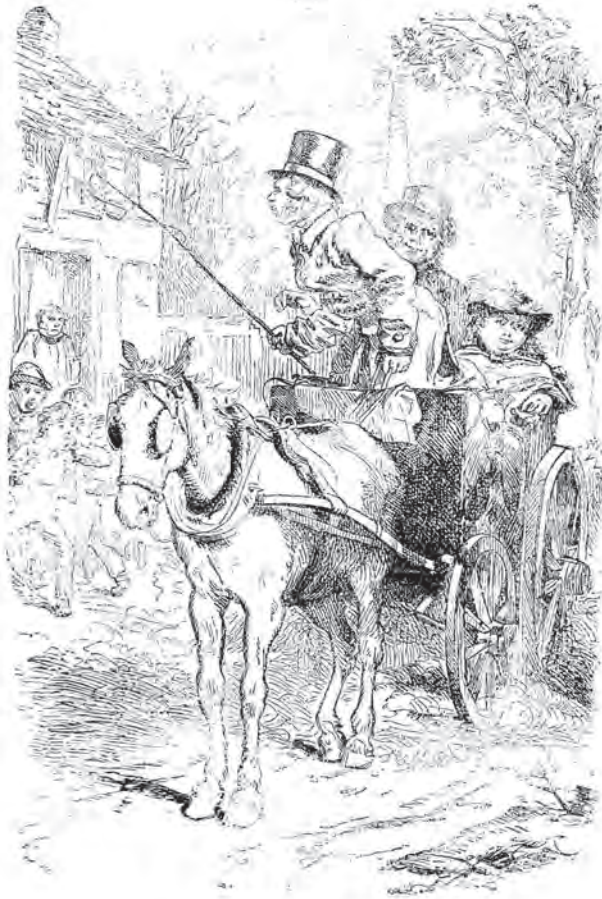


Mr Dick's Kite

FOR ALL DICKENS FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS

No.95

Winter 2015



THE BOFFIN PROGRESS

“An unwonted application of corn to the horse, and of paint and varnish to the carriage, when both fell in as a part of the Boffin legacy, had made what Mr Boffin considered a neat turn-out of the whole: and a driver being added...left nothing to be desired.”

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND. CHAPTER IX

Dear Readers,

Another year is beginning, and we hope it will bring peace and happiness to us all.

For some reason the Christmas post was delayed this year, but gradually cards arrived bringing small items of news. Some have been included in this issue.

It is always a great pleasure to know that *Mr Dick's Kite* is well received and enjoyed.

Our cover picture is from *Our Mutual Friend*. Chapter IX.

Mr Boffin – the Golden Dustman - has come into an inheritance, due to the supposed death of the heir to the Harmon estate, John Harmon. Mrs Boffin decides she would like to adopt an orphan child and give it John's name, in order to give something back. Mr Boffin humours her and puts together a shabby equipage with a dreadful old horse and a rough lout of a driver, so that they can travel about the countryside in state, and begin their search for a suitable child.

From our Postbag

Thank you to everyone who has corresponded with us.

Elaine and Bob Oakley from Christchurch New Zealand Dickens Fellowship sent Christmas greetings and expressed pleasure in reading *Mr Dick's Kite*.

Their Branch delights in dressing in character for each of their readings, and at 84 years of age, Elaine was encouraged to do a re-run of the programme on *Pickwick Papers* which she first put together in 1999! Her son Harold made a lovely, despondent Winkle, while son Peter (Branch Secretary) took the part of Mr Tupman.



Mr Wardle (John Vine) Mr Winkle (Harold Oakley) Martin, the gamekeeper (Yvonne Gavin) and Mr Tupman (Peter Oakley)



The Fat Boy (William Oakley) makes Mrs Wardle's (Vanessa Grenfell) flesh creep.

Wonderful impersonations!

Rose-Marie Morrison from Adelaide Dickens Society sent greetings, and says that New South Wales Branch are arranging to have Plorn's wife's grave fixed up with a slab and headstone. "She died in Melbourne and has been in an unmarked grave ever since."

Rose-Marie and her husband John plan to go over to Box Hill, near Melbourne for the unveiling ceremony.

We also received some responses to previous items in *Mr Dick's Kite*.

John Haviland, long time member of the Dickens Fellowship, writes in response to the article *A Rare Find (MDK No 94)*

‘About your contribution from New South Wales. I have been thinking again about my copy of A Christmas Carol. I treasure it because it is a first edition, with green endpapers and because its special inscription reads:

“To Arthur Haviland from his brother George, December 1843”

Arthur was my grandfather, who has many descendents, while kind George has none.

Vintage car enthusiasts like to keep a registers of the surviving cars of a particular make, with their descriptions.

I wonder if any member of the Fellowship would think of starting a register of first edition Christmas Carols? I wonder how

many survive in the same family that they first belonged to?’

Mr Glyn Downton, writes:

‘Although I have been a Dickens fan for over 40 years, I have only been a member of the Society in recent times.

In issue 94 (Autumn 2014), you have referred to the Staplehurst rail crash in June 1865. This features in “God is an Englishman”, which is the first book in the Swann Family Saga by R.F.Delderfield. The protagonist, Adam Swann, is on the train, and indeed loses a leg because of his injuries. Dickens also features and is portrayed as behaving courageously and helping to rescue a number of passengers.

This is related in “Tumult” which is the second chapter in Part Five, “Towards the Weir”.

Absolutely Enjoying Dickens

It is always of interest to hear from other Dickensians regarding their particular favourite pieces from the novels, or sometimes small snippets that have moved them or held their interest.

The Monterey Peninsula Dickens Fellowship studied *Barnaby Rudge* as their book of the year for 2014. Interestingly they say:-

“As the disparate pieces of the plot come together, the group continues to enjoy this novel with some saying that it is surprising them, and that it should be more widely read. Dickens is at his best here, “on task”, as one might say today, without the long asides the longer novels contain – the story moves forward with a limited number of characters but no absence of Dickens’s beloved descriptions of his varied characters or his comic relief”

Rose-Marie Morrison, Adelaide Dickens Fellowship, says their book of study 2015 will be *Martin Chuzzlewit*, and comments “*I love the opening description.*”

Not being a Dickens scholar I immediately turned to Chapter 1 and read about the pedigree of the Chuzzlewit family. There is ironic humour in this chapter, but I wonder if she was thinking more of the next chapter with its description of autumnal scenes and of leaves and trees in the still evening air:

“On the motionless branches of some trees, autumn berries hung like clusters of coral beads, as in those fabled orchards where

fruits were jewels; others, stripped of all their garniture, stood, each the centre of its little heap of bright red leaves, watching their slow decay; others again, still wearing theirs, had them all crunched and crackled up, as though they had been burnt; about the stems of some were piled, in ruddy mounds, the apples they

had borne that year; while others (hardy evergreens this class) showed somewhat stern and gloomy in their vigour, as charged by nature with the admonition that it is not to her more sensitive and joyous favourites she grants the longest term of life.”

Martin Chuzzlewit Chapter 2

Two letters to the *Financial Times* (Sept 2014) extol the virtues of the sage advice from Mr Micawber to young David Copperfield.

Forget about Algebra, Dickens has the answer!

In a previous letter, a writer said “*financial savvy is not something schools can teach*” and suggests pupils should learn more maths. Mr W.C. of Manhattan Beach disagrees. He believes ‘*better assign more Dickens.*’ “*Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure nineteen pounds nineteen and six, result happiness. Annual income twenty pounds, annual expenditure twenty pounds nought and six, result misery.*”

However, Mr S N. of Oxford has a different slant on things.

“*Sir, Mr W C. says that schools should be assigned more Dickens and less mathematics. He quotes the line in David Copperfield about happiness and misery, and claims that this is more than enough mathematics and finance for anyone. What this theory overlooks is that Mr Micawber could only draw his financial conclusions thanks to a solid grounding in the basics of addition and subtraction, an ease with arithmetic bases 10,12 and 20, and a grasp of the meaning of negative real numbers. It is vital for mathematical*

principles to be well taught. They underpin so much in life.

If there is to be more Dickens in schools, then perhaps it should promote the wisdom of Mrs Micawber rather than that of her husband. She says, “Now I am convinced, myself, and this I have pointed out to Mr Micawber several times of late, that things cannot be expected to turn up of themselves.”

Thanks to Brenda from Chicago, for these pieces.

FH

The Irish Connection

A friend recently gave me a large newspaper cutting from *The Irish Times* dated August 2013, and apologised for the delay in doing so. “*There is something about Dickens in it*” she said.

It was an article by Connor Pope on the unglamorous, hard work of hotel staff. The

journalist went behind the scenes at the Shelbourne Hotel in Dublin.

Well, I had to read a long way in to find the Dickens connection, but right at the end of the article JD Flynn, the young man who had acted as a chaperone to the journalist, revealed “*My great, great, great, great grandfather was Charles Dickens*” The journalist is flabbergasted. “*JD Flynn is a direct descendent of one of the finest novelists the English language has ever seen? he writes, “And he mentions it only in passing? His colleagues don’t even know. Well, they might now.”*

I thought I’d better check these facts before printing it, but before I did so I read the second article from *The Irish Times*, this one dated 2011. This was headed “*Great expectations heaped on the descendents of Charles Dickens*”.

It stated “*that in Kilkenny two of Charles Dickens’s direct descendents are helping to stage a play about the 19th century writer. One of those present will be actor Gerald Dickens, who will perform his one-man show, ‘Mr Dickens is Coming’, at Kyteler Inn for one night only. His sister, Nicky Dickens Flynn... who currently owns the Kyteler Inn, facilitated the show*”

“*The Dickens family is a very large clan,*” explains Flynn. “*Charles had 11 children and we come down from the eighth child.*”

Mystery solved! JD is Nicky’s son and nephew to Gerald Dickens.

I found further connections when reading the *Pilgrim Edition. The Letters of Charles Dickens 1865 – 1867.*

Dickens at the Shelbourne

In March 1867 Dickens went over to Ireland to give his public readings. A Fenian rising had been threatening since autumn 1866, and in February 1867 at least 1000 London

Irish Fenians raided the military arsenal at Chester. He was due to stay in Dublin from the 16th to the 18th March and St Patrick’s Day was right in the middle. If there was going to be trouble, it would be on that day.

He wrote to his daughter on the 16th March from Dublin, following his first reading. “*I daresay you know already that I held many councils in London about coming to Ireland at all, and was very much against it. Everything looked as bad here as need be, but we did very well last night after all*”. To Forster he wrote “*so profoundly discouraging were the accounts from here (that I) had actually drawn up a bill announcing (indefinitely) the postponement of all readings..*”

He gave three readings in Dublin to packed audiences, (one estimated at nearly 4000 attendees). This is really remarkable when considering that there was trouble in the offing, a marked military presence in the streets, and that the weather in February was none too clement.

Dickens wrote to Georgina “*Of course you will not be in the least uneasy about me. If any commotion occurs, I shall instantly stop the Dublin Readings, and of course shall not put myself in harm’s way.*” His trip was a great success. He read *Dr Marigold, The Trial*, and *Copperfield* in Dublin to great acclaim. While in Dublin where should he stay but at the Shelbourne Hotel!

“*We are splendidly housed here and in great comfort*” he wrote.

There were thankfully no disturbances or riots, and the only troubles that Dickens encountered were from “*a horrible fellow-creature (female as I judge) practising the scales on a bad piano in the next room where the sound is worse than it would be here...*”

FH

Following in the Great Man's Footsteps

We all know that Dickens got around, in Britain and abroad. To walk on the same street or dine in the same building that he did over one hundred years ago still holds a thrill for me.

And so it was that on a sunny Saturday in October I found myself lunching with a very dear friend and former member of our branch in The Angel Hotel in Bury St. Edmunds. Sheila Flowers was involved in organising the Nottingham DF Conference in 1995 and moved to Suffolk a few years later.

The Angel – a splendid, historic coaching inn dating back to 1452, stands in one of the prettiest Georgian squares in the country, opposite the ruins of the ancient abbey. Dickens first stayed there in 1835 while reporting on the Suffolk Parliamentary Elections for *The Morning Chronicle*. Later in his career he returned in 1859 and 1861 on his reading tours, performing in The Athenaeum nearby.

In chapter 16 of *Pickwick Papers* Dickens writes "The coach rattled through the well-

paved streets of a handsome little town, of thriving and cleanly appearance, and stopped before a large inn situated in a wide open street, nearly facing the old abbey. "And this," said Mr Pickwick, looking up, "is The Angel! We alight here Sam."

In a letter to Georgina Hogarth dated 30 October 1861 Dickens writes: "I think *Nickleby* tops all the readings.....it went last night, not only with roars, but with a general hilarity and pleasure that I have never seen surpassed. We are full here for tonight."

Sheila and I were hoping to see the "Dickens room" where he stayed, but unfortunately it was occupied. We wondered if these modern-day tourists appreciated, or even knew, the significance of their holiday accommodation?

Kathy Powis, Nottingham DF

Charles Dickens Recognised!

The new statue of Charles Dickens in Guildhall Square, Portsmouth, was one of three prizewinners at the annual Marsh Awards for Excellence in Public Sculpture on 6th November.

The winner was Richard Wilson RA's *Slipstream*, a £3.5 million, 78 metre long sculpture at Heathrow's newly rebuilt Terminal 2. Martin Jennings's *Charles Dickens* in Portsmouth and Studio Weave's *Lullaby Factory* at Great Ormond Street Hospital were both Highly Commended runners-up.

This is the only national prize competition for public sculpture in Britain. Organised

by the Public Monuments and Sculpture Association, prizes are given by the Marsh Christian Trust and were handed out by the Duke of Gloucester in a ceremony in Central London.

The Dickens statue was commended for its placing in such an appropriate location, for being erected in defiance of some serious doubters and for catching its subject so exactly and so approachably.

Gad's Hill Place on Fire

One extremely hot summer's day some years ago, my father Alan Watts was visiting Gad's Hill Place with Cedric Dickens and a few other helpers. Cedric felt that the rose-bed at the front of the house needed some considerable pruning and tidying up. It was overgrown with brambles, and long grass which had turned to straw in the heat of this particular summer.

My father recalls that Cedric wore a remarkable hat, which as far as anyone could remember might have started life as an American Stetson. Ideal headgear for such a hot day with its broad brim, even though it was somewhat misshapen.

The pruners were busy at work when suddenly there was a cry of "Fire!"

To everyone's consternation the overgrown grasses had caught alight and Gad's Hill

Place and its contents were in danger of being reduced to ashes!

It spread quickly, and a hot and begrimed Cedric was trying to beat down the flames.

Someone dashed for the telephone and within a very short time the local Fire Brigade arrived on the scene and managed to put the bush-fire out using a considerable amount of water!

FH

Paul McCartney Sells *Barnaby Rudge*

We are grateful to Beth Penney of the Monterey Peninsula Branch whose newsletter – *Our Mutual Friend* – informs us that Sir Paul McCartney sold his ex-Army General Service Launch *Barnaby Rudge* for £60,000 in July.

The boat is a 50 foot Dickens Class motor launch that was launched in 1956 and was moored in Rye. Apparently all the boats in the Dickens Class were named after a different Dickens novel. Sir Paul made the decision to sell because he no longer used the vessel - which held too many memories of his late wife Linda. All proceeds were donated to charity.

Fans of the ex-Beatle will know that Sir Paul's 2005 solo album

- *Chaos and Creation in the Backyard* - includes the song *Jenny Wren* which is his tribute to Fanny Cleaver.



James Steerforth – A Case for the Defence

I am a great admirer of Charles Dickens's autobiographical novel, *David Copperfield*.

I have often wrestled with the question of James Steerforth, who is glibly portrayed as one of the villains of Dickens's novels. I personally believe that he had much to commend him. Born the son of a wealthy autocrat, circumstances in which he was brought up dictated that he perhaps devoted himself to "a restless search for distractions".

Steerforth certainly "carried a spell with him to which it was a natural weakness to yield". I am sure we have all encountered individuals who are charming, scholarly, good looking and very persuasive.

Arrogance and dominance are sometimes a natural progression, but hardly damning or Machiavellian.

I merely put the case, as Mr. Jaggers might have said. Steerforth was a protector and patron of Copperfield as a small boy in Salem House School. Copperfield was

never formally received into school until the arrival of Steerforth. Copperfield himself as stated "in the discovery of his unworthiness, I thought more of all that was brilliant in him and all that was good in him. If I had been brought face to face with him I could not have uttered one reproach". The last words Steerforth spoke to Copperfield were "Daisy, if anything should ever separate us you must think of me at my best if circumstances should ever part us". Copperfield's final response was "Oh God forgive you Steerforth". David Copperfield clearly forgave him - but do Dickens's readers forgive him?

The evil that men do lives after them. The good is oft interred with their bones. So let it be with Steerforth.

I rest my case. Perhaps this plea might prompt a case for the prosecution!

Terry Blissett

Mapping The Dickens Country

The early years of the Fellowship's journal *The Dickensian* were characterised by frequent articles about the topography of Dickens's life and writings.

On Saturday 28 March there is to be a one-day symposium on the subject hosted jointly by the journal and the Rochester and Chatham Branch in the Guildhall Museum in Rochester (where Pip was indentured). The event will run from 11 am - 6 pm and the speakers will include: Malcolm Andrews, Jeremy Clarke, Joss Marsh, Andrew Sanders,

Jeremy Tambling, Daniel Tyler, Tony Williams and Norman Nunn. Tickets cost £25 which includes a buffet lunch, beverages and wine reception, and are obtainable from: Peter Fairbrace, 32 Applecross Close, Rochester, ME1 1PS. Cheques made payable to: Rochester and Chatham Dickens Fellowship please.

Election of Officers: The AGM of the Fellowship will take place on Saturday 25 July during the conference in Bristol. All the current officers will be standing for re-election. Should you wish to stand as Joint General Secretary, Honorary Editor of *The Dickensian* or Honorary Treasurer, please contact the Fellowship via: postbox@dickensfellowship.org with a brief c.v.