

**Toast to the DF – 05/02/2025**

**Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, fellow Dickensians**

**I am very conscious of the honour of being asked to propose the toast to the DF this evening. I am particularly grateful to be asked to do so in this momentous year – as we commemorate and celebrate the centenary of the most significant achievement in the history of the Fellowship – the opening of 48 Doughty Street as a Museum on 9 June 1925. Whatever else the DF does in its history – that will be its finest hour.**

**I would also like to pay tribute this evening to those pioneers of the DF who accomplished that feat – particularly Bertram Waldrom Matz – who was one of the founders of the Fellowship at the inaugural meeting at the long defunct Anderton’s Hotel in Fleet Street on 6<sup>th</sup> October 1902, where he was elected as the 1<sup>st</sup> Hon. Gen. Secretary. He went on to become the 1<sup>st</sup> editor of *The Dickensian* in 1905 (a position he retained for 20 years) and, simultaneously, served as President of the Fellowship (1920-21) It was Matz who, after the opening of the Museum by Lord Birkenhead, showed his lordship around the Museum. This was appropriate as Matz was not only the leading Dickensian of his day, but he had effectively endowed the Museum by gifting his massive collection of Dickensiana – more than 1,300 books, pictures and other items, including Dickens’ reading desk which had been gifted to him by Kate Perugini. For his massive contribution to the DF and the Museum, Matz was appointed Trustee of the Museum for life – but, very sadly, that life was rapidly running out. In the following month – on 17 July 1925 – Matz died. The next issue of *The Dickensian* – for October 1925 - was designated a B. W. Matz Memorial Number. It contained many tributes to Matz, including one from the novelist Sir Hall Caine who believed: ‘that the joy and excitement of (the opening of the Museum) acting upon a constitution already weakened by a grave malady, contributed seriously towards the quickening of his end.’ Such was Matz’s eminence that there was an obituary in *The Daily Telegraph* and a memorial service at St Martin’s in the Field.**

**Later in that same momentous year of 1925 the Fellowship suffered another loss when, on 24<sup>th</sup> November the death occurred of Percy Fitzgerald – the 1<sup>st</sup> President of the DF. Fitzgerald’s death was not an**

equivalent blow to the DF as Matz's death had been. Fitzgerald had been bedridden for the last two years of his life and had not been active in the Fellowship's affairs since 1914. The chief interest in his passing was that he was almost the last of Charles Dickens's 'Young men' who wrote for him in *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, and who enjoyed his hospitality and friendship at Gad's Hill. Fitzgerald had been the principal founder of the Boz Club in 1900 – an elite club of men only whose members had known Dickens personally – friends, family, and collaborators. It therefore had a necessarily limited lifespan and ceased to exist after the first world war. The Fellowship, founded two years after the Club, with Fitzgerald as President, was far more inclusive. The illustrator Henry Furniss compared the Club to the House of Lords and the Fellowship to the House of Commons. Unlike the long defunct Boz Club, the Fellowship remains active today with members throughout the world.

And so, remembering all those who have gone before us and served the DF well, I ask you to charge your glasses and stand. The toast is: The Dickens Fellowship.