
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

2023 Dickens Fellowship Conference After three years of taking place on-line, the annual conference of the Dickens Fellowship will revert to being held 'live'. The principal venue will be Barnard's Inn (now part of Gresham College), off High Holborn in London. When Pip first came to London he lodged there with Herbert Pocket. His first impressions were not favourable, as: "*I had supposed that establishment to be an hotel kept by one Barnard, to which the Blue Boar in our town was a mere public-house. Whereas I now found Barnard to be a disembodied spirit, or a fiction, and his inn the dingiest collection of shabby buildings ever squeezed together in a rank corner as a club for Tom-cats*". You can see if the location has improved by attending the conference over **Wed 26 – Sat 29 July 2023**. The theme of the conference will suit the venue, as it will be: "*Dickens, Law, and Disorder*". Further details will follow.

Membership renewals Treasurer Eddie Jones says, "Dear members, if your membership runs to **31 December 2022**, it is time to think about renewal for 2023. Your options are:

1) If you have a Standing Order, please don't do anything and your membership will be automatically renewed (only possible for UK bank accounts).

2) Renew via the website – login, click on "My Membership Profile", scroll down, then either "Renew" or "Upgrade" (to move to a recurring plan). When you get to the online payment part in Paypal, there is an option to pay by card.

3) Use the renewal form downloadable from the "Subscribe" section of the website.

If your membership runs to a date other than **31 December 2022**, the website will email you with renewal advice one month before your expiry date".

Dickens "scarcely intelligible outside the English speaking culture" Further to this claim by George Orwell (LP, March 2022), I received an interesting comment from DF member **Joanne Eysell**. She says, "I am American but am interested in languages and have several versions of *A Christmas Carol*. I have noted the following: In Stave 4, Scrooge says to the Spirit of the Future, "I will bear you company". The German translations I have re-translate this to "I will bear YOUR company", which isn't even polite and not likely from Scrooge at that point! The Italian version I have makes the same error, while the French version gets it right! Again, Dietrich von Engelhardt speaks of "an alcoholic child" in *Our Mutual Friend*; while it's true Jenny Wren calls her father her "bad child", either von Engelhardt didn't understand the English text or he was working with a poor translation."

A gruelling read – and a surprise DF member **Pat York** has drawn attention to a Dickens reference in Edna O'Brien's 2015 novel, "*Girl*", which tells the extremely harrowing story of a Nigerian schoolgirl captured by the Jihadist sect Boko Haram. In the novel, someone reads an extract from Dickens to the young girl. The passage read is the final meeting of Pip and Estella in *Great Expectations*, but remarkably, it is the ending removed from the novel in the week before publication, when Dickens substituted a revised conclusion on his friend Bulwer Lytton's advice. In the original ending, Pip and Estella were to meet briefly and finally in London, with Estella, widowed and re-married, mistaking Joe and Bidley's son for Pip's. As revised and published in the serial version and first edition, Pip and Estella meet in the ruined grounds of Satis House, where they pledge friendship and Pip foresees "the shadow of no parting from her".

Most readers have agreed with Forster in his "Life of Dickens" that the first ending is both "more consistent" and "more natural". The novel with its original ending was published in a limited Club edition in 1937. It is remarkable that Edna O'Brien used the original, rejected, ending. Why did she do it? Is she teasing the reader?

Some advice for the Chancellor Turnpikes (introduced in the 17th century) were gates where travellers had to pay a toll (used for road maintenance) in order to be allowed through by the turnpike-keeper. In the 19th century, they gradually became obsolete with the coming of the railways. During his journeys as *The Uncommercial Traveller* (1860/61), CD speaks to a London turnpike-keeper, and asks: “How goes turnpike business, master?’ **‘It don’t go at all, master’**, said he to me. **‘It’s stopped.’** ‘That’s bad’, said I. **‘Bad?’** he repeated. And he pointed to one of his dusty sun-burnt children who was climbing the turnpike-gate, and said, extending his open right hand in remonstrance with Universal Nature. **‘Five on ’em!’** ‘But how to improve Turnpike business?’ said I. **‘There’s a way, master’**, said he, with the air of one who had thought deeply on the subject. ‘I should like to know it.’ **‘Lay a toll on everything as comes through; lay a toll on walkers. Lay another toll on everything as don’t come through; lay a toll on them as stops at home.’** ‘Would the last remedy be fair?’ **‘Fair? Them as stops at home, could come through if they liked; couldn’t they?’** ‘Say they could.’ **‘Toll ’em. If they don’t come through, it’s their look out. Anyways,- Toll ’em!’** Finding it was as impossible to argue with this financial genius as if he had been Chancellor of the Exchequer ... I passed on meekly.” (UT)

Dickens and Slavery DF member **Chris Davies** tells me he came across 3 letters published by CD in *The Daily News* (March 9th, 13th and 16th 1846) on the subject of Capital Punishment. Chris says, “CD gives a very detailed argument against this law, but what caught my eye was the concluding paragraphs in which he unambiguously states his abhorrence of Slavery: **‘So, we have the Bible appealed to in behalf of Capital Punishment. So, we have the Bible produced as a distinct authority for Slavery. It is enough for me to be satisfied on calm enquiry and with reason, that an institution or Custom is wrong and bad; and thence to feel assured that it CANNOT BE a part of the law laid down by the Divinity who walked the earth. No one ... could ever persuade me that Slavery is a Christian law’**”. Chris adds “I have often seen D misrepresented in recent years, but I think the above excerpt makes his views clear”. In the same connection, an article in *The Times* (27 June) mentions a recently-discovered letter written by CD in 1850 to Joseph Denman, a commander in the Royal Navy’s anti-slavery West Africa Squadron, in which he deplored the transporting of slaves on disease-ridden ships from west Africa to the Americas: **‘You cannot too strongly represent to yourself the horror with which I**

contemplate that atrocity the Slave Trade. I am sure we shall agree in denouncing the inhuman traffic with our utmost might’.

A modern take on David Copperfield It was an “ethereal conversation” with Charles Dickens that gave American novelist Barbara Kingsolver the idea for a new work (*Times* 15 October). She was on holiday visiting Bleak House in Broadstairs and, **“That’s when CD said to me, Look to the child. Let the child tell the story”**. So her novel *Demon Copperhead* was born. Demon is the child of a young addict and endures abuse at the hands of his family. As he says at one point, **‘Charles Dickens, seriously old guy, dead and a foreigner, but Christ Jesus did he get the picture of kids and orphans getting screwed over and nobody giving a rat’s ass. You’d think he was from round here’**. The author links her plot with that of *David Copperfield* throughout her novel and says: **“It was like a masterclass in plotting, because, as I tried to mess with the structure, I realised I really couldn’t. How Charles Dickens did this without a computer I don’t know”**. An article in the *Daily Telegraph* says: “While Kingsolver closely cleaves to the original story, she ‘breaks the most important rule of working in the Dickensian mode’: the need to ‘show the reader a good time’. Hers is a re-telling “beset by earnestness” – as a result it falls flat”.

HONORARY GENERAL SECRETARY *The current HGS of the Fellowship will stand down at the AGM in July next year. Any member who wishes to be considered for the role and would like further information about it should contact the editor at the address below.*

CHRISTMAS LUNCH *The traditional DF Christmas Supper will this year, as last, be a lunch at the Union Jack Club in Waterloo. Members will please note that the date will NOT be the one listed on the membership card, but will be a week later – Sat 10 December. For details, please see booking form attached.*

“Do you want a drink?” asks Sam Weller. “I likes eating better”, says Jo, the Fat Boy in Pickwick. What I like best of all, please, is your contributions or comments, to be sent to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans17@outlook.com