
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

NEWS FROM THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP JOINT HONORARY GENERAL SECRETARIES:

i) We are sorry to inform you that Sati Mackenzie has stepped down from her role as Joint Honorary General Secretary, leaving Jacquie Stamp as sole Hon Gen Sec. We are very grateful to Sati for all her hard work on behalf of the Fellowship over several years, and we wish her well for the future.

ii) Our annual Christmas Lunch will be held at The George & Vulture, 3 Castle Court, Bank, London EC3V 9DL, on Sat 6 Dec 2025. Diners are asked to arrive by 12.30 pm in order to start eating at 1 pm. All places have now been booked, but if you would like your name added to the waiting list, please contact Jacquie at jacqueline.stamp99@gmail.com or 07812 995736.

iii) Prior to the Christmas Lunch on 6 Dec, you are invited to join us on a Dickens Guided Walk, led by our President, Lucinda Dickens Hawksley. This will start from the statue of Queen Anne, outside St Paul's Cathedral, at 10.30 am and will finish at The George & Vulture. The walk is also open to those who are not joining us for lunch afterwards.

iv) Our speaker on Tues 18 Nov will be Professor Carolyn Oulton of Canterbury Christ Church University. Her talk has the intriguing title, 'Not Without Prejudice: Getting Lushy with the Stepney Pickwick Club', so do join us for that if you can. We meet at The Charterhouse, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6AN. Drinks are available from 6pm, for a donation to the Oliver Fund, and the meeting starts at 6:30pm.

The Dickens Estate DF member Allan Clack has alluded previously in LP to the Dickens Estate, which is situated in the Jamaica Road area, near Bermondsey tube station, south London, and comprises 9 late Victorian mansion blocks and 18

high-rise flats, built in the 1950s/60's. All the 9 buildings are named after Dickens characters and 8 out of the 12 built in the 1960s are named after female characters. This is a high proportion, especially as several of them are less well-known names, e.g. Wade House, Dartle Court, Lupin Point. There is no record of how or why the council named the buildings in the 1960s, but one wonders if this was a minor contribution to the feminist movement...

...and a brief reminder of the history of the area, courtesy Wikipedia: 'The Dickens Estate was opened on the site of the former Jacob's Island, a notorious slum in Bermondsey in the 19th century. It was located on the south bank of the Thames, approximately delineated by the modern streets of Mill Street, Bermondsey Wall West, George Row and Wolseley Street. Jacob's Island developed a reputation as the worst of the slums in London and was vividly described, as we know, in *Oliver Twist*, published 30 years before the area was cleared in the 1860s. Bermondsey was historically a rural parish on the outskirts of London until the 17th century, when the area began to be developed as a wealthy suburb following the Great Fire of London. By the 19th century, the once affluent parts of Bermondsey had experienced a serious decline with the arrival of industrialisation, docks and migrant housing, especially along the riverside. The worst part of all was Jacob's Island', described in the press as "the Venice of drains" and "the capital of cholera".

Another London house In May of this year I noticed an item in *The Times* headed "Estate agent ordered out of £19m home once occupied by Dickens". It continued "A wealthy estate agent has lost her legal battle with a bank to remain in the London house where Charles Dickens wrote *Great Expectations*. She was found to have failed to meet the mortgage payments on the grade 1 listed property overlooking the boating lake in Regent's Park. The woman, formerly the wife of an Italian aristocrat, is said to be more than £10 million in debt. Dickens spent the summer of 1861 at the property at about the time he wrote what many consider his greatest novel. The house was

designed by John Nash, the neo-classical architect also responsible for Buckingham Palace and Marble Arch. It has been recently renovated to feature its own gym and sauna." I looked this up in a CD biography and found he had stayed there for a few months at the time stated, the address being 3, Hanover Terrace, Regent's Park. The temporary move into London [from Gad's Hill] made it easier for him to see Ellen Ternan, who was at that time established with her mother in a house at No 2 Houghton Place, Amptill Square, just off the Hampstead Road.

Tut tut, Sir Ed! The Saturday Times Review features an article where various well-known people express their cultural preferences. On 11 Oct, Sir Ed Davey (leader of the Liberal Democrats) admitted, under the heading "The book I'm ashamed I haven't read" that "We had CD's books in our house growing up, so I read a few but I never got round to *David Copperfield*". BUT, under the heading 'Who would you invite to a fantasy dinner party?', his list of guests was: "Charles Dickens, Jane Austen and my wife..."

Do we try to save the 'Little Nells'? Fax **MacAllister** writes: "I am a tireless reader of Dickens's novels. I have re-read *The Old Curiosity Shop* for the third time. As always, I discovered in the same pages a different novel, just as I discovered myself to be different from decades past. This time I elected Dick Swiveller as the protagonist - flawed, indolent, comical, yet dominated by an unexpected sense of honesty and responsibility. Dick saves himself by saving a little girl. The Marchioness Sophronia Sphynx holds out the hope that one or a hundred Little Nells can benefit from the humanity of a 'ramshackle' subject like Dick Swiveller. I love the straightforward dialogues between Dick and the Marchioness, so brilliant, naive and yet believable. What nobody can do to save Little Nell, Dick does in parallel. Dickens is saying in effect - you are outraged by her death, but are you doing anything to help the little Nells you come across? Try to change the fate of Little Nell. Dick Swiveller does it, without proclamations or moralising. I imagine the response from the ship's deck to the question from the apprehensive crowd waiting on the dock in New York 'Is Little Nell alive?' 'No, sorry, BUT the Marchioness will be fine!"

Little Wooden Midshipman This little effigy, on display in the Charles Dickens Museum, features chiefly in *Dombey & Son*, ornamenting the shop-front of the ship's instrument-maker, Sol Gills, in the City. There were several such shops, each with its "*little timber midshipmen in obsolete naval uniforms, eternally employed in taking observations of the hackney coaches. Sol Gills*

was sole master and proprietor of one of these effigies - of that which might be called, familiarly, the woodenest - of that which thrust itself out above the pavement, right leg foremost, with a suavity the least endurable, and had the shoe buckles and flapped waistcoat the least reconcileable to human reason, and bore at its right eye the most offensively disproportionate piece of machinery". The LWM was one of Dickens's favourite landmarks in his walks in London: he describes (in *The Uncommercial Traveller - Wapping Workhouse*) how, 'My day's no-business beckoning me to the East-end of London, I had turned my face to that point of the metropolitan compass on leaving Covent-garden, and had got past the India House, thinking in my idle manner of Tippoo-Sahib and Charles Lamb, and had got past my little wooden midshipman, after affectionately patting him on the leg of his knee-shorts for old acquaintance' sake...'

Now watch out for the pickled salmon A recent article in the *Times* mentioned that oysters are increasing in popularity - and included the famous Sam Weller quote from *Pickwick Papers*: "Away went the coach up Whitechapel... 'Not a very nice neighbourhood this, sir,' said Sam. 'It is not indeed, Sam,' replied Mr Pickwick, surveying the crowded and filthy street through which they were passing. 'It's a very remarkable circumstance, sir,' said Sam, 'that **poverty and oysters always seems to go together**'. 'I don't understand you, Sam,' said Mr Pickwick. 'What I mean, sir', said Sam, 'is, that the poorer a place is, the greater call there seems to be for oysters. Look here, sir; here's a oyster stall to every half-dozen houses. The street's lined with 'em. Blessed if I don't think that ven a man's very poor, he rushes out of his lodgings, and eats oysters in reg'lar desperation.' 'To be sure he does,' said Mr Weller senior; 'and it's just the same with pickled salmon!'"

"'Sir!' said the Doctor in an awful voice, producing a card, 'my name is Slammer, Doctor Slammer, sir - 97th Regiment - Chatham Barracks - my card, sir, my card.' 'Ah!' replied the stranger, coolly, 'Slammer - much obliged - polite attention - not ill now, Slammer - but when I am - knock you up'. 'You - you're a shuffler! Sir', gasped the furious Doctor, 'a poltroon - a coward - a liar - a - will nothing induce you to give me your card, sir?'" (*Pickwick Papers*). I hope you will be induced to send in contributions/comments, please, to 'Danesdyke', 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET or by email: aligowans17@outlook.com.