

London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

MEMBERSHIP RENEWAL A renewal form for 2015 is enclosed with this newsletter, together with a standing order form for those who would like to pay by this method (UK only). Subscriptions are unchanged. Please complete and return asap to the address shown on the form, and membership card/programme for 2015 will be sent to you.

Dickens and George Eliot The Telegraph reported recently that an antiquarian bookseller, Harrington's of London, is offering for sale a special copy of *A Tale of Two Cities* - it's inscribed '**To George Eliot. With high admiration and regard. Charles Dickens. December 1859**'. George Eliot, under her real name of Mary Ann Evans, met Dickens in 1852 and found him "**disappointing and with no benevolence in the face and I think little in the heart**". Oh dear.

Another Character Reference for CD Professor Michael Slater tells me he recently saw a pamphlet advertising a magic show called 'The Secret World of Charles Dickens' performed by one Ian Keable (he has a website). Michael says, "Here's a quote from it which may surprise LP readers: '*Charles Dickens neglected his children, disgraced his wife, kept a mistress half his age, frequented brothels, practised hypnosis on impressionable ladies and humiliated his friends!*'" Well, I really don't think he neglected his children.... (Ed.)

Dickens at his Worst LP readers may be interested to know that, following a DF meeting in September when four members each put a case for CD's worst novel, the winner was Dr Tony Williams whose least favourite work was *The Old Curiosity Shop*. I'm glad to say he'd extracted Quilp, Dick Swiveller, the Marchioness and the Brasses from the equation first! Other suggestions were *Our Mutual Friend*, *Hard Times* and *Barnaby Rudge*. A very jolly afternoon!

Dickens's Contribution to the War Effort A friend has sent me a brilliant essay by Jerry White, printed in the TLS in August, describing the impact of Dickens during World War I. White says: '*The wartime Christmases were of great importance. Unutterably bleak as they all were, they epitomised an acute sense of loss – a lost peace, lost pleasures and often a lost home and family too. Dickens had embodied the secular celebration of Christmas with Pickwick and A Christmas Carol and the absence of a joyful "Dickensy" Christmas was noticed that December of 1914. But his spirit was not entirely absent. A new dramatisation of David Copperfield directed by Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree opened on Christmas Eve at His Majesty's Theatre, Haymarket and ran until April 1915. For the rest of the wartime Christmases Dickens would be used in some way to lighten the gloom, with stage and film versions appearing in large numbers. An Irish journalist, Robert Lynd, noted a turn among readers away from modern literature to older favourites even before the end of 1914: 'Perhaps one turns to Dickens most readily because he refuses to ignore death and yet keeps his hold on the comedy of things. One is so much in want of a key, and somehow one has most faith in a key that comes from so cheerful a hand*'. "

A Twenty-First Century Vision Frances Wilson in the Daily Telegraph wrote in September: "Hoorah for The Pigeonhole, the digital publisher which will be releasing *Great Expectations* next month in its original drip-by-drip, nail-biting, cliff-hanging, nerve-racking form. Human nature hasn't changed: we still want, just occasionally, to be on the same page as one another. How much more noble it is to read rather than watch our stories, to return to the magic of the written word. The Pigeonhole aims to 'publish our books in instalments to create suspense and prompt discussion', according to Jacob Cockcroft, the founder. 'My vision is that 3 years from now, we have 100,000 readers on the site and app... all reading a book at the same time and then discussing that book together'. "

Persian 'Great Expectations' An abridged version of GE for teenagers by Jayashree Singh, translated by Leila Sobhani, was released last year in Iran. We are told that 'Most of Dickens's books have been rendered into Persian'.

'Ere, You! DF member and Barnaby Rudge enthusiast, Eileen Norris, draws attention to Dickens's choice of the name "Hugh" for the half-gypsy illegitimate son of the villainous Sir John Chester. Hugh is ostler (or should that be Hostler! Ed.) at the Maypole Inn, Chigwell, and Dickens might have felt the name to be suitable for a man who would frequently be addressed (by the landlord, John Willett) as "You"!, sounding much the same as "Hugh!".

A Chinese View A Chinese novelist called Bi Feiyu who is apparently becoming well known in the West, featured recently in a newspaper called *China Daily*. He writes about being in London in 2011 and deciding to visit the Dickens Museum. He didn't know how to get there and has very poor English, but found it just by saying 'Charles Dickens' to everyone he met. This impressed him very much. He says that in Dickens he sees 'a writer full of sympathy for the poor'. Bi quotes the Chinese literary critic Li Jingze, who says that Dickens is one who writes while carrying God on his back; Bi adds that Dickens often writes in an omniscient style and is ready to judge what is right and wrong. He notes: 'This is a task that ought to be done by God, but Dickens did it himself'.

Hard Times in a Debtors' Prison Those researching their family history, says the Metro (26th September), can find out if any of their ancestors fell on hard times and were among the 70,000 held in the Marshalsea, King's Bench and Fleet prisons. The Debtors' Prison Registers, spanning 128 years from 1734 to 1862, were held by The National Archives in Kew and have been put online by 'family ancestry.co.uk'. These records shed light on what life was like in the debtors' prisons of Victorian London, where living conditions were appalling. Apart from Dickens's father, John, jailed for owing money to tradesmen, other famous inmates included painter George Morland; also Charles Hall, held in the Fleet prison from 1816-25 over a £157 debt. Hall was a doctor and social critic who condemned capitalism for its inability to provide for the poor. Many consider him to be one of the earliest socialists.

The Booker Prize and Dickens Our Hon Gen Sec, Paul Graham, notes that Australian author, Richard Flanagan, has won this year's Man Booker Prize with his novel, *The Narrow Road to the Deep North*. Dickensians who enjoy the book

are reminded that his 2008 novel, *Wanting*, features Dickens as a principal character; seeking to escape from his failing marriage by giving performances of *The Frozen Deep* and attempting to maintain the reputation of Sir John Franklin and his crew against charges of cannibalism. Paul says 'It's certainly one of the better attempts to 'novelise' a period of Dickens's life'.

Thinking of going on a winter cruise? Don't, like Dickens and Kate, travel by steam packet to the US. 'In the preposterous box that was their stateroom they were hilarious about its minute area, into which they could no more force their two portmanteaus than a giraffe could be got into a flowerpot, and Dickens sat roaring aloud upon something that the stewards called his bed, but which he said he believed to be a muffin beaten flat. He demonstrated that, by nearly closing the door, twining in like serpents, and counting the washing slab as standing room, very nearly four people could be insinuated into it at one time.' (Edgar Johnson's CD biography).

FORTHCOMING EVENTS:

Tues 11th Nov: Talk by Dr Beryl Gray – "The Dog in the Dickensian Imagination" (Lumen 6.30)

Sat 6th Dec: Christmas Supper, the George Inn, Southwark, 77 Borough High Street SE1 1NH (see membership card for details)

Tues 20th Jan 2015: DF President Professor Jenny Hartley will welcome members. Prof Michael Slater MBE will then talk on "The Gestation of Our Mutual Friend" (Lumen 6.30)

Sat 7th Feb: celebrating Charles Dickens's 203rd birthday (further details later)

Tues 24th Feb: Film night – Dr Tony Williams will show excerpts and discuss "Our Mutual Friend on Screen" (Lumen 6.30)

To paraphrase Sam Weller, "My eyes ain't a pair o' patent double million magnifyin' gas microscopes of hextra power" - but I'm still looking hard for more contributions, so please send to: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans@hotmail.co.uk