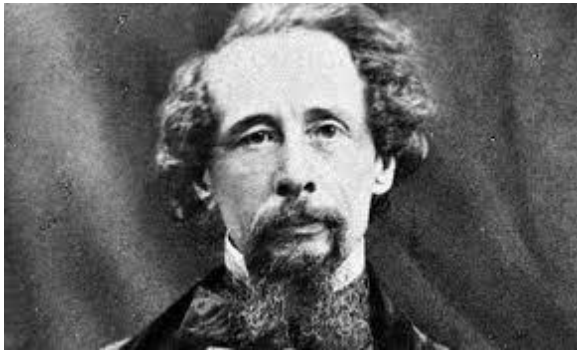


SOCAL DF GREETINGS



Winter 2025 Volume 16, Issue 1

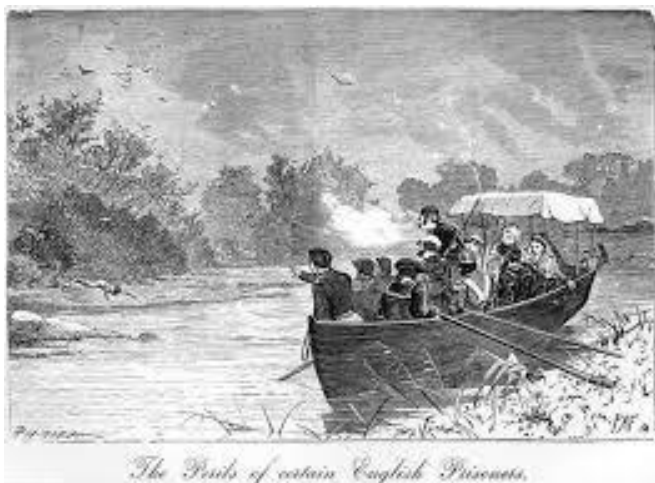
NEXT MEETING

Date: Saturday, March 22, 2025
Time: 11:00 am PST

Place: ZOOM
Meeting ID: 952 793 9640
Passcode: 075531

Discussion: *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*

Presenter: **Tom Savignano**



A Proud Branch Member since 1984

CHAIRMAN'S NOTES

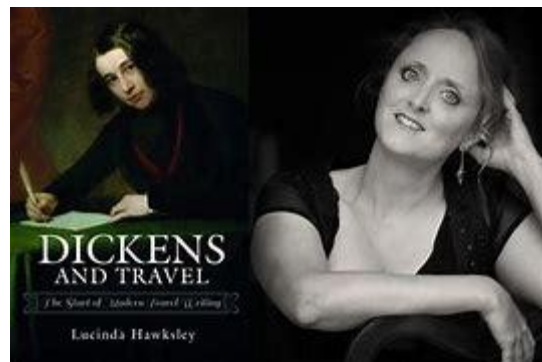
Welcome to our first newsletter issue of 2025. Please note the designation of "Winter." From this publishing onward, the intent is to provide your *SoCal DF Greetings* once a quarter: Winter, Spring, Summer and Fall.

We are very pleased to bring you our Dickens Fellowship President **Lucinda Hawksley** this coming Saturday, Feb. 22nd, on Zoom, 9 am PST (5 pm GMT, 12 pm EST).

Saturday, February 22nd:

Dickens Fellowship President **Lucinda Hawksley**

Presents her book "*Dickens and Travel*"



Place: ZOOM
Meeting ID: 939 5701 2880
Passcode: 396195

Lucinda's recent books include *Victorian Christmas* and *Dickens and Travel*, as well as a biography of Kate Dickens Perugini. We have asked Lucinda to focus on *Dickens and Travel*, as we have been recently reading and discussing *Pictures from Italy* and *The Lazy Tour of Two Idyll Apprentices*.

(continued on pg. 2)

Lucinda Hawksley is an author, broadcaster, lecturer and award-winning travel writer, who has worked as an interviewee, consultant and presenter on TV and radio shows worldwide. She has written three biographies of female artists: Kate Perugini (née Dickens), Princess Louise and Lizzie Siddal.

Lucinda's other books include, *Victorian Christmas* (2024), *Dickens and Travel* (2022), *Letters of Great Women* (2021), *Elizabeth Revealed* (2018), *Dickens and Christmas* (2017), *The Writer Abroad* (2017), *Bitten by Witch Fever: Wallpaper and Arsenic in the Victorian Home* (2016), *Charles Dickens and his Circle* (2016), *Moustaches, Whiskers & Beards (Facial Hair in Art)* (2014), and *March, Women, March: Voices of the Women's Movement* (2013).

Lucinda is a lecturer in literature and art history, and has spoken at universities, libraries and museums around the world. She also teaches Life Writing for the University of Cambridge.

Lucinda is a direct descendant great-great-great granddaughter of Charles and Catherine Dickens, and a Patron of the Charles Dickens Museum in London. In 2024 she became the President of the International Dickens Fellowship.

Next month we will resume our regular reading and discussion of the Household Words' 1857 Christmas annual of *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, co-written by Dickens and Collins.

Please enjoy our (pg. 3) GRAD GRIND that features a synopsis of *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*, along with reactions and reviews of the "Christmas" novella. Enjoy the Phillip V. Allingham excerpt from the Victorian Web, *The Imperial Context of The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*.

Please see our Facebook <http://www.facebook.com/groups/1405191869718211/> and become a Friend. Your Zoom join info is in the box on pg. 1, or you may contact Tim directly for the link. You should have received an email blast earlier this week that reminded you of the presentation by Lucinda on Saturday.

A Review of Lucinda Hawksley's "Dickens & Travel"

One of the many things I learned in the superb "Charles Dickens & Travel: the Start of Modern Travel Writing" by the prolific and versatile author Lucinda Hawksley, is that "The Sparkler of Albion" was a nickname by which Dickens was known among his friends. His great-great-great granddaughter, Lucinda Hawksley, should henceforth be known as "The London Sparkle" having put a wise, witty and wonderfully detailed sheen not only on her ancestor's history but on making a solid and page-turning treatise that her forebear invented modern "travel writing."

Reading this delightful biography while aboard ship was an especial treat for me as I dove bow first into Dickens' trips to the United States (ante bellum and post-civil war) and how Dickens was the first truly international celebrity to go on tour. Dickens and his tale of two continents paved the way for Jenny Lind in New York and Oscar Wilde in San Francisco.

Dickens' sojourns in his native United Kingdom, Ireland, Italy, France, Switzerland, Canada and a planned but unrealized trip to Australia round out Lucinda's lucid and fact-filled journey. I loved every page, especially learning many things I should have known but did not. How can anyone write in the English language without knowing Dickens more fully? I'm happy to have been sent back to school by Lucinda.

The apples have fallen close to the Dickens family tree for now close on 200 years. Lucinda, a gifted and crowd pleasing lecturer in addition to being an author and biographer of other subjects, is continuing a liberal, literary legacy: Charles was only the most famous Dickens to write. Lucinda is more than equal to her lineage and a proudly progressive voice upon which the "Sparkler of Albion" would undoubtedly smile.

If you love travel, Dickens, history or just plain fantastic, impeccably well researched eloquent writing this is a book for you, and Lucinda Hawksley an author whose pages you should bookmark and turn.
— David Eugene Perry, author of "Upon This Rock"

You can visit Lucinda's website and buy this and any of her other books:

<https://www.lucindahawksley.com/books/dickens-and-travel/>

GRAD GRIND

By Tim Clark, Chairman



Did You Know?

(*The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* tid-bits to whet the Dickensian Whistle)

A classic collaboration between two literary giants, *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners* is a gripping adventure story filled with murder, intrigue, and strong female characters

Following on from the success of *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, this is another collaboration from close friends and literary giants, Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. Their legendary friendship resulted in a number of joint literary ventures, in this case Collins wrote the second chapter under Dickens' supervision (Dickens is credited with chapters one and three).

Inspired by events of the Indian Mutiny in 1857, but wishing to distance himself from the context of India itself, Dickens chose to set his novella in Central America. This adventure story takes place on the island of Belize, where an English colony serves as a depot for a British silver mine on the mainland. To be sure, reports of piratical depredations up and down the coast have caused quite a stir, which is why His Majesty's sailors and Marines have been dispatched to clear up the disturbance.

Inevitably, the silver mine is overrun by pirates. Despite the mobilized military presence, the pirates prove craftier than expected, colonists, sailors, and Marines alike will find themselves ensnared in a desperate struggle for survival against hopeless odds.

The pirates murder a number of English colonists and take the remaining prisoner. In the diverting narrative that follows, the initiative of intrepid women prisoners enables the captives to escape.

Reactions and Reviews

"The Perils of Certain English Prisoners" is a short story written by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins for the Christmas numbers publication but it does not mention Christmas at all. I was expecting a story about criminals who were prisoners so I was surprised and pleased on reading this exciting suspenseful read. The men and women of usefulness depends not of rank or learning but instinct and determination.

Still a huge fan of Dickens, but what was this doing in the middle of a book of Christmas stories? Pirates, treasure, and a daring escape, made for a somewhat suspenseful story but did not belong in this book. I like when Dickens collaborates with Collins, he's done it before. Not a bad story but I'm tired of reading about death and suspense when I was looking toward more of Dickens typical type holiday stories. Overall I was disappointed and although the collaboration was an interesting read, I didn't really find myself enjoying it.

I'm disappointed with Dickens for writing a fairly racist short story here. It's hurtful, it's short-sighted, it's angrier than it is kind, it's not particularly good, and it is beneath him. As was Dickens' stated purpose, this story gives us quite good 'women in action'. They're practical, courageous and efficient as well as good-hearted. So this odd little paean to imperialism, which I find at odds with the general tenor of his work, is also surprisingly white-feminist. Make of that what you will.

This collaboration of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins is a short, energetic adventure yarn along the lines of "Treasure Island" and "Kidnapped," but written decades before those hoary classics. Tropical paradise, trackless jungle, gunfights, treachery, treasure, beautiful women and innocent children to save: this tale has it all. The second chapter credited to Collins is the true heart of the story, a taut and suspenseful and exotic narrative comparable to any modern thriller. Frankly, I think Dickens comes off second-best in this collaboration. Enjoy as you set sail in His Gracious Majesty's service against the most villainous set of scalawags ever to blight the Caribbean.



The Imperial Context of "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners" (1857) by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins

"The Perils of Certain English Prisoners" (1857) the novella Charles Dickens wrote in [collaboration with](#) his protégé, Wilkie Collins involves British imperialism on two continents — Asia and South America. In preparation for writing the first and third chapters of the novella, for which he was responsible, Dickens consulted his scholarly subeditor for Latin American affairs, Henry Morley (1822-94), whom he had recruited to the staff in 1850, about details of politics, international relations, setting, and circumstance, as well as about the broader issues behind the rhetorical strategy of a first-person "captivity narrative" (see letter of 18 October 1857, Pilgrim Edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, 8: 468-69).

The inspiration for this tale set in South America was the courage exhibited by the British women and children captured during the [Sepoy Mutiny](#) of Indian troops earlier that year at Cawnpore and Lucknow; this was almost certainly the source of the intrepid Miss Marion Maryon. Lillian Nayder (2001) has pointed out that Dickens explained in a letter, "I wish to avoid India itself; but I want to shadow out in what I do, the bravery of our ladies in India" (*Letters*, 8: 469). As he stated, Dickens wished to examine the courage of the English women in India in a context far removed from that of the Indian Rebellion; he does so in "The Perils of Certain English Prisoners" by shifting the scene of the action to a British mining colony off the coast of Central America in the reign of George II, in 1744.

Since his inauguration of the weekly journal *Household Words* in 1850, Dickens had been interested in publishing occasional pieces on Latin America. Moreover, at the time that Dickens and Collins were writing the novella there was considerable interest in London and Paris in constructing a canal across the isthmus of Panama, in the very region where the story is set, to connect California with both the eastern United States and western Europe. Technologically, the engineering project was viable — and, indeed, potentially lucrative — but was mired in governmental red tape. Yet a third factor was Britain's seizing the Mosquito Coast of Belize, which it renamed "Grayville" after the colonial governor of Jamaica, whose forces had effected the conquest, supposedly in support of the Mosquito Indians. Since this annexation violated the Monroe Doctrine of the United States of America, [Sir Edward G. D. Bulwer-Lytton](#), Britain's "Mr. Fix-It" in Anglo-American relations, negotiated a settlement with the Americans according to which Britain abandoned its original notion of an independent "Mosquitia." Nonetheless, many in the engineering and financial communities in London and Paris continued to be interested in the possibility of constructing a Nicaraguan canal to link Atlantic and Pacific and thereby considerably reduce the length of the voyage from Europe and the eastern United States to the gold fields of California. This "canal zone" is precisely the region to which Morley, the *Household Words* South American specialist, had taken his "Phantom Ship" in the 22 February 1851 issue.

"The Perils of Certain English Prisoners," which followed these other texts about South America in *Household Words*, takes the form of a tale of captivity and escape: When the pirates attack Silver-Store Island (in the vicinity of the British colony of Belize) aided by the turncoat King, they murder a number of the British colonists before stealing the silver and taking a number of the survivors hostage before retreating to the interior of

Honduras. Under the combined initiative of Miss Maryon and Davis, the captives manage to escape down river.

Dickens's views appear to be voiced by his narrator, Gill Davis, the plain-spoken private in the Royal Marines, who to an extent anticipates [Kipling's](#) proletarian defenders of empire. A benign *miles gloriosus* — the braggart soldier of classical and Shakespearean tradition — Davis responds to the solemn beauty of the Central American jungle in a manner sometimes sentimental and sometimes comic, and the illiterate soldier speaks positively about the "accommodations" that the British garrison and colonists have made with local customs. And yet, especially in describing the treacherous mulatto ('Sambo') collaborator, "Christian George King," Gill makes racist comments that render Dickens's chapters awkward reading today.

A particularly personal influence upon Dickens's attitudes towards British imperialism and colonialism of course was the position of his son Walter (1841-63), who left for military service in India in July 1857, shortly after the Mutiny and six months before the novella appeared. Dickens's friend, the banking heiress [Angela Burdett Coutts](#), had helped Dickens's son obtain his appointment as a cadet in [East India Company](#), and the anxious father, one surmises, might have been especially concerned about inept imperial leaders who placed those under their command and under their protection in great danger by misunderstanding conquered peoples. Perhaps his son's position in India offers an explanation why he did not want to set the novella there and thus appear to be criticizing his son's superiors.

Philip V. Allingham, Associate Professor of English, Lakehead University with [George P. Landow](#), Professor of English and the History of Art, Brown University

(The Victorian Web, December 2005)

Our annual Fellowship dues are designated to support local sponsorships and charities. We bestowed a \$200 Holiday 2024 donation/sponsorship each to the following:

Operation Safehouse (abused and battered women)
Riverside City Mission
The Dickens Project (Dickens U.)
Foodbank/Hope Net
House of Ruth (abused and battered women)

We have received letters of acknowledgement and gratitude from Foodbank/Hope Net and the House of Ruth.

Thank you members, near and far!

SoCal Dickens Fellowship Officers

Chairman

poohclark@earthlink.net

Tim Clark
(909) 225-2834

Corresponding Secretary Emerita

jeggen@ca.rr.com

Jean Eggen
(310) 645-5554

Recording Secretary

flybyfrye@gmail.com

Faye Russell
(323) 630-3784

Treasurer

davidjpickett@icloud.com

David Pickett
(951) 805-6099

Future SoCal DF Meetings

- March 22 (*The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*)
- May 10 (*The Signalman and George Silverman's Explanation*)
- July 12 (TBA)
- September 13 (TBA)
- November 15 (TBA)

March 22 and May 10 will be led by Tom Savignano.
All meetings are scheduled for Zoom.
Reading choices and Presenters for July, September
and November ?

This is our quarterly 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.
If you submit a check, please make it payable to GRAD (it's a Provident bank stipulation).



Upcoming Dickens Fellowship Feb.-March Zoom Events

- **Saturday, February 22nd**, 9:00 am PST: **Southern California Dickens Fellowship (SoCalDF)**
www.facebook.com/groups/1405191869718211/
Lucinda Hawksley presents *Dickens and Travel*
- **Sunday, February 23rd**, 1:00 pm PST: **Santa Cruz Pickwick**
<https://dickens.ucsc.edu/resources/pickwick-club/index.html>
Glenna Matthews presents *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Ch. 42-55 (registration required)
- **Saturday, March 1st**, 1:00 pm EST: **Friends of Dickens, NY (FDNY)**
www.thefriendsofdickens.org
James Armstrong moderates *Sketches by Boz: Characters* (Hybrid)
- **Tuesday, March 4th**, 1:00 pm EST **Montreal**
www.dickensmontreal.ca
Ellie Clavier moderates *Great Expectations*, Ch. 48-52; Christian Lehmann, guest speaker
- **Tuesday, March 11th**, 3:00 pm GMT: **Canterbury**
canterburydf@gmail.com
Beryl Gray presents *Dickens and His Dogs* (Hybrid / registration required)
- **Saturday, March 15th**, 12:30 pm EST: **Philadelphia**
www.dickensphila.org
Patrica Vinci moderates *A Week's Tramp in Dickens Land*
- **Saturday, March 15th**, 1:00 pm EST: **Dickens Fellowship of New York (DFNY)**
www.dickensnewyork.com
Mark Halperin moderates *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Ch. 16-22
- **Saturday, March 22nd**, 10:00 am PST: **Southern California Dickens Fellowship (SoCalDF)**
www.facebook.com/groups/1405191869718211/
Tom Savignano presents *The Perils of Certain English Prisoners*
- **Wednesday, March 19th**, 7:30 pm GMT: **Aberdeen**
eadsummers@me.com
Eric Summers presents *TBA*
- **Sunday, March 23rd**, 1:00 pm PST: **Santa Cruz Pickwick**
<https://dickens.ucsc.edu/resources/pickwick-club/index.html>
TBA presents *The Old Curiosity Shop*, Ch. 56-68 (registration required)

Summer Conferences (Registration is open for both):

- **118th International Dickens Fellowship**: July 14-16, Canterbury Cathedral, Canterbury, Kent, England. "*Dickens, Faith and Antiquity*" www.dickensfellowship.org
- **45th Annual Dickens Universe**: July 20-26, U.C. Santa Cruz, "*The Old Curiosity Shop*" [Dickens Universe](http://DickensUniverse)

