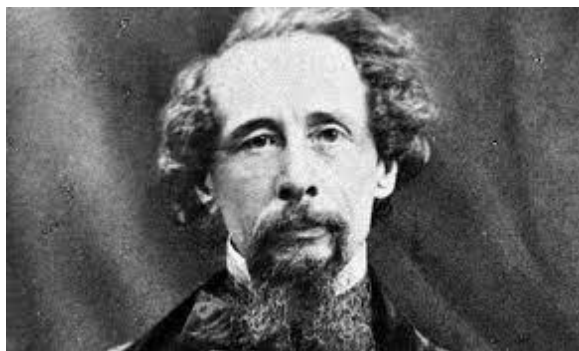


# GRAD GREETINGS



November 2021      Volume 13, Issue 10

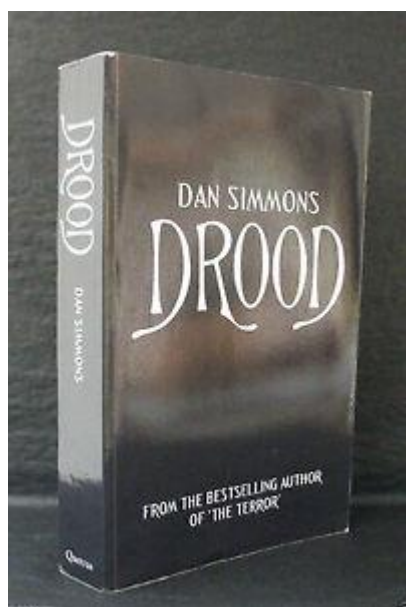
## NEXT MEETING

Date: Saturday, November 20, 2021  
Time: 11:00 am – 1:00 pm PDT

Place:     Riverside Main Library  
          The Carnegie room  
Address:  3900 Mission Inn Ave.  
          Riverside, CA 92501  
          (w/ ZOOM Hybrid)

Discussion: **DROOD** by Dan Simmons  
              Ch. 28-40

Presenter: **Vikky Pickett**



The Greater Riverside Area



A Proud Branch Member (#204) since 2009

## CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

Happy November Everyone! For the first time in two long years....a wonderful Holiday season awaits!

We present to you our tenth issue of our Volume 13 2021 newsletter. We are very excited about this upcoming Saturday, as we get to return to our new venue, the Carnegie room at the Riverside Main library. Did I mention that this room houses the rare, scarce antique Children's book collection? It is fantastic!

Please find within an informative and entertaining 2015 essay, **Charles Dickens, a.k.a. "The Unparalleled Necromancer**, written by Paul Anthony Jones for Mental Floss. This highlights a very gushingly funny reminiscence of an Macready Christmas party with Dickens conjuring and dancing by Jayne Carlyle.

Your **GRAD GRIND** features an early autobiographical letter written by Dickens to Wilkie Collins; along with a short expose' of Saint Ghastly Grim, the featured cemetery of *DROOD*; and biographical introductions to George Dolby and W.H. Wills, both of whom are featured prominently in the book

Due to the immense enormity of *DROOD*, we are going devoting four months to it, so the required reading is manageable. It is our intention to meet monthly in a hybrid setting: physically at the new Riverside Main Library, along with zooming in. For you locals, we look forward to seeing you Saturday as Vikky presents highlights from chapters 28-40.

We will be discussing and deciding upon our Holiday charity donations and sponsorships on Saturday.

Please check out our back page for upcoming Fellowship Dickensian-related Zoom events.

## Charles Dickens, a.k.a. "The Unparalleled Necromancer"

BY PAUL ANTHONY JONES

In the summer of 1849, a magician going by the name of Rhia Rhama Ros gave a performance in Bonchurch, a coastal resort on the Isle of Wight off the southern coast of England. Billed as "The Unparalleled Necromancer," and claiming to have been "educated cabalistically in the Orange Groves of Salamanca," Rhoo's conjuring act featured several bizarre tricks, including making playing cards magically burst into flames, transporting a woman's watch from inside a wooden box and into the middle of a loaf of bread, and even cooking a steaming hot plum pudding in a gentleman's top hat. With tricks like that, the act would undoubtedly have been a memorable show—but what made it all the more impressive was that the eccentric conjuror "Rhia Rhama Rhoo" was in fact the great English novelist Charles Dickens.

Dickens' interest in theater and performance is well known—as a boy, he had wanted to be an actor, not a writer, and he may well have ended up in the theater had he not fallen ill on the day of an important audition in 1832, when he was 20 years old. Even still, before his writing career took off, Dickens wrote, starred in, and directed a number of amateur productions in London in the 1830s. He dedicated *Nicholas Nickleby* to the renowned Victorian stage actor William Macready; he packed his novels full of actors, actresses, and other theatrical characters; and whenever he gave public readings of his books, Dickens would always annotate his text with stage directions like "beckon down," "shudder," and "look round in terror" to make his performances all the more dramatic. It worked, too: the Scottish critic and historian Thomas Carlyle once called him "a whole tragic, comic, heroic theatre ... performing under one hat."

Not long after the publication of *The Pickwick Papers* in 1837, Dickens did a reading of *Nicholas Nickleby* that was on the same bill as Ramo Samee, a famous juggler and magician. A few years later, he went to see a performance by a renowned Austrian magician named Ludwig Döbler. At the time, Döbler was at the height of his fame and had performed all across Europe for the likes of the Austrian Emperor Francis I and, while in London, Queen Victoria. He had spent much of his professional life designing and manufacturing his own unique stage props—including a magical pistol that was able to light 100 candles all at once, and a bottomless wine bottle, from which any drink imaginable could be poured on request—all of which helped him put on a truly remarkable show.

Dickens was immediately hooked. After seeing Döbler's performance, he—together with his friend (and eventual biographer) John Forster—purchased the entire stock of a magicians' supply store that was going out of business and began putting on amateur conjuring shows at home and at parties. According to Jayne Carlyle, Thomas Carlyle's wife, who saw Dickens put on a show at a Macready's Christmas party in December 1843, he eventually became a remarkably good performer. She wrote to her cousin:

But then it was the *very* most agreeable party that ever I was at in London – everybody there seemed animated with one purpose -to make up to Mrs. Macready and her children for the absence of 'the Tragic Actor', and so amiable a purpose produced the most joyous results. Dickens and Forster above all exerted themselves until the perspiration was pouring down, and they seemed *drunk* with their efforts!

Only think of that excellent Dickens playing the conjuror for one whole hour – the best conjuror I ever saw – (and I have paid money to see several) – and Forster acting as his servant. This part of the entertainment concluded with a plum pudding made out of raw flour, raw eggs – all the raw usual ingredients – boiled in a gentleman's hat – and tumbled out reeking – all in one minute before the eyes of the astonished children and the astonished grown people! That trick – and his other of changing ladies pocket handkerchiefs into comfits, and a box full of bran into a box full of – a live guinea pig! Would enable him to make a handsome subsistence, let the bookseller trade go as it please.

Then the dancing – old Major Burns with his one eye, old Jerdan of the *Literary Gazette* (escaped out of the Rules of the Queen's Bench for the great occasion), the gigantic Thackeray, etc., etc., all capering like *Maenades*!! Dickens did all but go down on his knees to make *me* – waltz with him! But I thought I did my part well enough in talking the maddest nonsense with *him*, Forster, Thackeray and Maclise, without attempting the impossible.



(continued on pg. 5)

## GRAD GRIND

By Tim Clark, Chairman



### Did You Know?

(Interesting Drood-related tid-bits to whet the Dickensian Whistle)

#### DICKENS GIVES WILKIE COLLINS DETAILS OF HIS LIFE

Tavistock House June  
the Sixth, 1856

My Dear Collins,

I have never seen anything about myself in print which has much correctness in it – any biographical account of myself I mean. I do not supply such particulars when I am asked for them by editors and compilers, simply because I am asked for them every day. If you want to prime Forgues, you may tell him without fear of anything wrong, that I was born at Portsmouth on the 7<sup>th</sup> of February, 1812; that my father was in the Navy Pay Office: that I was taken by him to Chatham when I was very young and lived and was educated there till I was twelve or thirteen, I suppose: that I was put to a school near London, where (as at other places) I distinguished myself like a brick; that I was put in the office of a solicitor, a friend of my father's; and didn't much like it; and after a couple of years (as well as I can remember) applied myself with a celestial or diabolical energy to the study of such things as would qualify me to be a first-rate parliamentary reporter, at that time a calling pursued by many clever men who were young at the Bar; that I made my debut in the gallery (at about eighteen, I suppose), engaged on a voluminous publication, no longer in existence, called "The Mirror of Parliament"; that when "The Morning Chronicle" was purchased by Sir John Easthope and acquired a large circulation, I was engaged there, and that I remained there until I had begun to publish Pickwick, when I found myself in a condition to relinquish that part of my labours; that I left the reputation behind me of being the best and most rapid reporter ever known, and that I could do anything in that way under any sort of circumstances, and often I did. (I daresay I am at this present writing the best shorthand writer in the world.)

That I began, without any interest or introduction of any kind, to write fugitive pieces for the old "Monthly Magazine," when I was in the gallery for "The Mirror of Parliament"; that my faculty for descriptive writing was seized upon the moment I joined "The Morning Chronicle." And that I was liberally paid there and handsomely acknowledged, and wrote the greater part of the short descriptive Sketches by Boz in that paper; that I had been a writer when I was a mere baby, and always an actor from the same age; that I married the daughter of a writer to the signet in Edinburgh, who was the great friend and assistant of Scott, and who first made Lockhart know to him.

And that here I am.

Finally, if you want any dates of publication of books tell Wills, and he'll get them for you.

This is the first time I ever set down even these particulars, and glancing over, I feel like a wild beast in a caravan describing himself in the keeper's absence.

Ever faithfully,  
Charles Dickens

P.S. – I made a speech last night at the London Tavern, at the end of which all the company sat holding their napkins to their eyes with one hand; and putting the other into their pockets. A hundred people or so contributed nine hundred pounds then and there.

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#### SAINT GHASTLY GRIM

By O. Sack

When Dickens thought that he deserved particularly well of himself and had earned the right to enjoy a little treat, he would stroll from Covent Garden in to the City of London, and roam about its deserted nooks and corners. Among his favourite retreats the city churchyards held high place, as he says in "The City of the Absent," one of the chapters of The Uncommercial Traveller, wherein he proceeds to describe their peculiar interests and attractiveness in his own imitable manner.

Of all the churchyards and churches thus referred to, one only, so far as we know, has been identified, and although we believe it would be particularly difficult to trace out and identify the others, it would nevertheless be a task with many things to recommend it, even though failure awaited us at the finish.

The one churchyard and church that has been discovered for is that of St. Olave, Hart Street, to which Dickens gives the

(continued, pg. 4)

(GRAD GRIND, cont. from pg. 3)

Curious, yet fitting, name of Saint Ghastly Grim. He describes it as one of his best beloved churchyards. "It lies at the heart of the city and the Blackwall Railway shrieks at it daily. It is a small churchyard, with a ferocious, strong, spiked iron gate, like a jail. The gate is ornamented with skulls and crossbones, larger than the life, wrought in stone, but it likewise came into the mind of Saint Ghastly Grim, that to stick iron spikes atop of the stone skulls, as though they were impaled, would be a pleasant device. Therefore the skulls grin aloft horribly, thrust through and through with iron spears. Hence there is attraction of repulsion for me in Saint Ghastly Grim, and, having often contemplated it in the daylight and in the dark, I once felt drawn towards it in a thunderstorm at midnight."



Whether most of the other churchyards and churches which allured the novelist to the city have been swept beyond the power of identification or not, there still remains Saint Ghastly Grim with its weird gateway, which we reproduce here. Our readers will perhaps refer to "The City of the Absent" to read again and the full story of Dickens's visit to Saint Ghastly Grim. In doing so, should anyone be able to identify any of the others mentioned, we trust the result of the research may appear in our pages.

(The Dickensian, Summer 1948)

## PROMINENTLY FEATURED IN DROOD

Here are two gentlemen that are prominently featured in **DROOD**:

### George Dolby (1831-1900)



Dickens's reading manager from 1866 to 1870. Devoted to Dickens, he was a large, amiable, highly competent man, hampered in his business dealings with a speech impediment. He sustained the ailing Dickens through the English tours of 1866-7, the arduous American tour of 1867-8; and the "Final Farewell Tour" in the UK of 1868-70. After Dickens's retirement from his touring life, Dolby was a frequent visitor to Gad's Hill, and left a detailed and rapturous account of his friendship with his beloved "Chief," and of the tours, in the book *Charles Dickens as I Knew Him* (1885).

### William Henry Wills (1810-80)



Wills was appointed assistant editor of *Household Words* in 1850. It was Wills who in 1855 excitedly told Dickens "It is written that you were to have that house at Gad's Hill!" In company with Forster and Georgina Hogarth he opposed Dickens's intention of embarking on the American tour of 1867-8, but Dickens pointed out the immense profits to be made, and made light of his growing ill-health. It appears from correspondence that Wills was privy to the liaison with Ellen Ternan: he received letters from Dickens written on Ellen's stationery, and among his instructions was a memo containing a code message for her by which she was to know whether or not to follow Dickens to America. Dickens had written to him in 1862, "we doubt whether any two men can have gone on more happily, and smoothly, or with greater trust and confidence in each other."

(Jones, continued from pg. 2)

However, *after* supper, when we were all madder than ever with the pulling of crackers, the drinking of champagne, and the making of speeches, a universal country dance was proposed – and Forster, *seizing me round the waist*, whirled me into the thick of it, and *made* me dance!! Like a person in the tread-mill who must move forward or be crushed to death.. Once I cried out “Oh for the love of Heaven let me go! You are going to dash my brains out against the folding doors!” To which he answered – (you can fancy his tone) – “Your *brains*!! Who cares about their brains *here*? *Let them go!*”

In fact the thing was rising into something not unlike *the rape of the Sabines!* (Mrs. Reid was happily gone some time) when somebody looked (at) her watch and exclaimed “Twelve o’clock!” Whereupon we all rushed to the cloak room, and *there* and in the lobby and up to the last moment the mirth raged on. Dickens took home Thackeray and Forster with him and his wife “*to finish the night there,*” and a *royal* night they would have of it, I fancy! – ending perhaps with a visit to the watch house.

Happily, Dickens’ “book-seller trade” didn’t “go as it pleased,” and instead went from strength to strength. He followed up the early success of *The Pickwick Papers* with the likes of *Oliver Twist* (1839), *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841), *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844), until his ongoing accomplishments as an author forced him to shelve his interest in magic—but not before one final performance.

By now, Dickens had created an entire stage persona for his magic act, “The Unparalleled Necromancer, Rhia Rhama Rhoos” (a name he based on a famous Indian magician and juggler called Khia Khan Khruse, a member of Ramo Samee’s troupe), and it was in this guise that he staged his last conjuring performance in Bonchurch in 1849. The Dickens family—Charles, his wife Kate, and eight of their eventual 10 children—arrived on the Isle of Wight in mid-July and stayed with Charles’ friend, the Reverend James White, until early October.

The exact date of Rhia Rhama Rhoos’ final performance isn’t clear, but it seems likely that it was sometime in September. In front of an invited audience of friends and family, Dickens, dressed in gaudy eastern robes, performed a selection of tricks including “The Leaping Card Wonder,” “The Travelling Doll Wonder,” and the climax of his act (according to his self-penned playbill), “The Pudding Wonder.”



Ben Cross as Dickens The Conjuror (1983)

Sadly, the Dickens family’s trip to the Isle of Wight was marred by tragedy when John Leech, a long-time friend of Dickens who had accompanied them on their holiday, got into trouble while swimming in the sea and was crushed against the rocks by a wave. He suffered a terrible head injury that left him dazed and in considerable pain for several days, with Dickens later writing that, “it was quite impossible to get him to maintain any one position for five minutes. He was like a ship in distress in a sea of bedclothes.” Amazingly, when all the best medical treatments known at the time failed, Dickens used another of his conjuring hobbies to help nurse Leech back to health when he hypnotized him into a deep recuperative sleep. When Leech eventually woke up, he was well on the road to a total recovery.

With the vacation over, Dickens was immediately back to work: *David Copperfield* was completed by November 1850, and was quickly followed by the first installment of *Bleak House* less than 18 months later. Though the pressures of writing apparently left him little time to continue practicing his own conjuring act, Dickens nevertheless maintained an interest in magic, and while in France in 1854 made a point of seeing a renowned French mind-reader called Alfred de Caston. He was, Dickens later wrote, “a perfectly original genius,” who “puts any sort of knowledge of legerdemain, such as I supposed that I possessed, at utter defiance.” Dickens himself, however, never performed again.

(MENTAL FLOSS, July 16, 2015)

## GRAD Fellowship Officers

<b><u>Chairman</u></b>	Tim Clark <a href="mailto:poohclark@earthlink.net">poohclark@earthlink.net</a>
<b><u>Corresponding Secretary</u></b>	Vikky Pickett <a href="mailto:vikky.pickett@twc.com">vikky.pickett@twc.com</a>
<b><u>Recording Secretary</u></b>	Nancy Smith <a href="mailto:dragonsmith@verizon.net">dragonsmith@verizon.net</a>
<b><u>Treasurer</u></b>	David Pickett <a href="mailto:davidjpickett2018@gmail.com">davidjpickett2018@gmail.com</a>

### **Future GRAD Meetings**

- Nov. 20: DROOD (Ch. 28-40)
- Dec. 11 DROOD (Ch. 41-53)
- 2022 TBD

We plan on meeting live with hybrid Zoom\* at the brand-new Riverside Main Library The Carnegie Room 3900 Mission Inn Ave. Riverside, CA 92501 (located now two blocks west of the old location, across the street from the Fox Theater)

\* Join Zoom Meeting

<https://ucsc.zoom.us/j/93306449804?pwd=elpFZXBwRTkzbU10TUZoQ1VSVFpwez09>

This is our monthly request for you to consider our Annual Fellowship dues. Nothing has changed, \$20 for a single, \$30 for a duo. Memberships are rolling, so once you pay, your renewal is not due until a year has elapsed. And of course, we do not discourage any donation that exceeds the renewal! Aside from our annual International Fellowship dues, we donate the balance to local charities and sponsorships.

## Upcoming Dickensian Events

- **Tuesday, November 16th**, 6:00 pm, BST: **London Central** [dickensfellowshiptalks@gmail.com](mailto:dickensfellowshiptalks@gmail.com)  
**Malcolm Andrews** presents *Dickens Through the Looking Glass: Reflections on (and in) the Mirror of Dickens's Life, Times and Writings* Registration required
- **Wednesday, November 17<sup>th</sup>**, 7:30 pm GST: **Aberdeen** [eadsummers@me.com](mailto:eadsummers@me.com)  
**John Mullen** presents *The Artful Dickens*
- **Wednesday, November 17<sup>th</sup>**, 7:30 pm AEST: **Melbourne** [www.dickens.asnau](http://www.dickens.asnau)  
**Elisabeth Neales** presents *A Tale of Two Cities, did Dickens get his history right?*
- **Saturday, November 20<sup>th</sup>**, 11:00 am PST: **Riverside (GRAD)**  
<https://www.facebook.com/groups/dfgrad>  
**Vikky Pickett** presents *DROOD, Ch. 28-40* (Hybrid)
- **Sunday, November 21<sup>st</sup>**, 7:30 pm BST: **N.E. England (Leeds Playhouse)**  
[info@leedsplayhouse.org.uk](mailto:info@leedsplayhouse.org.uk) Filmed production of *Oliver Twist*. Two Hour show. This is a ticketed event, £15 per device, registration required.
- **Sunday, November 28<sup>th</sup>**, 2:00 pm PST: **Santa Cruz Pickwick** [www.dickenscommons.com](http://www.dickenscommons.com)  
**John Jordan** presents *Bleak House, Ch. 33-49* (Hybrid)
- **Wednesday, December 1<sup>st</sup>**, 7:30 pm GST: **Aberdeen** [eadsummers@me.com](mailto:eadsummers@me.com)  
**David Hewitt** presents "Scott at 250."
- **Saturday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**, 1:00 pm EST: **Friends of Dickens, NY** [The Friends of Dickens New York](http://TheFriendsofDickensNewYork)  
**Bob Sloan** moderates *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Ch. 21-26.
- **Saturday, December 4<sup>th</sup>**, 10:00 am PST: **Dickens Project / Universe** [www.dickenscommons.com](http://www.dickenscommons.com)  
*Christmas Fundraising Auction, Tim Clark*, Auctioneer

