Dickens Down Under

The occasional newsletter of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship
ISSN 1174-5797 (paper). ISSN 1179-383X (online)

Issue 146: March 2025

Edited by Vanessa Grenfell

Little Dorrit: Mr Flintwich mediates as a friend of the Family.

Dickens Down Under

Dickens Down Under is published by the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship, 17 Marley View St, Christchurch, New Zealand 8024, 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 form (pdf), readable by Adobe Acrobat Reader (available free from www.adobe.com), is available from vsgrenfell@gmail.com at no cost.

The Christchurch Dickens Fellowship Website

Go to https://www.christchurchdickensfellowship.nz which provides information about the Christchurch Branch of the Fellowship and can be used to access past copies of *Dickens Down Under*.

The Dickens Fellowship Website

Go to www.dickensfellowship.org which provides information about the Fellowship and links to other Dickensian branches.

Please Note

The views expressed in *Dickens Down Under* articles are the views of the individual authors and not necessarily the views of the Fellowship.

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The Pen of the President

Welcome to a new year, although we are nearly a quarter way through it now. By the time you read this we will have started our monthly meetings with the AGM and will shortly be beginning to study our novel for the year, *Little Dorrit*. I look forward to a fun and interesting year's programme.

We have had an unseasonably cold start to the year but several brave souls still ventured out to the Botanical Gardens for our annual picnic. We found an area sheltered from the cold southerly wind which still got the sun so it wasn't as cold as we feared. It was much warmer when we met for the Birthday Dinner, a bit later in the month than normal due to the venue not being available the first or second Sunday in February. This was again an enjoyable event in beautiful surroundings. I really appreciated hearing Professor Elliot Engel speak to us on Edgar Allen Poe early in February. He is such a dynamic speaker that I look forward to his next visit.

On our travels in Europe last year, Duane and I spent some time in Rochester Cathedral in Kent, England. Formerly the Cathedral Church of Christ and the Blessed Virgin Mary, the cathedral is the mother church of the Anglican Diocese of Rochester and seat of the Bishop of Rochester. It is the second oldest bishopric in England after that of the Archbishop of Canterbury. Built in the Norman style, the cathedral is a wonderful place and a Grade I listed building. Its links to Dickens are celebrated with a large brass plaque on the wall and a bust of The Inimitable in the reading room. It was interesting to see the place where *Edwin Drood* was based and now, when reading the book, I can better picture its surroundings.

I hope you all have a safe and interesting year.

Blessings

Ros

The following links are taken from the Cathedral website:
https://www.rochestercathedral.org
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rochester,_Medway
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/95
Rochester_Cathedral_from_Castle

The Pen of the President

Rochester Cathedral seen from the top of Rochester Castle.

Nave of Rochester Cathedral

The Annual Report

It is with pleasure that I present the 2024-2025 annual report of The Christchurch Dickens Fellowship on behalf of the committee. I also pass on my heartfelt thanks to the committee for their continued support and advice. This year we welcomed 1 new member, Carole Acheson. The Fellowship received three resignations – Niall Washington, due to his moving back to the UK, and Enid and Geoffrey Ayling due to advanced age. This leaves a total of 49 members, made up of 10 associate members and 39 ordinary members (including six Life Members and 1 Honorary Member.)

We held nine monthly daytime meetings including the AGM; the average attendance for the April to November meetings was 21 members and 1 guest. The 93rd Annual General Meeting was held on March 2nd in our usual premises, the Hagley Community College cafeteria, attended by 11 members. Our main novel for 2024 was *Oliver Twist* and the Christmas work, *The Cricket on the Hearth*. We also looked at *The Uncommercial Traveller* over two programmes.

6 April: A team of five, Annabel Gormack, Vanessa Grenfell, Peter Oakley, Esmé Richards and Graeme Yardley, presented Chapters 1-11 of *Oliver Twist* attended by 19 members.

4 May: Ros Calvert presented Chapters 12-22 to 22 members and 1 visitor.

1 June: Margaret Landauer presented Chapters 23-34 to 24 members.

6 July: Vanessa Grenfell presented Chapters 35-43 to 24 members.

3 August: Kathie La Rooij presented Chapters 44-53 to 19 members and 3 visitors.

7 September: Peter Oakley presented Part 1 of *The Uncommercial Traveller* to 19 members.

5 October: Annabel Gormack presented Part 2 of *The Uncommercial Traveller* to 19 members and 2 visitors.

2 November: Kathleen Campbell presented a programme on *The Cricket on the Hearth* to 20 members and 1 visitor.

We held five social gatherings and one lecture over this year. On 12 May the 34th Pickwick Celebration was held at Pomeroys Tavern. The food and company were excellent and enjoyed by 17 members and 1 guest. The staff were very enthusiastic and welcoming. The Mid-Winter Wassail pot-luck lunch was held at the home of Edwina Palmer and Geoffrey Rice on the

The Annual Report

22 June and was enjoyed members and 2 guests. Our grateful thanks go to Edwina and Geoffrey for opening their home to us. Our Christmas Party on 7 December was held at the President's home where 16 members and 3 guests had an enjoyable time with fun games, quizzes, a raffle, mulled wine, cold punch and singing, followed by a festive supper including Christmas cake. Thank you to the members who organised and presented this fun evening and donated children's gifts for the Christchurch City Mission. Thank you to Pauline Francis-Fox for transporting the gifts to the Mission and to Peter Lewis for providing background music and accompanying the carol singing.

Above: Michael Rogers

Right: President Ros Calvert

The Annual Report

The annual picnic in the Botanical Gardens, 4 January, was enjoyed by 16 members, despite the weather being cooler than normal for a Christchurch January. On 3 February we were privileged to welcome Professor Elliot Engel who gave a lecture on Edgar Allen Poe to 12 members and 3 guests in the Hagley Staffroom. Then, on 9 February, 24 members attended the Dickens's Birthday Celebration at Riccarton House. Average attendance for these social gatherings was 22 members and guests.

On 27 October 11 members of the Fellowship put on a programme of sketches and readings for the WEA at the request of member John Sullivan. It was very well received.

Our thanks go to Graeme Yardley for his continued hosting of our monthly DVD afternoons. We have enjoyed a diverse selection of opening music before we settle down to a variety of BBC programmes, movies and other productions. This is an afternoon not to be missed by the "regulars." Special thanks also go to Graeme Yardley for his services as our Librarian.

We have been fortunate again this year to have so many talented and capable people among our membership. Special mention and thanks must go to Annabel Gormack, our secretary, to Vanessa Grenfell, the editor of *Dickens Down Under* and her proofreaders, Margaret Landauer and Esmé Richards, to Suzanne Waters our treasurer, to Esmé Richards our chatelaine and to Peter Oakley who has convened our liaison committee. Thanks also to Vanessa Grenfell our wardrobe mistress, who continues to supply us with suitable costumes for our productions, to Vanessa Grenfell and others who take photos at our gatherings, and to Annabel Gormack and Pauline Francis-Fox as script collectors. Thank you to those who have contributed goods to sell on our sales table.

Special thanks go to Michael Rogers, our proxy in London, and to our financial reviewer, Lesley Godkin. We are also very appreciative of all those who provided transport for others to and from our various meetings and social functions.

Lastly, I would like to extend a big thanks to the afternoon tea convenors and to all those who supported the fellowship by attending our programme afternoons.

On behalf of the committee, I now propose that this Annual Report be adopted. Ros Calvert.

The Christmas Party

The evening of Saturday 7 December was hot and blustery as sixteen members and three guests (TJ, Abel & Haruto Inagaki) gathered at the home of our president Ros Calvert. Ros and her husband, Duane Griffin, had kindly offered their home as the venue for our annual Christmas Party and it looked very festive and welcoming. Guests mingled and partook of nibbles provided by the hosts while Peter Lewis played background music on the keyboard. Cups of either a fruity cold punch or a hot punch called "Grimwig's Ginwine Guzzle" were on offer as liquid refreshments. Christmas raffle tickets were on offer to purchase at $1.00 a ticket.

At 7.30pm the president welcomed everyone and tabled an apology from Carole Acheson. Ros thanked Pauline Francis-Fox for her offer to transport the donated children's gifts from under the Christmas tree to the Christchurch City Mission.

The evening's entertainment, organised by Vanessa Grenfell, started with a reading by Annabel Gormack from an old magazine article about a charity devoted to providing hot-pot meals to the poor and needy of Liverpool. This was followed by a quiz about Dickens devised by Vanessa Grenfell. Prizes of chocolate bars were given for each correct answer and handed out by Ember Matson. The final item of entertainment was charades of Dickens's book titles chosen by Edwina Palmer. Edwina started with the first book title and the person who guessed correctly presented the next charade. This was a lot of fun and edible prizes were given for the correct answers.

Edwina Palmer conducting a charade.

The Christmas Party

At 8.15pm Ros Calvert said Grace and all those present then enjoyed a sumptuous supper from the table laden with sweet and savoury treats, during which time glasses were recharged and there was time for convivial conversation. After supper the Christmas cake, baked and iced by Edwina Palmer and Geoff Rice, was cut by our longest-serving member, Peter Oakley.

Peter Oakley and President, Ros Calvert.

The Christmas Party

The Christmas supper table.

When the raffles were drawn, the first five prizes of baskets of goodies went to Irene Taylor, Annabel Gormack, Pauline Francis-Fox, Geoff Rice and Chris Richards. Esmé Richards and Edwina Palmer each won a Christmas cake baked and iced by Vanessa Grenfell. A further prize of a bottle of grape juice went to Edwina and Geoff's daughter, Eleanor. Ros thanked Suzanne Waters for gathering and presenting the prizes.

Cups of tea and coffee were available, as well as the punches, and members filled their glasses before the song books were given out for the traditional singing of Christmas carols. Ros Calvert led the singing and Peter Lewis accompanied her on the keyboard. Slices of the Christmas cake were handed around after the singing and members had a chance of further conversation before heading home. Some even managed a look at the inventive Christmas lights decorating the neighbouring properties on the way. A good time was had by all.

SAG

2025 Annual Picnic

The morning of the 4th January was cold and cloudy but the sun made a sufficient appearance to allow us to go ahead with our annual picnic on the Archery Lawn of the Botanical Gardens as planned. The large trees sheltered the sixteen members who braved the chilly wind to gather for our first get-together of 2025. Surprisingly the ground was not too damp under-foot, considering the amount of rain that fell in the days just prior to the picnic. Weatherwise, it had not been a brilliant Christmas holiday season but spirits were cheerful and conversation and laughter flowed as people recounted the news of their Christmas and New Year celebrations with family and friends. Cherries and leftover treats of chocolate and baking were shared around, including some of the Christmas cake baked for the Christmas raffle. After a couple of hours sitting in the sun, those attending dispersed to enjoy the lush growth of plants and colourful flowers on display as they walked back to their cars. A good way to start another year of Dickens fellowship.

Right. From the left: Suzanne Waters. Thomas, Ray, Henry, Harold and Relda Oakley. Duane Griffin and Ros Calvert. Chris and Esmé Richards.

Left. From the left: Ros Calvert, Chris and Esmé Richards. Annabel Gormack and Edwina Palmer.

Dickens Birthday Dinner

From left: John Sullivan, Relda Oakley, Suzanne Waters, Ray Oakley, Henry Oakley, Maurice Jalfon, Esmé Richards, Chris Richards, Geoffrey Rice.

The Quarters Restaurant at Riccarton House was the venue for the Christchurch branch of the Dickens Fellowship to commemorate what would have been the 213th birthday of Charles Dickens. For the second year in a row, we were able to enjoy a private room in this beautifully restored Victorian House. Why, 'The Quarters' you may ask; apparently, it originally cost a quarter to rent a room. Riccarton House itself was commissioned by Jane Dean, the widow of Canterbury pioneer John Deans. Although finished in 1856, there have been several additions since. The Deans family sold the property to the City of Christchurch in 1947.

Jane Deans

Dickens Birthday Dinner

Post earthquake repairs were finished in 2014 and today Riccarton House is used as a restaurant and also for functions. A market is held on Saturdays in front of the house.

With a portrait of Jane Deans looking down on proceedings, twenty four members of our branch were welcomed by our President Ros Calvert. With orders taken and drinks supplied, Ros proceeded to say grace.

Peter Oakley then asked those present to charge our glasses in a toast to 'The King'.

Lively chatter followed before lunch was served. Although the menu was limited (most choosing lamb kofta over the bruschetta, chicken or Caesar salads) the food was tasty and enjoyable.

The main course cleared, Esmé Richards, in proposing the toast to Dickensian Fellowship, spoke of her own personal experience of The Fellowship as a new member back in 1989. Esmé went on to mention the many incidences of fellowship she and her husband, Chris, had enjoyed as a member of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship. She then spoke of the importance of fellowship to Dickens in his own life and how he continued this into his writing.

Those present were then asked to raise their glasses in a toast to 'Dickensian Fellowship'.

It was then the turn of Vanessa Grenfell to speak. Vanessa began by asking in what way Dickens warranted the title 'The Inimitable'. Various stages of his life were referred to, as illustrations of her definition of inimitable. Charles Dickens was "unequalled, unmatched, unparalled and unrivalled as a novelist, i.e., Inimitable.

Riccarton House as it is today.

Dickens Birthday Dinner

Dickens did not get away unscathed however! Vanessa spoke of his tendency to hold a grudge, such as that against his mother for her reluctance to allow him to continue his education and, of course, against Catherine for not being the perfect female and wife!

At the conclusion of her speech, we were asked to raise our glasses in a toast 'To The Immortal Memory of Charles Dickens'.

Both speeches were detailed and informative and a full text of them appears in this issue of *Dickens Down Under*.

Panna Cotta was served for dessert with tea and coffee available for those who wanted it. It was another delightful afternoon spent in Dickens Fellowship. P F-F.

Kofta

Panna Cotta

Toasts From the Birthday Dinner, Dickensian Fellowship—Esmé Richards

Fellow Dickensians and guests.

Over the years, at our Dickens Birthday Dinner we have often heard the meaning of the word fellowship, as given in one or other of our dictionaries. I make no apologies for repeating it here again with thanks to 'Mr Google' this time – 'friendly association, especially with people who share one's interest.' That sums it up nicely.

Fellowship is more than mere camaraderie or companionship. It speaks to the bonds that unite us through shared ideals and mutual respect. Keeping to the topic of Dickens I have thought about the many forms of fellowship just by being a member of the Christchurch branch. The fellowship of our monthly meetings, our external meetings such as our monthly DVD gatherings at Graeme Yardley's home, our social functions such as our Birthday Dinner today, our fellowship with other branches throughout the world and the opportunity to meet at annual conferences. Then there was the fellowship for Dickens within his life with family and friends, and most importantly, I feel, within his novels.

Starting with my own experience dating from when I joined our branch in 1989. In those days we met at the Burns's Club rooms in Tuam Street. Arriving at the address, I waited a moment hoping to see someone else entering the building so that I knew I was at the correct address. I didn't have to wait long. Parking across the road and walking in front of my car was someone who could have been Dickens himself! Dressed ready to take part in a sketch no doubt, although I didn't know about sketches and what form the meeting would take at that point. It was John De la Bere, whom many of you will remember. I was warmly welcomed and I remember exactly where I sat in the second row between two friendly Fellowship members. The study book was *David Copperfield*. Strangely I don't remember anything about the afternoon tea. I'm sure it was as sumptuous as it always is, with lots of chatter over the teacups. I didn't realise then that that day was the start of now 36 years of embracing the love of everything Dickensian and the fellowship of like-minded people.

Chris and I have attended many Dickens Fellowship conferences over the years and, apart from enjoying learning more about Dickens

Dickensian Fellowship

Esmé Richards

through interesting papers and enjoying the new city or country we were in, it was making new friends and re-meeting old ones from branches the world over that was so good. That was due to fellowship, it always shone through. Old fellows meeting again. The connection with all branches worldwide even continued over the Covid years, with meetings often being held on zoom.

For Charles Dickens, fellowship was both a guiding principle and a source of solace. In embracing others' company throughout his life he seemed to find inspiration, strength and creativity in his relationships. Even on holidays to such places as Broadstairs or Chatham or Brighton the family would no sooner have arrived than Dickens was busy sending messages to friends to come and visit. During the family's year long residence at Genoa in Italy in 1844 when he wrote his second Christmas Book, *The Chimes*, he made the long, cold journey, back to London to read his new story to his friends. He needed the fellowship, the stimulating conversations, and the appreciation of his work. There is a well-known illustration by Daniel Maclise, which you may be familiar with, of Dickens giving his reading at John Forster's house surrounded by his friends, who are all named in the illustration. He loved having social gatherings at home in London and on occasions, such as Twelth Night, which was son Charley's birthday, there was always much merriment and games, surrounded by family and friends. Fellowship was important to him.

Lastly, the fellowship within his novels, where it often stood as a counterforce to hardship and injustice. Think of the Cratchit family in *A*

Dickensian Fellowship

Christmas Carol where the love and support for one another shines like a beacon of hope in the cold, stark world of Scrooge's greed. I also always think of all the fellowship within *Pickwick Papers.* Mr Pickwick always pops up in my mind, with his beaming eye, and with his raised glass of wine, or maybe it was Smoking Bishop, enjoying Christmas at Dingly Dell.

Like the Aims and Objects of our branch, as quoted on the front of our syllabus each year, "To knit together, in a common bond of friendship, lovers of that great master of humour and pathos, Charles Dickens. To spread the love of humanity which is the keynote of all his work," we surely achieve this through fellowship.

So, like Mr Pickwick, I ask you all to stand and raise your glasses to 'DICKENSIAN FELLOWSHIP'.

Mr Pickwick and company at Dingley Dell

Toasts From the Birthday Dinner, The Immortal Memory of Charles Dickens.

—Vanessa Grenfell

We are agreed, us Dickensians, that Charles Dickens was inimitable, but what exactly does that mean? Unique, distinctive, individual, special, idiosyncratic, quirky, exclusive, and rare are some of the adjectives chosen by *Oxford Languages*, Google's English Dictionary. Thesaurus.com adds consummate, matchless, nonpareil, peerless, perfect, supreme, unequalled, unmatched, unparalled, unrivalled. And there are more!

A distinctive, idiosyncratic, individual can perhaps be easily agreed upon when we think of Dickens's dress sense; his flair for colourful, floral waistcoats and neckties that some considered unusual in his time and many considered flamboyant and flashy. Idiosyncratic can also mean peculiar, eccentric, strange, even aberrant and bizarre. Was he so? These desciptions add up to a deviation from what was considered the 'normal behaviour' of Dickens's time, in public at least!

As a child, Dickens had the confidence to perform at the various public houses to which his father regularly took him and encouraged him to sing for pecuniary reward. Taught to read at an early age by his mother, Dickens was also an avid reader of his father's classic novels. Unless they were from wealthy families, these opportunities were not shared by many of his peers. Many, of course, could not read at all. School children today , of course, are encouraged to speak in public, and some feel they have the right to express their views anywhere! Nineteenth or twenty-first century, it is an exceptional child who reads the classics from choice and considers their heroes his friends before the age of twelve years. Nor would many be yearning to return to school. The young Charles, being the oldest sibling, was also required to pawn items for his parents in order that the family survived from day to day. Each time he had to renew his courage to face the haggling and humiliation.

The teenage Dickens was not dissimilar to others, past or present, who study hard and work to make their way in the world. As a court reporter, who learned shorthand in order to help his career flourish, he was not exceptional, but take into account the fact that he further reduced that shorthand into his own shorter version and one begins to see a distinction.

The Immortal Memory of Charles Dickens.

Add his perseverance with short story writing at such a busy time in his life and there is greater distinction.

Vanessa Grenfell

The average age of any new author would appear to be thirty to forty years. 'Mr Google' also informed me there are twenty-five well-known novelists who had their works published under twenty-five years of age. Two of those were Mary and Percy Bysshe Shelley. The illustrious name of Charles Dickens wasn't mentioned, therefore I shall take that with a grain of salt! The general drift however, seems to indicate few in number. *Pickwick Papers* was published when Dickens was twenty-four years of age. Prior to that he had also published some short stories and become "The Inimitable Boz."

Authors with more than fourteen published, well-known and loved novels number few. Stephen King may have written sixty-five but that was with the aid of modern technology! Among the more serious novelists, Sir Walter Scott wrote twenty-seven books, Thomas Hardy equalled Dickens with fourteen and George Elliott, Jules Verne and Isaac Asimov each produced twelve, not many of which were double volumes. The works of Jane Austen, The Brontës, Tolstoy and Shakespeare, perhaps Defoe, Elliott, Fielding, Hardy, James, Orwell, Poe, Swift and others are well-known and loved, but no more so than Charles Dickens's. Along with his numerous letters, editorials and volumes of non-fiction he is unique, or nearly so in his proliferation of written English literature and works that are prized and considered classic.

Britannica.com cites, "(Charles Dickens is) generally considered the greatest (novelist) of the Victorian era." "An author not for an age but for

The Immortal Memory of Charles Dickens.

all time." And at his Centenary in 1970, "Dickens's death demonstrated a critical consensus about his standing, second only to William Shakespeare in English literature."

The journalist writing Dickens's obituary in *The Times* of June 10 1870 believed, "Even irrespective of his literary genius he was an able and strong-minded man who would have succeeded in almost any profession to which he devoted himself."

The above quotes seem to corroborate Thesaurus.com's description of Charles Dickens as unequalled, unmatched, unparalleled and unrivalled as a novelist, i.e., Inimitable.

What made Dickens the consummate artist that he was? Nature or nurture? For all their faults, neither parent was a dullard, so good genes probably boosted Dickens's start in life. Elizabeth Dickens considered herself capable of teaching school pupils and Michael Slater states that, on Charles's own admission, she was a good teacher in his early years, even teaching him the rudiments of Latin.[1] John Dickens was also a knowledgeable parent who worked as a clerk for the British Navy and periodically as a court journalist. He also did his own share of public house entertaining. Being too fond of a tipple, plus a "she'll be right" attitude, led to the situation with which we are all very familiar, that of Mr Macawber in *David Copperfield* where "annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pound ought and six, result misery."

Another strong influence on young Charles's development was his cherished childhood teacher William Giles, a young, Baptist minister living in Chatham. "The Inimitable Boz" was a moniker Dickens happily bestowed upon himself following the gift of a silver snuff box, so inscribed, which was given to him by William Giles

1 p.10. Slater, Michael. *Charles Dickens.* Yale University Press, Newhaven, London. 2009.

The Immortal Memory of Charles Dickens.

when halfway through the publication of *Pickwick Papers.*[2] The switch of authorship from Boz to Charles Dickens, combined with his popularity thereafter, eventually led to the disappearance of Boz and the prominence of "The Inimitable" as his distinguishing nomenclature.

Charles's nurturing and experiences as a boy taught him much about life and how to live it. It led to his observational skills, the study of human character, nuance and quirk and every bit increased the thirst for education first instilled in him by his mother. Underlying all, Charles was a loved child who felt loved, until the betrayal he felt at age twelve from his mother's wanting to keep him at work and away from education. A child who feels loved is likely to mature with his or her sense of self, the ego, intact, regardless of negative experiences, however, "adolescence is a period of rapid biological, cognitive, and neurological changes which have a salient impact on psychosocial functioning and relationships."[3] Hence the beginning of Charles's life-long changed relationship with his mother?

Aberrant behaviour infers some kind of transgression or perversion which is obviously assumed to be abnormal. Such an irregularity in CD's behaviour, that comes to mind, is resentment, his abnormally holding a grudge for a very long time, in fact a lifetime. Beginning from the episode at the blacking factory that his mother was instrumental in not only setting up but would have continued on, Charles's bitterness towards her became rooted and never entirely died. He saw only the affect of this upon himself and not the impact on his family; starvation, a return to the debtor's prison perhaps. Later in life Dickens tried to send Catherine to an asylum rather than have it thought he was responsible for their marriage separation. Again he saw only his own biased view and directed cruel resentment at Catherine. At least one flaw in an otherwise insightful genius is almost a necessity, surely? And isn't the devil himself immortal?

Life experience is the treasure trove of a writer and nine months in the blacking factory devastated Charles. He endured hard, physical labour

2 Slater, Michael. *Charles Dickens.* Yale University Press, Newhaven, London. 2009.

3 Society for Research in Child Development. https://srcd.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/cdep.12278 29.01.25.

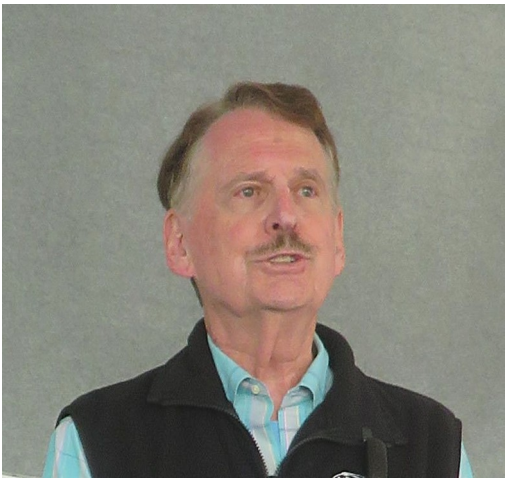
The Immortal Memory of Charles Dickens.

and continual embarrassment. He had to live in "digs," not something he was accustomed to, but he saw his family regularly and he had the resilience necessary to survive. Although he was forever ashamed of the experience, it honed his judgement of character and gave him all the more determination to succeed. And succeed he certainly did!

Let us raise our glasses and drink a toast to,

"The Immortal Memory of Charles Dickens."

A Visit by Elliot Engel



Professor Elliot Engel

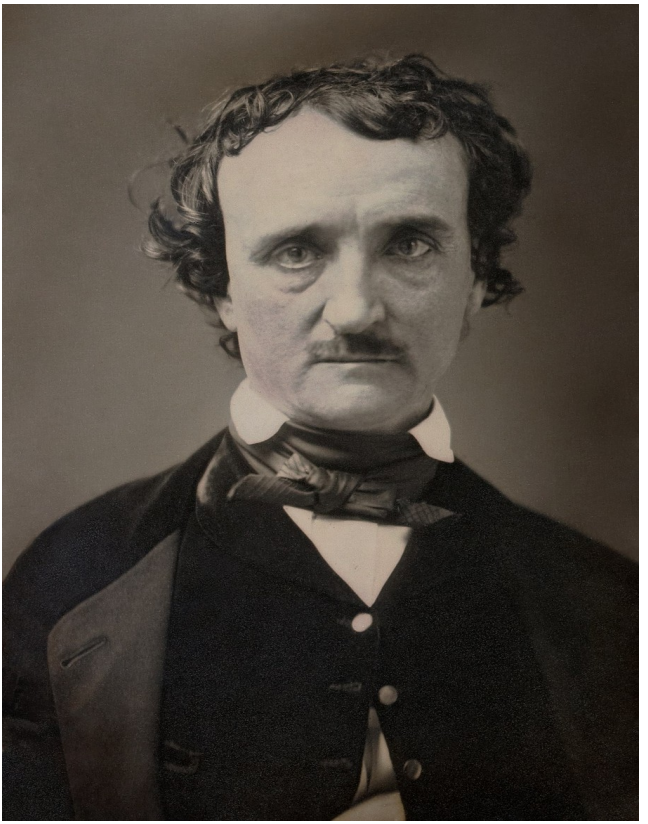
On the evening of Monday 3 February 2025, 12 members and three guests gathered in the staffroom at Hagley College to enjoy an evening with Emeritus Professor Elliot Engel who was visiting from North Carolina, USA. Professor Engel had visited our branch on one occasion more than thirty years ago and was delighted to know that several of those present had met him on that occasion as well. Professor Engel was accompanied by his friend, Craig Olson, and they were staying in the Oxford area. They had enjoyed visiting Christchurch that day, including sites of the city relating to Ngaio Marsh.

Elliot's topic for the talk that evening was Edgar Allen Poe. He began by saying that however bad we thought our lives had been they were not to be compared to the dreadful life of the famous American author. He then proceeded to let us know about the sad and lonely childhood Poe endured which had directly led to the tenor of his writings. So many people in his life had died of consumption at a young age, including his mother, stepmother and young wife. He himself succumbed to alcoholism and died young. Even after death his bad luck continued as his literary editor who held a grudge tried to blacken his name. His writings were certainly singular and have had great influence on horror and mystery writers ever since.

A Visit by Elliot Engel

Of course the poem "The Raven" led to a connection with Dickens and his pet raven, Grip, who stars in Barnaby Rudge. After a most entertaining talk, our president, Ros Calvert, presented Elliot with a card and small gift as a thank you on behalf of us all. We then enjoyed a sumptuous supper provided by those attending and conversation with Craig and Elliot before they had to depart for Oxford.

Those present agreed that it had been a delightful evening. (It was also felt that the staffroom might make a most suitable venue for our monthly meetings with the accessible kitchen facilities and comfortable seats.) Everyone hoped that we might get to meet Elliot again sooner than thirty years hence! SAG.



Edgar Allan Poe

Introduction to the Books for the Year: *Little Dorrit*

—Peter Oakley

Peter Oakley

Little Dorrit is Dickens's eleventh novel. He began the writing in mid 1855, and the novel was published in 20 monthly parts in 19 (because the last was a double number), from December 1855 to June 1857, and in volume form in 1857. The number plans for the parts are extant, so we can follow Dickens's debating with himself the ongoing structure of the novel.

The novels that were its predecessors were his tenth, *Hard Times*, of 1854, and his ninth, *Bleak House*, of 1853.

Bleak House focusses on social ills such as the Court of Chancery, and upon a degree of poverty for many of the population that we now might find hard to believe, and the difficulty many had to get access to medical care. Technically, the novel taxed him, using dual narrators, one female.

Hard Times takes these matters as read, and focusses on social ills such as labour relations and access to education.

Little Dorrit moves on again, but under the shadow of the Crimean War, tainted with government inefficiency and corruption. So that matter is in part dealt with under the flag of the Circumlocution Office. But the matters of prison life are also covered and some of Dickens's concerns that

Little Dorrit

are not government-focussed are also raised.

One concern, already touched on in *Hard Times* and perhaps also in *Bleak House* is the sexual vulnerability of young girls to older men. A side issue in *Hard Times* is the inappropriate attention bestowed by Josiah Bounderby on the pre-adolescent Louisa Gradgrind, culminating in their inappropriate marriage and Louisa's near encounter with social disgrace, engineered by Mrs Sparsit. Perhaps we still wonder what exactly Dickens wanted to say about this. But he takes the theme up again in *Little Dorrit:* Amy Dorrit is very small and apt to be taken for a child; she is seen as a potential focus for unwanted attention in the streets, by a prostitute who berates Maggy for taking a child out in the streets at night. This misunderstanding is cleared up, but we always wonder if Clennam's love for her may have at one stage been complicated by such a misunderstanding. Dickens clearly does not wish to bring a cloud over Clennam, but we may still wonder what point Dickens was trying to make by reintroducing such a theme, which he could easily have omitted.

In our study of *Little Dorrit* no doubt we will examine Dickens's treatment of social ills: we can hardly omit the detail of the Circumlocution Office: it seems to stand in for several aspects of government corruption, but it risks being taken for a caricature. We recall the treatment of labour relations in *Hard Times:* while we probably take sides with the issues as presented, and I suspect we may all take the same side, Dickens presents the misery and injustice but apparently can see no solution. Somebody ought to come up with a way of solving the problems, and that somebody is not going to be Charles Dickens. We can ask whether this is a cynical ploy to sell books while offending nobody. But do we consider the likelihood that Dickens was genuinely devoid of ideas?

We move on to *Little Dorrit:* we have indebtedness, and we have prison; should we have imprisonment for debt? Indebtedness is a problem: does Dickens have a solution? The only one he has is that of many other novelists too, the magic wand. A large fortune is inherited. A genie delivers sacks of gold. Dickens does, unconvincingly, portray people working for a living, and sometimes making enough to live comfortably. Perhaps not:

Little Dorrit

Frederick Dorrit is despised for every penny he earns. But that is not the great thunderclap that pours money down, that we get to extract the Father of the Marshalsea from his home.

Amy Dorrit between Maggie and Arthur Clennam

We can leave the novel and its series of events to our programme conveners for the year. I can say, in my ignorance of how novels are written, that there is an art in telling a good story. There is an art in telling the story in a way that draws the reader in and blanks out the passage of time spent reading. While we don't doubt that Dickens had mastered this art, what is puzzling is that the greatest novelists, if themselves sucked in in the art of exercising this art, eschew it, and from time to time burst forth from its shackles. Dickens mildly steps out and lectures the reader. Fielding structures *Tom Jones* not only to have periodic steppings-out of the author to lecture the reader, but in a way that these episodes are regular in their timing, but irregular in their structure, and are sometimes outstanding tours-de-force in themselves. Second-rate authors, who have nothing to say, don't do this, and we marvel at how completely we are drawn in into their novels; we also marvel at how the time has gone by. People whose lives are no more than waiting to die favour these novels, because for a time they can be diverted from marvelling at their own worthlessness, which they find a task large enough to be tedious.

Little Dorrit

Dickens tips his hat to us before speaking. Fielding with twinkling eye gives us a staggeringly learned conspectus of the techniques of world literature. Cervantes serenades us with song, with the odd crackling obscenity. Sterne wakes us with a slap, and tears off his wig and hurls it in our face, dissolved in laughter. Peacock narrates to us face to face, explicitly not bothering even to name characters drawn in from the stock of stock characters. (And we see Dickens doing this in *Little Dorrit.*) In contrast, Essie Summers, New Zealand's greatest novelist, solemnly skulks in the background since for her there is only the story. All but the last address us directly. This is unrelated to their wish to pursue non-novelistic ideas. As we have seen [in past issues of Dickens Down Under, see issues 43–46, 75, 78 and the supplement to 110, for instance], Smollett and Dickens model themselves upon Cervantes and Lesage in pursuing their aim of conveying social comment in their novels. They do this sometimes by stepping out of the narration of the novel, but not always. We recall Dickens's directly lecturing us about the evils of the slums caused by Chancery. But we don't ever have him lecturing us on suicide. Nevertheless he does address the topic. As Zimri might be the only suicide in the Bible, Mr Merdle may be the only suicide in Dickens (we ignore such as Mr Watkins Tottle and the odd prostitute). Because of Mr Merdle's uniqueness we might look at him. But as we saw last year, Dickens models Merdle on himself. We might look at him for that reason too. Or we might shudder away in horror. There are perhaps similarities; the fortunes of both depend on public confidence, but in an inexact manner: the consequences of a loss of this confidence are unclear in the tempo and extent of their bearing on financial prosperity, but such a loss is devastating for the man's psyche.

Since I had to excise my treatment of Merdle from my programme last year (you recall that my programme went rather long?) at least we can catch up with him in a *Little Dorritt* year. You recall the scene where Merdle asks Fanny for a penknife. After some impertinences from Fanny, he promises not to ink it. Does anyone know what a penknife is?—and, is it in any way similar to a paper knife? [A penknife is of hard steel with a razor edge, for the skilled job of forming a pen; a paper knife may be of bone, wood, or any sort of steel, and must be blunt, or else may run off when in its

Little Dorrit

typical use of opening a book, or the more recent use in opening envelopes.] After the penknife is discovered with Mr Merdle in the hammams, it is returned, uninked, to Fanny.

Merdle appears not to bridle at Fanny's impertinences. Note how Merdle deliberately makes Fanny an accessory. It is symbolic of his on-going war with his wife, but is more than symbolic in Fanny's ultimate dominance over Mrs Merdle, which Merdle himself could never achieve.

We are familiar nowadays with our doctors and medical system set up to impede our access to medical care, and our end-of-life legislation and bureaucracy set up to impede our access to assisted death, while we pay rate increases so that the local bodies can impair our access to unassisted death out of our high buildings. We have expert opinions aired about why we should have our access to both health and death impaired, and air our own opinions frequently enough that we have become experts ourselves, and that we see every facet of modern suicide. For those still unsure, we have lists of phone numbers on which we can be put on hold waiting for counsellors, lists that are intruded before us in every discussion. Of course we are experts in our own field. But we should also listen to Dickens, who was unimpeded by the clatter of our opinions.

Of interest perhaps more in our time than in Dickens's, is the treatment of those with dementia. Dickens, with the experience of his own mother's dementia, portrays Mr F.'s Aunt. She is a person with a personality, not exactly that of her younger years, and utters oracular sayings. Perhaps Dickens treats her more kindly than he did his own mother, whose deterioration distressed him. He does not offer to have her euthanased. Our recent political debate to have people empowered to demand to have themselves killed at a future date when they can no longer demand otherwise makes this topical. I imagine we have room to consult roomsful of consultants on this one, at considerable expense.

So, one of our tasks this year is to see why Dickens allies himself so closely with a man he describes [*Uncommercial Traveller* XXXVI: "A Fly-Leaf in a Life"] as a "swindler, forger and thief." The medical similarities are a very significant part. Yet only a part. We need to study Merdle's mood, marriage and money as well as the medical details. The longstanding

Little Dorrit

reluctance by Chapman and Hall to publish this paper, "A Fly-Leaf in a Life," is a testimony to its significance. (Dickens of course published it in his own lifetime, clearly labelled as an "Uncommercial" paper, but it was never reprinted as such until 1890, long after his death, and after several editions of the collection had been compiled.)

I am sorry to have said nothing useful on this topic, which is perhaps the most important in *Little Dorrit.* There are others. What are wives for? Mrs Elagabala Merdle is essentially a large, gracefully wobbling bosom to display diamonds on, and Dickens in his number plans for chapter XX carefully includes an entry, "—Bosom—." The bosom is frigid enough that its temperature may not melt nor moiré diamonds, and rigid enough that the moireå patterns don't propagate in a manner to mesmerise us. A former surname of hers was Sparkler, so one husband prior to Merdle in the queue may have had similar ideas.

The question by that time was a real one for Dickens, who confessed puzzlement as to how his wife kept having babies. But also real by this time was the question of educating girls. Floods of money could attract someone like Mrs General. We recall that Dickens was early taught to read English by his mother, but she also instructed him in Latin. For a mother so despised by Dickens we may take another view and say she did something that our expensive schools cannot do. More than half our teenagers leave school unable to read Modern English. We have not a single school in the country where Latin is on the national curriculum. Our deliberate exclusion of the essential languages from the curriculum deliberately excludes New Zealanders from most of our culture's literature. Even our indigenous language is not taught. We have lots of schools, but not even an attempt at education.

We can demonstrate this to ourselves. We have the news report on the morning of 27 February 2025 of the firefighters who poured water on concentrated sulphuric acid, with the expected results. Not a single one of these people, nor their supervisors, had absorbed what was taught in my time at the age of twelve. I had the added privilege at the age of fifteen of seeing my headmaster demonstrate the principles to me one-on-one, when he unthinkingly added water to the acid; series of explosions was attended

Little Dorrit

by unheadmasterly language. But we have a fire service which has learned bullying and little else; their command of firefighting knowledge may be primary-school level if that. You aim and squirt, then send a big bill. That is the summary, but the detail includes the fact that none of the men nor their supervisors had absorbed anything beyond primary school. They are now whining that they didn't get training—the blame lies elsewhere, with their nonexistent non-trainers.

Leave that aside: the Dorrit girls did not have a mother, and, of course, were female, so did not need that sort of education anyway. What did a girl need to know? We know that Dickens acknowledges that girls in general are at least as capable as boys. Some may be dull (as may boys) but the most able are as able as the best of the boys (look at Florence Dombey, for instance). But that does not answer the question. Mrs General seems to think that keeping your legs crossed and pouting your lips might be sufficient, at least until a husband of sufficient income has been snared.

We can look at Mrs General and scoff. We would not think of subjecting our children to that, and of course, after that smug thought, we would ignore the fact that we really would do nothing about it, since we send our children, either for a small sum to a state school or for a large sum to a private school, and shrug off the responsibility. The private school no doubt just follows the national curriculum, and so just is a more expensive form of having your children cooped up against their will, learning nothing. Well, not quite. They learn how to get on with their peers. Their paid tutors don't teach them; their peers do without pay. The rich adapt to the rich, the poor adapt to the poor. Mrs General actually provides the better education, because she reduces the bullying, being the only bully allowed. In our last session of the Roimata Reading Group (27 February 2025) we noted that one of Dickens's favoured childhood authors, George Colman junior, whose works were made to be recited to the illiterate, used a vocabulary far greater than any of us reading him. It was yet another demonstration of how illiterate societies tend to have a higher level of understanding than those where kids are cooped up in schools.

So.

I haven't summarised the book (we don't do that here).

Little Dorrit

I haven't explained anything important to you.

But I do challenge you, when reading *Little Dorrit*, and drafting sketches on the book, and acting, to look at how Dickens points to problems which, though bad in his time, are worse in ours.

One is access to deliberate death.

One is how to acquire an education.

One is access to care for the sick.

There is the social comment, but there are questions about how characters are portrayed.

One is the awkward details of Clennam's love for Amy.

Perhaps the one of greatest interest will be Dickens's self-perception as an avatar of Merdle. Recall the detailed insights Dickens gives us into the personality and motivations of Merdle. The time he spends on this in the novel? Much the same as he wore his heart on his sleeve before his public.

Of course, these mundane matters should not blind us to the fact that *Little Dorrit* is a novel, artfully constructed. Instead of treating it as though it were a television programme, we should also look at some of Dickens's experimentation with technique.

Not just formal techniqe, which applies to all novels, but the immediate structuring of the storyline as revealed in the number plans.

Remember, as a Dickens Fellowship we can take the easy road of looking at Dickens the man, and constructing foibles for him, and Dickens the social reformer, and constructing secondary programmes for him. But, primarily, he was a maker of literary artefacts, we should watch him in this process too.

Acknowledgements:

Factual material in this talk has been lifted from Bentley,
Slater and Burgis's *The Dickens Index*.
I am grateful to the members of the Roimata Reading Group for discussion of matters a step away from pure Dickens scholarship, but which are crucial to it nevertheless.

Introduction to the Books for the Year: *George Silverman's Explanation*

—Harold Oakley.

Harold Oakley

In 1868 the Maori wars were still raging, Benjamin Disraeli became Prime minister of Britain and Charles Dickens embarked on his final reading tour of America.

Simultaneous to the reading tour, Dickens's short novel, *George Silverman's Explanation*, was published in the 'Atlantic Monthly' from January to March.

To be able to introduce this book to you today I thought it wise to read it first.

George Silverman's Explanation

Like other Dickens novels it is narrated by a person, in this case George Silverman, beginning his career in difficult and trying circumstances. I saw Silverman seemingly rescued and helped, firstly by people of non-conformist religion, then by Lady Fareway associated with the established Church of England.

As for an explanation, I couldn't find one.

So I read the book again, a bit more carefully. This time the false starts at the beginning, rather than boring me, endeared me to the narrator. This time I saw the theft of an inheritance, not explicitly mentioned. I saw the bullying tactics of, though not explicitly mentioned, the non-conformist sect, "The Plymouth Brethren". (This particularly resonated with experiences in my own non-conformist background. Indeed, I retain a letter of censure from a church directorate for the evil of bringing a pavlova to a youth group function, topped with cream, coloured black!)

Reading on I saw a murder, egregious corruption in the established church, mental suffering and, lo and behold, an explanation most of which was not explicitly mentioned but 'read between the lines'.

Dickens was aged 56 when *George Silverman's Explanation* was published, just two years before his death.

Finally, after providing the masses with delightful light entertainment for over 30 years, he here stepped up and produced a novel full of subtlety and nuance.

Dickens himself was struck by his success. 'Upon myself', he wrote, 'it has made the strongest impression of reality and originality. I feel as if I have read something which I should never get out of my head.'

This is the final completed novel of Dickens' career.

And it's his best.

Read it twice!

Introduction to the Books for the Year: *No Thoroughfare*

—Pauline Francis-Fox

Pauline Francis-Fox

I believe the Christchurch branch of The Dickens Fellowship has only once before studied (if that is the right word to describe what we do!) *No Thoroughfare* back in 1999, some 26 years ago! [4]

I intend to take a few minutes of my allotted time to reminisce about members who were part of that year.

As only a few of us here today were members back in 1999 and as we have recently emphasised the importance of fellowship, I wish to remember past members and their contribution by referring to past issues of *Dickens Down Under* that cover our look at "*No Thoroughfare'*. I remind you that all issues referred to are available to read on our branch web site.[5]

4 Christchurch Dickens Fellowship 1999 – 2000 Syllabus

5 https://www.christchurchdickensfellowship.nz

No Thoroughfare

Issue 19 of Christmas 1998-1999 alerts members of the proposed reprint of the play by our Christchurch branch in preparation for the upcoming programme in October at a cost of $7.00. This was duly done[6] at a cost of $7.00. It is planned to reprint this publication ready for the programme later this year.

Issue 20 includes Peter's introduction.[7] In 1999 he gave a very detailed introduction to *No Thoroughfare* which I urge you to read as it gives a lot of detail about the story and the adaption of it into a play. Repetition of such details seems unnecessary today as they also appear in the introduction of the 1998-1999 reprint and will no doubt appear in this year's reprint.

Skip forward to issue 23 September 1999 which has again notification of the upcoming production.[8] I would like to read this as it mentions past activities and previous members.

"Rehearsals for the play *No Thoroughfare*

> Rehearsals for the 2 October production of the play *No Thoroughfare* will be held on 18 and 25 September. Even if you are not acting you are welcome to come along to the rehearsals and assist with the cup of tea. Everybody coming should of course bring something for afternoon tea.
>
> A very few copies of the first, limited, numbered, Christchurch Dickens Fellowship edition of the play are still available, at $7.00 to members living within New Zealand, and $10.00 otherwise.

The Production of the play *No Thoroughfare*

> On 2 October will be a production, directed by Gary Fox, of the play *No Thoroughfare* by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins

6 *Dickens Down Under* /The occasional newsletter of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship/Issue 19: Christmas 1998-199/ ISSN 1174-5797/Page 8

7 *Dickens Down Under* /The occasional newsletter of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship/Issue 20: March 1999/ ISSN 1174-5797/ Pages 11-14

8 *Dickens Down Under* /The occasional newsletter of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship/ Issue 23: September 1999 / ISSN 1174-5797/ Page 8

(and Charles Albert Fechter (1824-1879), perhaps, depending on how one thinks his contribution ought to be acknowledged), cut somewhat from its original three hours and forty minutes. We will endeavour to maintain our usual high standards, and we will act in our normal manner, script in hand, and imaginatively garbed. There will be no business meeting at the beginning. We will have the pleasure of the Burns Club members as our guests, and in order to live up to our good name in the catering department members are entreated to each bring enough afternoon tea for themselves and the Burns Club."

Finally, we come to the report of the October production of *No Thoroughfare.* [9] in Issue 24. Again, I choose to read this for the same reasons.

"The October Meeting: the Production of the play *No Thoroughfare.*

Gary Fox directed a production of the play, *No Thoroughfare*, by Dickens and Wilkie Collins (and perhaps Charles Fechter). The production was accompanied by a programme giving some details of the making of the play, and its early success.

The principal parts, those of Jules Obenreizer and George Vendale, were taken by Ken Young and Gary Fox, Ken breathing life into the role by making it clear from his first entrance that he was the viliain of the play. This was further emphasised by the eerie music, arranged by Pauline Francis, that accompanied his every entrance, in accordance with the stage directions.

The heroine, Marguerite, was played by Anne Draine in a spectacular blonde wig, Esmé Richards played the no-nonsense Sally Goldstraw, and was courted by Jack Prescott in the guise of Joey Ladle. Peter Oakley played the confused but well-meaning Walter Wilding, kept on the straight and narrow by Mr Bintry, played by Wilfred Dodge. Ruby Galbraith was a sensation in her costume as the Mother Superior and in her air of beneficent holiness. More

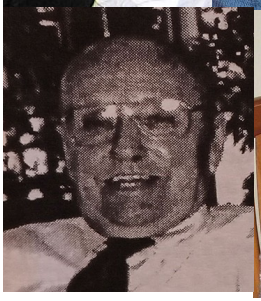
9 *Dickens Down Under* /The occasional newsletter of the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship/ Issue 24: Christmas 1999-2000 / ISSN 1174-5797/ Page 3

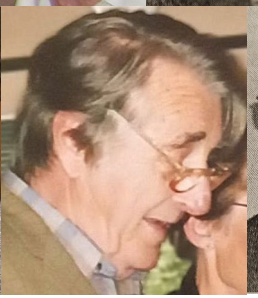
No Thoroughfare

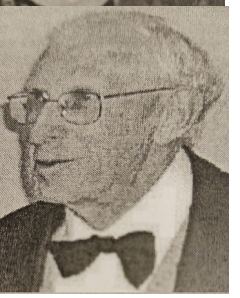
minor roles were those of the Veiled Lady, played by Pauline Francis, Madame Dor, played by Barbara Sadler, two guides and a landlord played by Hugh Williams, Peter Oakley and Mark Sadler, and a sister played by Pearl Marshall."

It is sad to note ten of those mentioned are no longer with us. (See below)

Above: 1999 cast of *No Thoroughfare*, including Esmé Richards and Peter Oakley.
Left: Anne Draine and Hugh Williams.







From top left: Gary Fox, Barbara Sadler, Mark Sadler, Ruby Galbraith.
Below from Left: Jack Prescott. Pearl Marshall, Ken Young, Wilfred Dodge.
Unfortunately, no other photos of Hugh Williams or Anne Draine could be located.

No Thoroughfare

Back to *No Thoroughfare.*

As the introduction given by Peter and repeated in our edition of *No Thoroughfare* are both full of detail which, if I repeat, will only soon be forgotten and as they are both readily available, I intend to make a few more general comments of where the work fitted into Dickens's life and the nature of the story or play.

In 1859 Dickens had recently ceased editing the weekly magazine *Household Words* and after the dissolution of the magazine he began another, titled *All The Year Round*, published monthly. Dickens continued the practice begun whilst at *Household Words* of producing an extra Christmas number. These collections of stories, sketches and essays written by Dickens and, at times, in collaboration with others like his friend Wilkie Collins became known and published separately as *The Christmas Stories.* The final Christmas number of *All The Year Round* appeared in 1867 and included the story *No Thoroughfare.*

In this case he did collaborate with Collins. It seems generally accepted that Dickens wrote the portion titled "The Overture" and the "Third Act" with Wilkie Collins contributing to the first and fourth act and writing the whole of the second.

It is interesting to contemplate how someone like Dickens, who liked to be in control, was willing to participate in such a joint venture. The two men had however, been friends for some time and, as The Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens[10] suggests, Collins's somewhat unconventional life and his friendship was the opposite of that of the very Victorian Forster who Dickens spent a lot of time with, so the eccentric Colins had a certain appeal. Some fourteen years previously in 1853, Collins and Dickens had travelled to Italy together and spent time crossing the Alps. Perhaps then, on a cold night over a glass of whisky or two, the two friends contemplated writing a murder mystery together! Also, Collins appeared to be the one friend who supported Dickens following his separation from Catherine and knew of his relationship with Ellen Ternan, although strains were to appear

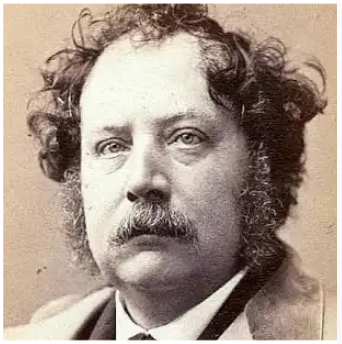
10 *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* /Edited by Paul Schlicke / Oxford University Press 1999/ Page 110 -111

No Thoroughfare

in the friendship later, especially after the publication of Collin's very popular *The Moonstone.*

Michael Slater [11]gives a lot more detail (than I have time or ability to talk about) of the exchange of ideas between Collins and Dickens in the writing of *No Thoroughfare.* The letter he quotes from ends thus, "we shall get a very Avalanche of power out of it, and thunder it down on the readers' heads"

Charles Fechter



No Thoroughfare, the play.

Another friend, Charles Fetcher may also have provided if not inspiration at least perhaps motivation for the writing of such a story and subsequent play. It seems there was always the intention that the story which appeared in *All The Year Round* would be adapted for the theatre, largely by Collins. Fetcher was an Anglo-French actor whose French mannerisms and passionate gestures appealed to Dickens. Dickens had been most impressed with Fetcher's portrayal of Hamlet in 1861 and offered him the lead role of the villainous Obenreizer. It was Fetcher who had given Dickens the Swiss Chalet back in 1864.

11 *Charles Dickens* by Michael Slater /Yale University Press New Haven and London 2009/ Page 569 -571

No Thoroughfare

Back to the play. The adaptation of the Christmas story for the theatre is usually accredited to Wilkie Collins though Dickens, you can be sure, put in his twopenny worth! It was first performed on 26th December and ran for 200 performances at the Adelphi Theatre, London. Billed as a drama in five acts and a Prologue, it seemed to appeal to the Victorian audiences. Dickens did not attend the opening night as he was by this time on his second trip to America, despite having spent much of the latter part of 1867 in ill health.

On his return Dickens saw the play twice[12] and according to Edgar Johnson,

> "was full of suggestions for its improvement. He thought it dragged; a drugging and attempted robbery in the bedroom of a Swiss inn should be done with the sound of a waterfall in the background - it would enhance enormously "the mystery and gloom of the scene."

Dickens then took off to Paris to give advice on how the French production should be managed!

So, did everyone enjoy it? Claire Tomalin obviously did *not,* she writes: [13]

> "He, (Dickens) collaborated with Wilkie Collins on a crudely melodramatic tale, … these works show diminished power and poor judgement and are read today only because they are written by Dickens: but they brought in money, and he kept going."

Will you, a 21st century reader, enjoy the story? Save it for a stormy winter's night around the fire. A story with many twists and turns, of abandonment, of mistaken identity, intrigue, greed, betrayal, murder, the horrors and dangers of mountaineering, dogs searching for lost travellers in a very hostile environment, unusually strong heroines who rescue lovers, what's not to like, even if it was written by Dickens nearing the end of his life.

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12 *Charles Dickens His Tragedy and Triumph* by Edgar Johnson/ Simon and Schuster 1952/ Volume Two / Page1099

13 *Charles Dickens A Life* Claire Tomalin / The Penguin Press New York 2011/ Page 361

Fellowship Notices

New Member: Dave Gillespie became an associate member at the AGM on 1 March 2025 in absentia. He will attend meetings when possible.

Monthly meetings will now be held in the staffroom of Te Puna Wai o Waipapa / Hagley College, 510 Hagley Avenue. Christchurch.
5 April, 2:00pm. *Little Dorrit*; chapters 1-12.
3 May, 2:00pm. *Little Dorrit*, chapters 13-24.

12 May 6:00pm. The Pickwick Celebration will be held at Pomeroy's Old Brewery Inn, 292 Kilmore Street, Christchurch Central.

Photos

Photos on page 12 were taken by Kathleen Campbell.

The photo on page 14 was taken by Pauline Francis-Fox.

The photo of Edgar Allan Poe on page 25 was copied from:
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/9/97/Edgar_Allan_Poe%2C_circa_1849%2C_restored%2C_squared_off.jpg/1200px-Edgar_Allan_Poe%2C_circa_1849%2C_restored%2C_squared_off.jpg

The photos of Charles Fechter and the play, *No Thoroughfare*, on page 41 were provided by Pauline Francis-Fox.

All other Photos were taken by Vanessa Grenfell.

Illustrations

Front page: Mr Flintwich mediates as a friend of the Family.
https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/963/images/0066m.jpg

P 13. Jane Deans
https://selwynstories.selwynlibraries.co.nz/assets/display/2290-max?u=b14e5dff1865a7bde24abd94ee5df629

P 15. Kofta
https://img.freepik.com/free-photo/side-view-fried-meat-dark-plate_176474-3086.jpg?ga=GA1.1.1607804845.1637477090&semt=ais_hybridhttps://

P 15. Panna Cotta
https://img.freepik.com/free-photo/tomato-salad-glass-table_140725-860.jpg?ga=GA1.1.1607804845.1637477090&semt=ais_hybrid

P 18. Pickwick www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/580/images/0536m.jpg

P 21. Mr Macawber and David Copperfield
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P 23. Sketches by Boz
https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/2/2e/George_Cruikshank_-_Sketches_by_Boz%2C_frontspiece.png/170px-George_Cruikshank_-_Sketches_by_Boz%2C_frontspiece.png

P 28. Amy Dorrit: https://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/963/images/0106m.jpg

P 41. No Thoroughfare.
https://cache.getarchive.net/Prod/thumb/cdn2/L3Bob3RvLzE4NjgvMTIvMzEvbm8tdGhvcm91Z2hmYXJlLWJ5LWRpY2tlbnMtYW5kLXdpbGtpZS1jb2xsaW5zLTY2ZjIyNS1zbWFsbC5qcGc%3D/640/434/jpg