
London Particular

The Newsletter for the Headquarters Group of the Dickens Fellowship

CENTENARY SURVEY

Thank-you to everyone who took the time to return one of the Centenary survey forms sent to more than 640 Headquarters members in October 2002.

The results are now in – and reflect a wide variety of opinion throughout the fellowship – with most members giving their backing to the full range of benefits on offer, whether or not they are able to take advantage of them all.

Membership secretary Derek Mortimer has been burning the midnight oil to collate your many comments and suggestions, and your ratings of the fellowship's various activities. The full report, bristling with statistics, is a cure for insomnia, Derek suggests. But he has distilled the key elements of the survey into a two-page report for members.

Of course, the feedback need not stop there. Suggestions on how the fellowship's activities might be improved, ideas for event or comments on any aspect of membership are always welcomed. Speak to a committee member at any of the HQ meetings – or use the contact points at the end of this newsletter.

LONDON PROGRAMME NEWS

Births, marriages and deaths in Dickens were the themes of the first Headquarters meeting of 2003, held at the Swedenborg Hall on 23 January.

Joint honorary secretaries Tony Williams and Thelma Grove treated members to a series of readings from Dickens's accounts of "hatches, matches and dispatches". Members new and old enjoyed a delicious buffet and toasted another year of fellowship.

On 7 February we marked the 191st anniversary of Dickens's death with a dinner at the National Liberal Club. There were 46 Dickensians and their guests booked in for the dinner, and social secretary Peter Duggan already has plans underway for the 2004 event. Ideas for speakers – especially ladies – will be most welcome.

A MESSAGE FROM OUR PRESIDENT-ELECT PAUL SCHLICKE

As incoming president of the Dickens Fellowship, I write to extend my greeting to... members and to say how very honoured I feel to be called upon to serve in this capacity. As one who has spent a lifetime both professionally and recreationally engaging with popular Dickens, I believe that the fellowship plays a vital role in keeping his memory green for us now and for generations yet to come.

With its close links to the Dickens family (witness my predecessor Henry Dickens Hawksley – a direct descendant of the Inimitable), to the academic world and to the general public, the fellowship with its worldwide membership is by far the biggest literary fan club of a classic author. By organising readings, rambles and entertainments, it promotes Dickens's capacity to amuse and delight us. Through conferences and lectures it increases our knowledge about the man and his age, and its various publications strengthen the bonds of fellowship which are so central to Dickens's vision of well-being for men and women everywhere.

I look forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the annual conference in Bristol this summer. Yours in fellowship, Paul Schlicke.

Members spent a fascinating evening on 18 February courtesy of Peter Gillies and his Magic Lantern presentation, *Dickens Through the Lens*. Using the lantern – a sophisticated slide projector that enthralled the Victorians in the days before the moving image – they presented a version of *A Christmas Carol* once familiar to audiences in the Nineteenth Century. Other forthcoming activities include:

- **28 March** – Gad's Hill evening. Gerald Dickens on *The Republic of My Imagination*. Tickets cost £20.
- **24 April** – Members evening where Tony Williams will – among other items - lead a discussion on the recently-published Centenary Survey.
- **24-29 July** – The 2003 Annual Conference. This year's conference, entitled 'Dickens: An author in an age of change', takes place in Bristol.

MEMBERSHIP NEWS

Renewal forms were sent to all members in January. For those who subscribed to the Dickensian last year, forms accompanied the winter issue.

As of 9 March, 545 membership cards had been issued. Just over 200 members had yet to renew their subscriptions. If a form has gone astray, a letter will do. Subscription rates are unchanged: £8.50 membership, £8 for the Dickensian and the usual supplements for overseas members.

Over 30 members on the current register joined this year. One of our latest members is from Tomsk in Siberia. About 30% of new members are now recruited via the website.

LITTLE DORRIT

Southwark Council has approved plans for the redevelopment of the parish halls at St George the Martyr, Little Dorrit's church.

It was at St George's that the eponymous heroine, "the child of the Marshalsea", slept in the vestry after she had been unable to get back to her father's rooms in the debtors prison. It was also in the vestry that she signed the register when she was married to Arthur Clennam.

As members will know well, Dickens's father was imprisoned for debt in the prison, and one of the institution's surviving walls adjoins the north side of the churchyard.

On Sunday 11 May, there will be a service at St George's, followed by lunch at the George Inn, Borough High Street.

Peter Duggan has also produced a set of charming notelets depicting an illustration by Phiz from Little Dorrit. These are being sold in aid of the restoration fund for St George's and will be available at our Swedenborg Hall meetings priced £1 per set.

These can also be obtained directly from Peter, by sending a cheque for the appropriate amount to: Peter Duggan, 6 Citrus House, Alverton Street, Deptford, London, SE8 5NP.

PROTEST OVER AIRPORT PLANS

A protest march and rally against plans to build a new airport in the heart of Great Expectations country will centre on Trafalgar Square, London, on 5 April.

Plans for a three-runway, 24-hour airport on reclaimed land in the Thames estuary and Cliffe Marshes have been put forward as part of

government moves to increase air capacity in the South East.

The area was memorably described by Dickens in Great Expectations. A bleak churchyard on the Hoo Peninsula provides the setting for the novel's famous opening chapter where the young Pip encounters the escaped convict Magwitch.

The protest is being organised by the No Airport At Cliffe action group. Protestors intend to march down Embankment and Whitehall to assemble in Trafalgar Square. For more information contact Joan Goddard (from the action group) 01634 271156.

THE FRIENDS OF DICKENS HOUSE

A new initiative

The next meeting of the friends is at 7pm on 10 April, at the Dickens House, 48 Doughty Street, London. This is a special event for all past, present and future friends.

Chairman of the Trustees Anthony Burton will speak on the way ahead for the House, and curator Andrew Xavier will explain some of the plans for the property. There will be refreshments and a chance to discuss the future direction of the friends, including proposals for members to act as guides at the House on selected days.

Jean Carroll, administrator for the friends, writes: "Come along and join us at what we expect to be a lively and enjoyable evening."

You don't have to be a fully paid up friend or committed to help to attend – all are welcome. The cost of the event is £5, payable at the door.

DICKENS ON THE INTERNET

For those members with internet access there is a good BBC website on Charles Dickens at <http://www.bbc.co.uk/arts/dickens> .

The site contains a wide range of Dickens-related material including a series of live performances of Dickens's best-known characters, a quiz, an interview with Dickens biographer Peter Ackroyd and a rather eccentric computer game in which you get to "tour" Victorian London.

The fellowship does, of course, have its own website (see bottom of page), but if anyone stumbles across a Dickens website they think may interest other members, then please send in the web address to: Matthew Davis, 80 Galloway Road, Shepherd's Bush, London W12 0PJ.

You can also send any items for the newsletter, or comments, to the same address.