
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

A BIG WELCOME to Dr Cindy Sughrue, OBE, who took over as Director of the CD Museum in October. Cindy was born in Boston, Mass., USA, and came to England in 1985 to study at university for her PhD. She later worked at an Edinburgh Art Gallery and then with Scottish Arts Council with directorships of theatre, dance and music organisations. A trained ballerina, she spent 11 years as Chief Executive and Executive Producer of Scottish Ballet, arranging tours of many countries including Russia and the USA. Cindy has already attended a Central Fellowship evening and met many DF members. She has always had a deep-rooted interest in CD ... **and A FOND FAREWELL** to previous Director, Rob Moye, who is taking up a new position in charge of 19 Princelet Street, Spitalfields, East London, a restored Huguenot house. Rob did splendid work in fund-raising for the Museum during his year as Director - in particular the purchase of Dickens's desk and chair.

Dickens and the war effort (Cont'd) Another quote from DF member Jerry White's article (TLS August 2014): Illustrating the huge enthusiasm for CD amongst the troops, White tells us that, "A learned topographical enquiry on 'The Town Arms at Eatanswill' was sent to the *Dickensian* by Corporal G.O. Rickwood, 'somewhere in France'; Sapper S.G. Jupp, Royal Engineers, reported how he had seen the signature of Trotty Veck and Dombey and Son scrawled on the door of a ruined cathedral; Lieutenant E.E. Polack of the Gloucesters remarked on a Dickens Motor Lorry + Column at the Front in late 1915, 'nearly every wagon being named after a book or character of Dickens'; and three years later a staff car was seen to carry on the outside of one door a framed portrait of Charles Dickens."

CD – Ebullient or panic-stricken? Professor Michael Slater has sent me an interesting quote from Philip Larkin's *Letters to Monica* (Larkin's lover, Monica Jones). On 26 Aug 1951 he was reading *Great Expectations* and wrote to her: "I should like to say something about this 'irrepressible vitality', this 'throwing a fresh handful

of characters on the fire when it burns low', [a quote from Virginia Woolf, Michael tells me,] in fact the whole Dickens method – it strikes me as being less ebullient, creative, vital, than hectic, nervy, panic-stricken. I would like to have said to him, "You don't have to entertain me, you know. I'm quite happy just sitting here." This jerking of your attention, with queer names, queer characters, aggressive rhythms, piling on adjectives – seems to me to betray basic insecurity in his relation with the reader. How serenely Trollope, for instance, compares." Larkin praises *Bleak House* however – see next issue.

London Fog Congratulations to Central Fellowship member – and one of the driving forces behind the very successful Cambridge Branch – Christine Corton, on the publication by Harvard Press of her book – *London Fog: The Biography*. Members will recall the excellent lecture that Christine gave us on the subject in April. In the *London Review of Books*, Neal Ascherson describes it as "a thoughtful, vivid, very memorable book." Dickens's use of fog in *Bleak House* and *Our Mutual Friend* features prominently, and the reviewer singles out the fact that Christine "salutes Dickens's mastery of 'the use of fog as extended metaphor'". (Readers of the *London Particular* will of course know that it owes its name to Mr Guppy's description of fog in *Bleak House*.) Definitely one for the letter to Santa this Christmas.

Cool Black American rap artist and actor "Ice Cube" is to portray Scrooge in a new version of ACC, "Humbug", to appear in 2017. Alex McNeal, in a US publication online, rather patronisingly muses that the casting of Ice Cube (a US box office juggernaut with a trademark scowl) is a stroke of genius which may actually give the film a chance to be entertaining... "*The caliber of Ice Cube is reason enough to be excited, with his hardcore persona making us all curious about the spin he'll add to the classic story. The casting is too wild not to get excited.*" I'll try to curb my excitement, Alex, but – who knows? (Ed.)

A(nother) new slant on Scrooge A cartoon from *The Washington Post* shows the Republican

Elephant holding a copy of the *Carol* seated by a Christmas tree, puffing his pipe and saying "Gather round children. We're going to read Charles Dickens's classic 'A Christmas Carol', a cautionary tale about a brave industrialist who falls prey to the perils of Socialism."

Miss Biffin DF member Thelma Grove notes that a recent item on Vintage Antiques Roadshow was a self-portrait by Sarah Biffin (1784-1850), who was born without arms or legs but became a celebrated artist who painted using her mouth. Dickens refers to her in *Nicholas Nickleby*, when Mrs Nickleby tells Nicholas that the Prince Regent and Daniel Lambert were proud of their legs. "So was Miss Biffin: she was – no, I think she had only toes, but the principle is the same." In *Martin Chuzzlewit*, the raffish Mr Pip quotes a fictitious Viscount deploring the lack of legs displayed in Shakespeare's characters: "Juliet, Desdemona, Lady Macbeth, and all the rest of 'em might as well have no legs at all. Why, in that respect they're all Miss Biffins to the audience." In *Little Dorrit*, "Mr Merdle came creeping in with not much more appearance of arms in his sleeves than if he had been the twin brother of Miss Biffin".

A Clever Twist Michael Deacon in the *Daily Telegraph* (25 July) wrote: 'Last Saturday I revealed what became of popular literary characters in later life. Mr Geoffrey Hodgson of Leeds has sent word of another: "Oliver Twist was given a good education and became a colonial administrator, so successful that his name came to the ear of Queen Victoria. She told the colonial secretary to offer Twist the choice of his final posting. Whether he was fond of the South Pacific, or by force of habit, he said, 'Please, Sir, may I have Samoa?'"

'Im' or 'Un'? A DF member has sent in an interesting query, saying he had just re-read *Bleak House* and noticed Dickens's unusual use of prefixes, e.g. 'unpolite' instead of 'impolite' and 'unperturbable' instead of 'imperturbable'. He asks if this was current usage at the time or were these Dickens's idiosyncrasies? Our President, Dr Tony Williams, replies: "It's largely a matter of changing usage in language. The 'un' prefix seems to have been much more popular and in use in the 19th century but has tended to be replaced in many cases by the 'im' prefix. One useful source for information on the ways in which Dickens's language reacts to the usages of his time is 'The Language of Dickens' by G L Brook (André Deutsch 1970)."

The Waterloo Cartoon In his last public speech, delivered at the Royal Academy Banquet on 30 April 1870, Dickens described himself as 'one of

the two most intimate friends' of Daniel Maclise, who had died three days earlier. Maclise's 1839 portrait of Dickens was included as the frontispiece of *Nickleby* when it was published that year. At the Royal Academy in Piccadilly there is currently a rare opportunity to see Maclise's Waterloo Cartoon, completed in 1859 as preparation for a prestigious commission at the Houses of Parliament. It is an epic composition, over 13 metres wide, and features the meeting of Wellington and Blucher after the battle, surrounded by a host of Prussian and British soldiers. The exhibition runs until 3 January, admission charge only £3.

BIRTHDAY DINNER 2016 It's a commonplace that, "If Dickens were alive today, he would be writing soap operas for television." Well, maybe. The Fellowship is delighted to announce that a real-life scriptwriter, Tony Jordan, who has written almost two hundred episodes of *Eastenders*, as well as episodes of *Life on Mars*, has agreed to be our special guest speaker at the Birthday Dinner on **Monday 8 February 2016**. Tony recently wrote and featured in the programme about *Great Expectations* for the BBC documentary series *The Secret Life of Books*; he is currently working on a new drama series for the BBC called *Dickensian*, to be aired later this year, with a cast that includes Stephen Rea, Pauline Collins, Caroline Quentin and Anton Lesser. The venue will again be the Royal Over-Seas League in St James's Street SW1. Make a note in your 2016 diary now for what should be an enjoyable and informative event.

Membership Renewals A renewal form is enclosed and members are invited to complete and return it asap. Fees are unchanged and those who have already elected to pay by Standing Order need not complete a form. Completed forms to be sent, please, to Membership Secretary, Dickens Fellowship, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX.

Like the church pew-opener in Our Mutual Friend 'whose left hand appears to be in a state of acute rheumatism, but is in fact voluntarily doubled up to act as a money-box', I am seeking contributions - to be sent, please, to: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans@hotmail.co.uk