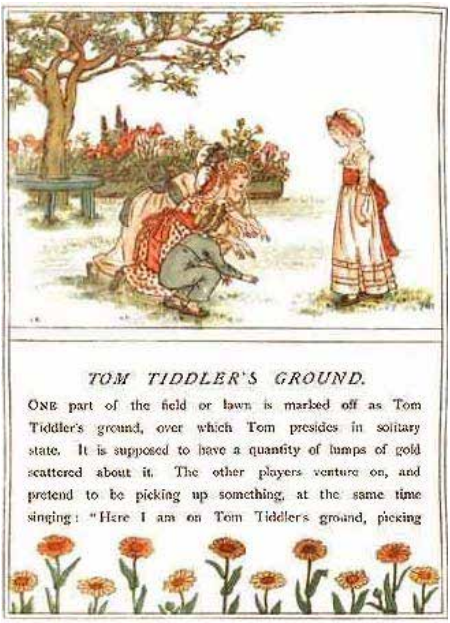
Peter Oakley, Craig Wilkinson, John Spain (obscured), Eilish Moran, Harold Oakley, Elizabeth Alperts, Jeni Curtis, Vanessa Grenfell, Graeme Yardley, John Sullivan, Chris Richards, Marla Hughes and Bernie Frankpitt

Talks from Past Meetings

Outdoor Games in the Times of Charles Dickens—
Ros Calvert

Today I am going to tell you about some of the outdoor games children (and adults) played in Victorian times.

Because it is the title of the book we are studying today, I am starting with "Tom Tiddler's Ground," also known as "Tommy Tiddler's Ground." One person stood on a pile of rock or stones while other players rushed the heap yelling, "Here I am on Tom Tiddler's Ground" while "Tom" tried to capture them or keep them off. If he managed to catch someone, the victim became the new "Tom" and the original "Tom" became one of the invaders. This game has modern incarnations in various forms of tag, capture the flag, and so on.



TOM TIDDLER'S GROUND.

ONE part of the field or lawn is marked off as Tom Tiddler's ground, over which Tom presides in solitary state. It is supposed to have a quantity of lumps of gold scattered about it. The other players venture on, and pretend to be picking up something, at the same time singing: "Here I am on Tom Tiddler's ground, picking

Tom Tiddler's Ground

"Potato Race" was a game played by two people at a time who raced to pick up potatoes with a teaspoon and place them in a basket. The potatoes (or small balls) were placed in two rows about three feet apart, with a dozen potatoes in each row. The basket was placed at one end between the two rows. The aim of the game was to be the first to pick up all the potatoes in your row and drop them in the basket without touching them with your fingers. If you dropped a potato, you had to pick it up with the teaspoon again without touching it with your fingers. This was not a game for the clumsy!

"Follow the Leader" was a game where the players formed a line behind the leader and imitated their every move. The leader could do whatever they wanted, including

Outdoor Games

marching, stopping, jumping, stooping down, kicking, dancing, whistling or standing in various poses. This game is still played today and the game "Simon Says" is another variant.

"Hunt the Ring" was a game where the players formed a circle holding a piece of string which had a ring (often a curtain ring) threaded on it. The string was then tied to form a circle. The players then passed the ring from person to person, hiding it in their hands. Another player stood in the middle of the circle and tried to guess who was holding the ring at any time. This was made more difficult by players using hand movements to confuse them. If the central player guessed correctly, the player caught holding the ring took their place in the centre.

Football is a game that has been played throughout the ages. The balls were made of leather or, in poorer neighbourhoods, cloth tightly wadded together. Skittles was played with a hard, round ball and usually nine wooden skittles. The object was to knock over as many skittles as possible. Quoits and "Ring Toss" involved trying to toss rope rings over poles or pegs laid on the ground. Points would be scored for successful tosses.

Children would have played with different toys also. Marbles were made of clay or, in some wealthier families, real marble. Skipping ropes were popular,

Street Football

Improvised hoops

Outdoor Games

more with girls, and were usually home-made, some with beautifully carved handles. Tops and whips were used both indoors and outdoors. A leather strap or piece of string was wound around the top of a cylindrical object with a pointed bottom. The strap would then be pulled to make the top spin. The string or leather strap would then be used to whip the sides of the top to keep it spinning. Hoops and sticks were also played with, often as a competition to see who could keep the hoop spinning longest by hitting it on the side with the stick. Hobby horses were also used indoors and outdoors. These were made with a pole or dowel and a horse's head made from cloth and leather fitted on the top. Some had wheels on the bottom.

So, as you can see, many of the games people played in Dickens's time are still played in some form today, although many have developed into being played more as sports or for very young children.

References:

Wikipedia www.merriam-webster.com "The Judges Lodging" Website of the Historic House of the same name Victorian Games, Victorian Children https://

Spinning Tops

Talks from Past Meetings

The Collins Contribution—Chris Richards

Tom Tiddler's Ground has seven chapter stories. Dickens authored three but always encouraged suitable contributors to his *Household Words* and *All The Year Round* publications. Thus we have the Collins brothers, sons of William Collins, well-known artist and portrait painter and his wife Harriet, also of an artistic background.

Wilkie Collins (1824–1889) was born and brought up in Marylebone, London, where he spent much of his life. When just twelve years old, however, his parents took him and younger brother Charles to live in Italy for two years before returning to England where boarding schooling resumed. Was it the Continental influence or the dormitory bully that encouraged young Wilkie? Anyway, to appease his school aggressor, he commenced a nightly storytelling regime. Leaving school at age seventeen, he was apprenticed to a firm of

Wilkie Collins painted by Charles Collins

Wilkie Collins in later life

The Collins Contribution

tea merchants. He hated the job, and started writing at this point, and then commenced as a law student from 1846 to 1851, when he was called to the bar. He did not, however, ever practise law. His main income in the 1850s was earned by journalism and contributions to *Bentley's Miscellany* and *The Leader*.

Wilkie first met Charles Dickens in 1851. Wilkie had joined an amateur theatrical which was a fundraiser for the Guild of Literature and Art. He developed a firm friendship with Dickens and became a frequent visitor to Tavistock House and Gad's Hill. His success grew further with three novels, and then the plays *The Lighthouse*, in 1855, and *The Frozen Deep*, in 1856. Dickens recognized his talents and encouraged Wilkie to join him on the permanent staff of *Household Words*, with a wage of five guineas per week. However, Wilkie's health was poor, with rheumatic gout or neuralgia. This affected his eyes and he frequently required a secretary to record for him. Many treatments were tried, including Turkish and electric baths, health spas, hypnotism and quinine. And

Caroline Graves

The Collins Contribution

then he started on laudanum (opium), to which he developed a huge tolerance. It was during the 1860s that his long-lasting fame was achieved with his four novels, *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, *Armadale* and *The Moonstone*, the first of which was published in *All The Year Round*.

Despite it being Victorian times, Wilkie became rather well-known for his home life. He met a widow, Caroline Graves, in the mid-50s, who already had a daughter. They moved in and lived together for the next thirty years, without bothering about the conventions of marriage. However, about 1864, Wilkie, then forty, made the acquaintance of a nineteen-year-old Martha Rudd and, in 1868, she was given residence within walking distance of Wilkie's house. Wilkie walked frequently! They never married, but had three children together. The affair seemed to cause a bit of a rift between Wilkie and Caroline. In 1868, she married another man. Wilkie attended the marriage. So impressed was Caroline with this that, by 1871, she had moved back to live with Wilkie. Confused?

Martha Rudd

The Collins Contribution

Dickens might have understood. Wilkie continued writing into the 1880s, but his health declined, with heart problems, and, following a stroke and bronchitis, he died in 1889. First lady Caroline is buried alongside him.

Charles Collins (1828–1873), Wilkie's younger brother, was tall, good-looking and quite unlike Wilkie in both appearance and character. Schooling was at a college in Lancashire. But Charlie lacked self-confidence and was possessed with strong religious principles. However he did take part in Wilkie's amateur theatricals. In 1843, he commenced study at the Royal Academy Schools, and became a contemporary of painters Millais and Holman Hunt and was associated with the foundation of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood. This group attempted to reform the mechanistic approach of artists following Raphael and Michelangelo. Charlie fell hopelessly in love with Maria Rossetti, sister of Dante Gabriel Rossetti. She rejected him and joined an Anglican order for women. He blamed this failure on his red hair which he then tried to dye. Significantly his most famous painting was *Convent Thoughts*, in 1850, of a novice nun in a garden.

In 1852, Charlie's mother, Harriet, introduced Charlie to Charles Dickens who took an interest in him and began promoting his career. In the late 1850s, Charlie gave painting away for writing, his most successful results being humorous essays collected under the title *The Eye Witness*, in 1860. Several articles appeared in *Household Words* and there were three series in *All The Year Round*, and three novels in the 1860s.

Charles Dickens's favourite daughter, Katey, herself a painter, admired Charlie for his artistic ability, and, in the late 1850s, they became good friends. Katey at this stage was feeling some of the ill-feeling from

Charles Collins drawn by Millais

The Collins Contribution

society towards her father, following his marital dalliance and, to avoid this, sought an escape. Charlie was her refuge. By then Charlie was a regular at Gad's Hill. He proposed in late 1859 and she accepted, to her father's deep disappointment. She later admitted she was not in the least in love with him, but did admire him and also was desperate to leave the family home! They wed in 1860. Dickens felt the marriage to be a disaster and was after found sobbing into her wedding dress! There were no children from the union.

Katey Dickens painted by Charles Collins

The Collins Contribution

Charlie continued in his writing, but his skills were often criticized by Dickens, although the public admired them. In 1870, at his father-in-law's request, he drew the illustration for the cover of the first number of *Edwin Drood*, but was too unwell to do more. His last ten years were fraught with emotional problems. He developed stomach cancer and died in 1873. Widow Katey, however, continued with her painting, and she married again, to another artist, Carlo Perugini.

The influences of the Victorian period values can be seen in both the Collins brothers, often overlaying their own personalities, but the control of Charles Dickens himself is always evident. Clearly the Collinses concocted their contribution but Dickens dissected their dialogue.

References:

Gasson, Andrew. Wilkie Collins-A Short Biography. wilkie-collins.info/wilki_collins-biography 1998–2010

Gasson, Andrew. Wilkie Collins's Family. wilkie-collins.info_charles.htm 1998-2010

Hawksley, Lucinda. Katey: The Life and Loves of Dickens's Artist Daughter. Doubleday a Division of Transworld Publishers, 2006

Charles Collins: *Convent Thoughts*

Talks from Past Meetings

The Village Coquettes—An Introduction
Annabel Gormack

The Village Coquettes was one of Dickens's early works and one that he was not proud of in later life. It came about through the friendship of Charles's sister, Fanny Dickens, with a young composer, John Pyke Hullah. Fanny and John studied together at the Royal Academy of Music. John Hullah met Charles Dickens and they decided to embark on the writing of a light opera together. Hullah first had the idea of writing a piece set in Italy to be called *The Gondolier* but Dickens wanted something set in England. And so *The Village Coquettes* was born.

At this time Dickens was working for *The Morning Chronicle* and Catherine's father, George Hogarth, happened to meet the popular light-opera tenor John Braham on the very day a complimentary review written by Dickens appeared in the *Chronicle*. Braham was touched by the sentiments expressed by Dickens and agreed to stage the play. He had recently become a theatrical producer. There was a scramble to finish but within fifteen days *The Village Coquettes* was completed and accepted. To put the timing into context, one week later *Sketches by Boz* was published and it would be two months before Dickens began his *Pickwick Papers*.

At Braham's request, Dickens added the character of Martin Stokes, a non-singing, "low comedy part." This was a vehicle for the great J. P. Hartley whom Braham had just signed. Dickens and Hartley became good friends and Dickens dedicated the play to him. Braham himself took the leading role of Squire Norton.

However, it was another play of Dickens that first made it to the stage, *The Strange Gentleman*, which ran for fifty performances. On the last night of *The Strange Gentleman*, 6 December 1836, *The Village Coquettes* made it on to the playbill for its first performance. It was not to prove a popular success and the reviews were decidedly mixed. The run closed after seventeen performances, the last of which was that of Christmas Eve 1836. It was revived the next year for a few performances, the last of these on 17 May 1837. On 7 April, Boz had asked for his name to be removed from the playbill.

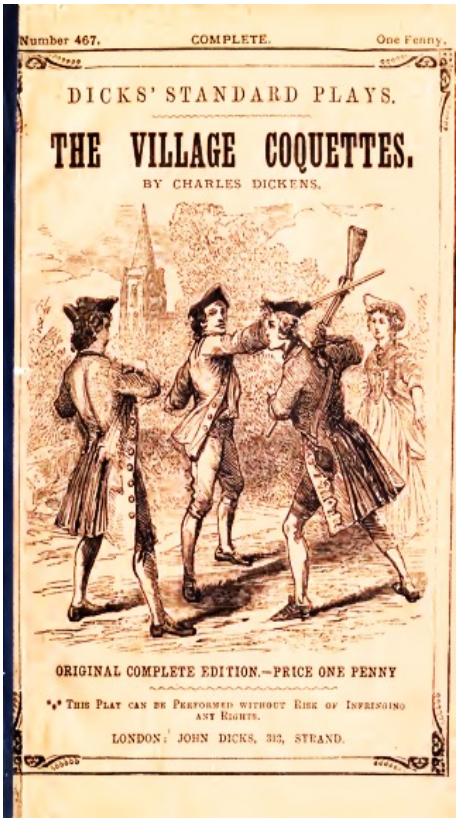
The Village Coquettes—An Introduction

One Henry Burnett, who had played Squire Norton on several occasions, went on to marry Fanny Dickens on 13 September 1837. The libretto was published by Bentley on 22 December 1836; the price was two shillings. However, Bentley later sold Dickens his surplus stock, some 355 copies. Dickens paid nine pounds, nine shillings to buy the stock up and, we presume, dispose of them.

The original music was presumed lost in a tragic fire in Edinburgh, shortly after the first run of the play had closed. It was amongst a collection of theatre music held by the Theatre Royal's librarian. Sir Frederick Bridge reconstructed the music for a revival of the burletta in 1924. It was again reconstructed, somewhat more thoroughly, by Edward J. Chadfield in 1937. The play was again revived in 1956.

Owing to the enquiries of our own Peter Oakley and Michael Rogers, our proxy in London, some of the 1927 musical score has been unearthed at the Dickens House Museum in London, where it had lain undiscovered for a long time. Thanks to Peter Oakley's efforts we are very pleased to bring you today some of John Hullah's music. It will really enliven our performance of the play.

So, sit back and enjoy!



The Village Coquettes

The Village Coquettes—an anonymous review by John Forster[1]

THEATRICAL EXAMINER

ST. JAMES'S THEATRE

An opera, or, as they call it at this house, *an operatic burletta*, in two acts, entitled the *Village Coquettes*—"the drama" and the "words of the song" by Boz; the "music by John Hullah"—was produced on Tuesday evening. This piece is a compound of Gerald Burgoyne's *Lord of the Manor*, and of Jerrold's *Rent-day*, but very far inferior to either. The scene is laid in a country village in England, in the year 1729, and the costume of that day is attempted. The plot and dialogue are totally unworthy of Boz.

One *Squire Norton* (Mr Braham), a wealthy man,—a compound of the *Truemore* and *Sir John Contrast* of Burgoyne, with a considerable spice of Bickerstaff's *Hawthorn* added,—has picked up a fashionable swindler, the *Honourable Sparkins Flam* (Mr Barnett),—an imitation of Burgoyne's *Young Contrast*,—and these two gentlemen amuse themselves with paying some compliments to a couple of country lasses, *Lucy Benson* and *Rose* (Miss Rainforth and Miss Smith),—whereupon these ladies, dismissing a couple of country lovers, *George Edmunds* and *John Maddox* (Messrs Bennett and Gardner), and being taken by the glitter of greatness in a most womanly and natural manner, prefer the men clad in purple and fine linen to the tillers of the earth. A busy-body, one *Mr Martin Stokes* (Harley), now acquaints old *Farmer Benson* (Strickland) that these young ladies have moonlight assignations with our two patricians. The old farmer falls into a fury; the bumpkin lovers and a virtuous brother join him; and all straightway utter certain admitted and well worn sentiments which are sure to touch the springs of feeling in all those who are not absolutely sick of the old clap-trap, and taken ill whenever they hear it. These sentiments are to be met with in Burgoyne's opera of the *Lord of the Manor*, and are pretty strongly iterated in Jerrold's *Rent-day*. After all this takes place, and when the usual

1 This review is reprinted from http://home.earthlink.net/~bsabatini/Inimitable-Boz/etexts/Village%20Coquettes.html. The punctuation is as in the original.

The Village Coquettes—Forster's review

epithets (which poor men in a passion, on the stage, always apply to rich ones, when the rich meddle too nearly with their domestic arrangements) have been let off, Mr Braham (the squire) incontinently resolves to turn the old farmer out of his holding, because he will not consent to the ruin of his daughter, and he also scolds a little upon the occasion; a finale thereupon is sung to the first act, and a *tableau* formed after the manner of the ejectment in the *Rent-day*.

In the second act the squire begins to think he has not behaved "exactly right," and the two young ladies presenting themselves at his house, to tell him that he is an inhuman monster for turning out *Farmer Benson*, and that they never really preferred him or his friend *Flam* to their two barn-door lovers, he very generously permits them to stay in the farm, father and brother, and lovers and all. He then marches off and tells the farmer his resolution, and gives a ball to celebrate the event. From this ball his friend, the *Honourable Sparkins Flam*, contrives to steal the squire's former innamorato for him, but without his knowledge. This causes *Flam* to be knocked down, and be brought back a prisoner. The squire turns his friend out of his house, swearing he had no hand in it, and the ball goes on.

John Braham

Not to speak of the lack of originality which this piece presents, it has also the demerit of having the incidents, such as they are, most clumsily hung together. The ejectment scene and *tableau à la Rent Day*, for instance, concludes one act in which the landlord is irritated to the highest degree. The next act commences at once with the same gentleman remorseful, and in this mood the two coquettes

The Village Coquettes—Forster's review

are introduced to pay him a visit—repentant as a pair of Magdalens, the only non-repentant among them being the squire's partner, *Mr Flam*, and him they turn out of the room. Now instead of converting the inflammatory landlord by their prayers or reasoning powers, the ladies at once proceed to acquaint him that nothing but the fine attitudes of himself and friend had gained their affections, so he had better let their relation stay in the farm; and they add that they had discovered that their quondam village lovers were much better men than the squire and his friend. This address, so *likely* to soothe the irritation of a gentleman in the squire's circumstances, and so extremely judicious, causes the squire to swear that they shall remain in the farm. *Mr Flam*, of course, is in disgrace with the ladies, and the squire intimates to him that they must now be let alone. After this, and during the ball which the squire gives to celebrate his repentance, *Miss Lucy*, the squire's choice, makes the audience to understand that she is miserable, and that the late events have incapacitated her for dancing, her young man not having quite got over her turning him off;—she therefore takes the immoral Mr Flam's arm, and strolls into the garden, the said Flam having a carriage ready to carry her off for the squire. Now as the squire is repentant, the lady repentant, and Flam out of favour with both, this is all vastly mysterious; however, at the fall of the curtain, Mr Harley came forward, and asked the audience "if it were all right?" They made a great din—we presume in acquiescence—and he then proceeded to beg favour for the piece, in that whining, half apologetic, all-familiar strain, now so very common on our stage. He desired the audience to applaud. They applauded. To repeat the same. They repeated it; and a disgusting farce was kept up between the favourite actor and his patrons, which we can hardly think will bear repetition, unless the house is on all occasions filled with orders.

When the curtain fell, Braham brought out Miss Rainforth, she pulled on Miss Smith, Bennet and Strickland followed, Barnett and all the rest paraded themselves,—and then the audience screamed for Boz! Now we have a great respect and liking for Boz; the Pickwick Papers have made him, as our readers are very well aware, an especial favourite with us; and we have no idea of his being exhibited gratis. Bad as the opera is, however, we feel assured that if Mr Braham will make arrangements to parade the real living Boz every night after that opera, he will insure for it a certain attraction. Boz appeared, and bowed and smiled and disappeared, and left the audience in perfect consternation that

The Village Coquettes—Forster's review

he neither resembled the portraits of Pickwick, Snodgrass, Winkle, nor Tupman. Some critics in the gallery were said to have expected Samuel Weller. The disappointment was deeply and generally felt. We think, however, that Mr Braham has still a right to exhibit a large wood-cut of Pickwick on his bills, with an intimation that Boz will be shown nightly after the opera. It would be no very exaggerated theatrical puff according to the present system.

We have now to say a word of the music, and we are compelled to state that its utter insignificance makes our task a brief one. The only song which we think to have any merit is that commencing "Autumn leaves." It is introduced by rather a pretty obligato passage on the horn. This song was sung very neatly by Mr Bennet. The finale to the first act is not remarkable, but yet not devoid of merit. There is in the finale to the first act a short quintette which is very well harmonized. The instrumentation throughout the opera is not appropriate; but the band of this theatre is so inefficient, that it can hardly do justice to any music. In this band there is a little boy who beats the drums, but never tunes them. He should be whipt.

The costume is absolutely disfiguring. Mr Braham himself is inducted into the strangest red velvet coat we can remember to have seen, surmounted by a hunting-cap, and underwritten by a pair of long gaiters. Signor

John Hullah

The Village Coquettes—Forster's review

somebody, who exhibits wax figures, and rejoices in mounted men who ride in procession through the streets, might study Mr Braham's costume with advantage for his cavalry.

Miss Rainforth had not one note of music in which she could use her talents with any effect. This young lady (evidently brought before the public of the metropolis, as is too frequently the case, without having had any previous practice in the country) labours under the disadvantage of being completely a novice in the business of the stage. However, to our thinking, she evinces promise of becoming a fair actress in serious characters; and, as far as the part allowed, she manifested evidently a very proper conception of it; but, alas! she was dressed more like *Deborah Woodcock* than any other person we know of. Miss Smith acted the part of *Rose*. We have already given it as our opinion that this young lady should never sing except with her sister. Of Mr Strickland's ill-used farmer we are happy to speak favourably, and Mr Parry was as effective in the virtuous brother as the part would allow. Harley made as much of a *Paul Pry* kind of character as possible. Mr Barnett made a miserable business of a fop; his acting was harsh, overstrained, and unnatural.

Elizabeth Rainforth

Mr Hullah is, we understand, a young gentleman of the Royal Academy. We think he has completely mistaken the *genre* of English music. We must conceive it to be an error to set English words to music after the manner

The Village Coquettes—Forster's review

of any foreign school. We think that words so set never can be effective. Barnett has set English words for the drama with more success than any composer of the present day except Weber; and the manner in which that great composer treated *Oberon* proves that the English lyrical drama is capable of a distinctive school.

We hear that an opera composed by Barnett is about to appear at Drury-lane. The composer will there meet with a band capable of giving any music effect, and we shall be most happy to see our national opera vindicated.

St James Theatre, 1836

Obituary

John De la Bere (1922–2017)

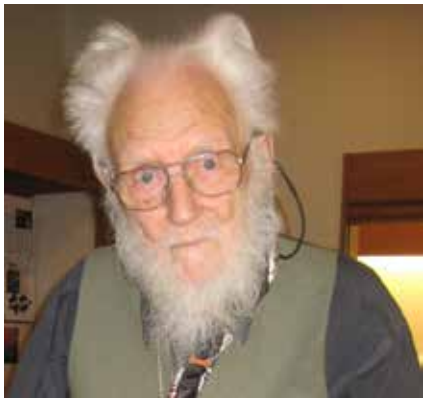
John De la Bere joined the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship, with his wife Wendy, on 6 May 1989; they were the first of the series of members introduced to the Fellowship by his and Wendy's friend Mary Aynsley (Sister Mary Carmel R.S.M.). Born 23 November 1922, he remained a member to the end of his long life on 23 June 2017. He was an active member, still attending up to 2016, and continuing acting in sketches as late as 2016. From time to time he wrote pieces in *Dickens Down Under* (see issues 19, 20, 25, 31 and 59), but his influence was perhaps more importantly in advice on typesetting; among the publications that he typeset was the journal of the New Zealand Royal Society.

Professionally, he was a mathematician, and any search of the internet will find his activities in that field, and in the field that he was perhaps more eminent in, that of Anglican liturgy: he was a member of the Prayer Book Commission, and his extensive library included many rare works in that field.

He was a man of wide knowledge, and it was difficult to find topics in which he was at a loss. I recall years ago trying to find an explanation of how what amounts to the key-signature notation in plainsong is to be interpreted. I had tried the music staff at the university, and could find nobody who understood it. Eventually I found out. Later, conversing with John (who was tone-deaf, and in the church was generally discounted by the musical community), I found that he knew how to interpret the notation, even though he could not hear the results. To this day, he is the only person I have met who understood the notation.

He was called upon by the Fellowship to relate Dickens to social movements of Dickens's time; we drew on his areas of expertise. He declined invitations to serve on the committee, but was always ready to participate in the presentation of programmes, and especially in the general conversations over afternoon tea at the end of the programmes.

Peter Oakley



John De la Bere

Fellowship Notices

New Members

We are pleased to welcome the following new members:

Alessandra Adams (Alex), 152 B Wilsons Road, St. Martins, Christchurch 8022; phone 021 126 4927; email, asa.isa42@gmail.com.

Judith Coullie, 12 Landsdowne Tce, Cashmere, Christchurch 8024; phone 03 3693618 (UC) or 021 025 67737; email, judith.coullie@canterbury.ac.

Ronnie Davey, 40 A Hamilton Avenue, Christchurch 8053; phone 021 336 954; email, oscarboscar.davey@gmail.com.

Changes of Email Address

Kathie La Rooij's email address is kathiela@gmail.com.

Lesley McKone's new email address is lesleymckone1@gmail.com.

Peter Oakley's email address is now ongoroo@gmail.com.

The Annual Picnic

Our annual picnic will be held on Saturday 6 January 2018, on the Archery Lawn of the Botanic Gardens. We will meet at 12 midday. Bring a picnic lunch and something to sit on. If it is wet on the 6th then we will meet on the following Saturday, 13 January. If you are unsure of the weather, please phone Annabel Gormack, 027 465 1827.

The 206th Birthday Dinner

The Birthday Dinner will be held at the Quality Hotel Elms, 456 Papanui Road, Christchurch, on Sunday, 4 February 2018, meeting at 12 noon. Payment is to be made in advance, and should be made to the treasurer, Suzanne Waters, PO Box 40–106, Christchurch 8140, as soon as possible and certainly no later than 12 January. The cost is $38.50.

Illustrations

The illustrations on pages 1 (Townley Green), 12 (Harry Furniss), and 44 (E. G. Dalziel) can be found at http://www.victorianweb.org/victorian/art/illustration, scanned image and text by Philip V. Allingham; on page 4, at https://blog.bookstellyouwhy.com/bid/230024/Charles-Dickens-Father-of-Modern-Christmas; on pages 24 and 25, at https://victorianchildren.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/03/Victorian-Toys-and-Games-Poor-Victorian-Children-Playing.jpg; on page 26, at http://www.bbc.co.uk/schools/primaryhistory/victorian_britain/children_at_play/https://www.pinterest.nz/pin/173107179400296901/?lp=true; on page 27, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilkie_Collins#/media/File:Wilkie_Collins_1853.jpg; on pages 28 and 29, at http://www.wilkie-collins.info/family; on pages 30 and 32, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Allston_Collins; on page 31 at https://artuk.org/discover/artworks/katey-dickens-18391929-191229/search/actor:collins-charles-allston-18281873/page/1/view_as/grid; on page 34, https://archive.org/details/villagecoquettes00dickuoft; on page 36, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Braham; on page 39, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabeth_Rainforth#/media/File:Elizabeth_Rainforth_Love_in_a_Village.jpg, and on page 40, at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/St_James%27s_Theatre.

The photographs on pages 5–10, 17, 19 and 20 were taken by Jeni Curtis, or on her camera; on pages 13–18 by Annabel Gormack,on pages 21–23 by Esmé Richards, and on page 41 by Vanessa Grenfell. All have been edited by Jeni Curtis.

Tom Tiddler's Ground