
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

A new boss for Miss Abbey Potterson

Jan Turner has sent in an interesting recent item from the national press. Sir Ian McKellen, actor, is buying "The Grapes" public house in Narrow Street, Limehouse, East London, which was immortalised as "The Six Jolly Fellowship-Porters" pub in "Our Mutual Friend" in 1864. Sir Ian is apparently a regular visitor and lives nearby. It is a delightful pub, over 300 years old, with a gallery at the rear which overlooks the Thames. The name "Jolly Fellowship-Porters" refers to members of the Fellowship of Billingsgate fish market porters, a form of guild for relatively unskilled labourers.

Shades of Mr Krook? A coroner in Galway, Ireland, has recorded that an elderly man who died in an unexplained fire was a victim of "spontaneous human combustion" - the first time in the country's history that such a verdict has been recorded (instead of the normal open verdict). The deceased's body had been burnt to ashes and nothing else in the room had been damaged. There were no signs of the cause of the fire. Dickens, of course, famously used this means to dispose of the rag-and-bottle dealer, Krook, in Bleak House.

Miss Havisham's Wedding Cake - continued

Further to our item in the last edition of LP, Peter Oakley and Suzanne Waters of New Zealand tell me that, when they married in 1996, they persuaded their friend, a professional cake-maker, to provide a "Miss Havisham" wedding-cake. She refused at first, for the sake of her professional reputation, but later changed her mind and the cake appeared on the big day, "blotched with apparent decay and resplendent in spiders, dusty spiderwebs, and a mouse looking out of a hole in the cake, and another mouse nearby. At the reception, the cake looked marvellous, with a faint breeze disturbing the grey cobwebs between the tiers. And the guests did eat the cake." I was especially grateful to Peter and Suzanne for taking the trouble to give me the above information, as they are awaiting extensive repairs to their house following the Christchurch earthquake.

Celebrity Corner Female staff at the Charles Dickens Museum were in a flutter recently over the unexpected arrival of a bearded Ralph Fiennes. He was seeking a copy of the play, "The Frozen Deep", as he is involved in a film version of Claire Tomalin's "The Invisible Woman", the story of Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan. It was through the production of this play, of course, that CD met her. After some research, the Museum was, fortunately, able to supply Mr Fiennes with a copy! By the way, Claire Tomalin's new book, "Charles Dickens: A Life", will have been published by the time you read this.

Lovers' Corner Romance blossomed in the CD Museum recently, when a Dickens fan hired one of its rooms, took his girl-friend to visit, then used the room to propose to her! Happily, she accepted him. (Bless! Ed.)

Death of Oliver Twist John Howard Davies, who played Oliver in the famous David Lean 1948 film version of Oliver Twist, died in August this year, aged 72. As an adult, after his brief childhood acting career, he directed and produced some of the most successful comedy series in British TV history. Chief among these was "Fawlty Towers", which he directed during its first series, "The Goodies" and "The Good Life", which he produced for its entire run (1975-79). He was also involved as a producer and sometime director of "Monty Python's Flying Circus". He later became Head of Comedy at the BBC.

Dr Tony Williams draws attention to a bi-centenary conference entitled "Charles Dickens and the Mid-Victorian Press (1850-70)", to be held on 28 – 31 March 2012 at the University of Buckingham, and featuring the launch of the Dickens Journal Online project. The conference aims to position the renowned journals "Household Words" and "All the Year Round" in the context of 19th century periodical study. For more information about submitting papers (deadline 9 December 2011), or to reserve tickets: www.buckingham.ac.uk/djo or DF website.

LONDON MEETINGS Two new venues have been arranged for some of our forthcoming events, with much more room and – surprisingly – no extra cost. The new locations are:

Goodenough College, Mecklenburgh Square,
and
Lumen Church, 88 Tavistock Place

Both are in Bloomsbury and a short walk from the CDM. Starting time of 6.30 p.m. is unchanged.

The meeting for Monday 14 November 2011, i.e. “Dickens’s Masterpiece: Great Expectations”, talk by Michael Slater, will be held at Goodenough College – **not** AWG. The social event and readings on Tuesday 13 December will still be held at AWG, as per programme.

FORTHCOMING EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY:-

DICKENS AND LONDON EXHIBITION AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON – Monday 12 December at 6.30 p.m. Fellowship members are invited to join the Museum of London Friends for a private view of this exhibition (which opens on 9 December). There will be introductory talks from Alex Werner and Tony Williams. Tickets (to include wine and ‘nibbles’) cost £8 from the Museum of London Box Office 020 7001 9844.

DICKENS AND LONDON: HOLDING UP THE MAGIC LANTERN A conference for teachers at the Museum of London. **Monday 12 December, 10 a.m. – 5.30 p.m.** Cost £75. For more information and booking form, see English Association website www.le.ac.uk/engassoc.

A CHRISTMAS CAROL, an evening reading by Tony Williams. **Friday, 16 December** at Lumen, 88 Tavistock Square. Admission free. Time tbc. Please check www.dickensfellowship.org or contact joan@dickshg.freemove.co.uk or 020 7242 8575.

2012: The first meetings of the Dickens Fellowship in 2012 will take place on Thursday 19 January at the Artworkers Guild hall and Tuesday 21 February at Goodenough College. At the January meeting, DF President Mark Dickens will inaugurate our bicentenary meetings, and Tony Williams will give an introduction to David Copperfield. The February meeting will be on *Dickens and Magic*, and will be a preview of his new show by Ian Keable, a professional magician and member of the Magic Circle. Further programme details on the 2012 DF membership card.

JOB VACANCIES.... are rare these days, but two will be arising in the Dickens Fellowship from August 2012:

Chairman of the Dickens Fellowship Council: The Chairman’s role, as you would expect, is to chair executive meetings of the DF. There are two Council meetings a year, in the spring and autumn, and intervening Management Committee meetings. All these take place in London. The Chairman also chairs the AGM of the Fellowship, which usually takes place during the Annual Conference. Michael Rogers has fulfilled this role for the past four years and would be happy to talk to anyone who is thinking of volunteering. m.rogers157@btinternet.com or 01384 873 100.

Joint Honorary General Secretary: Duties are under review and could be adapted to suit the particular skills of the applicant. The JHGS role will be shared with Lee Ault, who continues in post. The joint Secretaries work with the Management team to oversee the general activities of the Fellowship; responsibilities will include the organisation of Fellowship executive meetings. The JHGS represents the Fellowship at many functions and meets a wide variety of interesting people. Joan Dicks has acted as JHGS for the past five years and would be pleased to talk to anyone interested in taking over the job: joan@dickshg.freemove.co.uk. 020 7242 8575.

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL A renewal form is enclosed with this newsletter. Subscriptions are unchanged for 2012. Please complete and return as soon as possible to the address shown on the form. The membership card/programme for 2012 will be issued in January.

DICKENS BIRTHDAY LUNCH: There will be a celebratory buffet luncheon for DF members and guests at the **National Liberal Club** at 1 p.m. on **Tuesday 7 February 2012**. Cost about £25. Further details will be sent with the January issue of Mr Dick’s Kite.

Many thanks again to all our contributors. Please ‘Keep the pot a bilin’, sir!’, as Sam Weller says, by sending items to: Alison Gowans, “Danesdyke”, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email - aligowans@hotmail.co.uk