

Dickens Birthday Dinner – 5th February 2025

Thank you, Paul, on behalf of the members of the Dickens Fellowship. You gave us a fascinating insight into the early years of our society and we are now one hundred and twenty three years old. One hundred years ago the Dickens Museum at Doughty Street opened and that is another cause for celebration. We learned from Paul, that Bertram Waldrom Matz, one of the founders of the Dickens Fellowship, was also the First General Honorary Secretary. As you can read from your programme, Paul also was Honorary Secretary (for a bit longer!) for eleven years in fact, and he served on the Board of governors of the Charles Dickens Museum for eight. He is an associate editor of the *Dickensian*. But did you know he is our man on 'x'? He Sounds rather like a secret agent! Our man in Italy perhaps? I mean, of course, our social media platform (formerly twitter), and incidentally the Dickens Fellowship now features on Bluesky (managed by Jacquie, one half of our current Honorary Secretary) – she makes a great double act with Sati, who organised this wonderful event, with Nick's assistance, our man on the inside! Bluesky is a fresh media outlet for us. It is important for our organisation to keep up with the times and ensure that Dickens' life and works continues to be appreciated by future generations. Thank you, again Paul, and indeed, all the committee, for the work that you continue to do for the benefit and continuance of the Fellowship.

I am a relative newcomer to the Dickens Fellowship. I joined in 2021, during lockdown when I was starved of company with similar literary interests. I am very glad I did, as I have found a group of people, not only with an interest in Dickens, his life and work, but who share his enthusiasm for conviviality, companionship and friendship, as can be seen here this evening. In Dick Swiveller's words, from *The Old Curiosity Shop*, "Fan the sinking flame of hilarity with the wing of friendship; and pass the rosy wine."

On that note, I would now like to propose a toast to our President, the great-great-great granddaughter of Charles Dickens. Following in his footsteps, Lucinda Dickens Hawksley is a published author, broadcaster, educator and enthusiastic proponent of her eminent relative. We have had relatively few female presidents, in fact this is the first time one outgoing lady president, Professor Cathy Waters, has passed the baton directly to another. Girl power! Did I really say that in a celebrated gentleman's club? Lucinda, we are very grateful to you, in accepting this role and for offering your time from an already very busy schedule. It is always special to have a member of the Dickens family at the helm.

Ladies, gentlemen, fellow Dickensians - will you please charge your glasses for a toast to the President of the Dickens Fellowship. (repeat) The President of the Dickens Fellowship.