
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

PROFESSOR MICHAEL SLATER MBE Former President and popular long-standing member of the Dickens Fellowship, one-time Editor of the *Dickensian* and Chairman of the CDM Trustees, Michael has been awarded the MBE for "Services to Literary Scholarship". He is well-known to most members, a great supporter of the Fellowship and the Museum and regularly gives talks to members. Michael says he sees it as an honour for the Fellowship as much as for him personally, and an indication of the ongoing perceived importance of Dickens in the life of the nation. He adds that he is bearing in mind the shining example of Miss Morleena Kenwigs who was advised by her mother to say, when announcing that she and her sisters were to have private French lessons from Mr Johnson (aka Nicholas Nickleby), "But we ain't proud, cos ma says it's sinful".

Charles Dickens at Bruce Castle DF member Robert Missen says: "I inherited my enthusiasm for CD from my late father who remembered a very elderly master at his Church School in the 1930's reading "Great Expectations" to the boys. After 40 years as a public librarian I retired and am currently a volunteer at Bruce Castle Museum and Archive in Tottenham, N London. Between 1827 and 1891, it was a progressive boy's school run by Rowland Hill and his brothers. It did not have corporal punishment and had a system of tokens for good behaviour. Charles Babbage sent his sons there and Dickens visited the school. He wrote to William Macready from the Albion Hotel at Broadstairs in August 1845, praising the school, calling the system of teaching, "a perfectly admirable one; the only recognition of education as a broad system of moral and intellectual philosophy that I have ever seen in practice ". He did not send any of his sons there, but the Museum is proud of its connections with Charles Dickens and Rowland Hill, two Eminent Victorians !"

Selina Scott reads A Christmas Carol Brian Oxberry of the York Branch informs us that in 2012 a first edition of *A Christmas Carol* was

found in a skip and came up for auction in New York. The copy includes a dedication from the author to Mrs Charles Smithson, the widow of Dickens's solicitor friend. The Smithsons' home was in the market town of Malton in North Yorkshire. Quite how it migrated from Malton to New York remains a mystery. Thanks largely to the initiative of journalist, broadcaster and local resident Selina Scott, sufficient funds were raised from local businesses and organizations to buy the book – at a cost of about £27,000 - and return it to Malton. The purchase inspired the establishment of a charity - *Dickens Gift to Yorkshire* - to raise funds to stimulate the interest of schools, colleges, universities and community societies in the works of Dickens. To raise funds for the charity, Selina Scott has recorded the *Carol*, which is available for purchase at a cost of £10. Copies of the CD can be obtained by e-mailing Mr Stephen Jolli: gjr31@dial.pipex.com. Branch Secretaries can obtain copies at the special rate of £8.

Dickens and Morse Keen-eyed DF member Dr Christine Corton (Cambridge Branch) has sent in the following: "The final episode of the latest series of 'Endeavour', entitled 'Neverland', showed the young Morse entering a firm of solicitors. Did anyone notice the names of the partners? They were called 'Vholes, Jaggars and Lightwood'." LP readers will of course recognise *Dickensian* lawyers (two shady and one bored!) from *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend* respectively.

Virginia Woolf & CD Michael Slater says: "Claire Tomalin sent me this a while ago. Virginia Woolf is writing to Hugh Walpole 8 February 1936: 'I'm reading David Copperfield for the 6th time with almost complete satisfaction. I'd forgotten how magnificent it is. What's wrong, I can't help asking myself? Why wasn't he the greatest writer in the world? For alas – no, I won't try to go into my crabbings and diminishings. So enthusiastic am I that I've got a new life of him. Did you know ... the story of the actress? He was an actor, I think; very hard; meretricious? Something had shrivelled? And then his velvet suit and his stupendous

genius? But you won't want to be discussing Dickens at the moment.' Woolf is referring to Thomas Wright's life of Dickens which was the first biography to feature his relationship with Ellen Ternan. Claire came across it in *Congenial Spirits: Selected Letters of Virginia Woolf*, edited by J.T.Banks (1989)."

CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM

As most members know, the Fellowship does not employ any paid members of staff, but uses volunteers. Staff at the CDM in Doughty Street are employees of the Museum and members are asked not to phone the Museum with queries about the Fellowship. Staff are delighted to welcome DF members from around the world, but to enjoy your privilege of free access, please be ready to produce your membership card.

GHOSTS ON THE UNDERGROUND "Five models, transformed into Miss Havisham, the sinister spinster described by Charles Dickens in *Great Expectations* as 'the witch of the place', were unleashed on London in May. They were paying homage to the woman a recent survey reveals as "the most haunting female character in British literature" (with Heathcliff from *Wuthering Heights* topping the male list). They were celebrating the screening of *GE* on TV channel Drama. They travelled on the tube and buses amongst surprised commuters before meeting in front of Big Ben at 8.40am, the time at which Miss Havisham was jilted by her fiancé Compeyson. They also visited Westminster Abbey, where CD is buried. Adrian Wills, General Manager of UKTV channel Drama says, '*They are a fitting tribute to one of the most memorable characters ever created. We hope CD would have been amused to think that, more than 150 years after he created Miss Havisham, she is standing at the foot of Big Ben at twenty minutes to nine, still pining for her lost love.*' Thanks to DF member, Liz Velluet, for this.

Morleena Further to our first item, I do love this name, which can surely rival any of the most ridiculous names given to girls (or boys) these days. CD says, "(*Mr Lillyvick*) was led in by Miss Morleena Kenwigs, regarding whose uncommon Christian name it may here be remarked that it had been invented and composed by Mrs Kenwigs previous to her first lying-in, for the special distinction of her eldest child, in case it should prove a daughter." I find this a bit of an anti-climax – perhaps CD expended so much ingenuity on the name that he ran out of steam for the explanation! (Ed.)

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

ADDITIONAL MEETING – Members will be pleased to learn of an addition to the 2014 programme. On **Tuesday 5 August** Toru Sasaki, Professor of English at Kyoto University and President of the Japan Branch of the Fellowship, will speak on: 'Knowing and Not Knowing in *Great Expectations*'. Start time 6.30 as usual. It will be good to see as many members as possible. (Lumen)

Sat 9 August: "Where Dickens Lived Next", a walk with Dr Tony Williams. Meet at Baker Street Underground station (side entrance on Baker St) at 2 pm.

Sat 6 September: Annual outing – Hatfield. For details contact Peter Duggan, Social Secretary (see membership card).

Sat 27 Sept: Dickens's Worst Novel! Four advocates will put their case, followed by a discussion and vote. **Please note unusual time** – 2 o'clock on a Sat afternoon and **venue** – the Bertrand Russell Room in the Conway Hall, 25 Red Lion Square, London WC1R 4RL.

Trouble at t'Mill A new historical TV drama, "The Mill", dramatising the lives of workers in 1830s Cheshire, earns a rather scathing critique from Charlotte Runcie in the Daily Telegraph (21 July). She complains about the poor script as well as the unremitting gloom, saying: "The grimness would be Dickensian, if it possessed any of Dickens's wit or humanity".

MEMBERSHIP SECRETARY

A vacancy will arise later this year for the post of Membership Secretary for the Fellowship. This involves keeping up-to-date records of all members, sending out membership cards and some other administrative tasks. Anyone interested please write to Paul Graham, Joint Hon Gen Sec, c/o Dickens Fellowship, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX; or email paulgrahamdf@live.co.uk

"People mutht be amuthed" says Mr Sleary from *Hard Times*, so - more contributions, please, to: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans@hotmail.co.uk