

# London Particular

## The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

### ANDREW XAVIER

Members will be shocked and saddened to hear that Andrew Xavier, former curator and director of the Museum, has died. He was knocked down by a car whilst working in Saudi Arabia, teaching English. Our sympathies go out to his family and friends.

John Sullivan, creator of the popular TV series 'Only Fools and Horses', died recently. He is quoted as saying he hated school in Balham, London, except for those classes where an eccentric one-eyed English teacher inspired him with a love of Dickens by acting out scenes from Oliver Twist and David Copperfield. One obituary suggested that the coterie of eccentric, droll and grotesque low-life characters in 'Only Fools' even invited comparison with those of Dickens. (Having given this a bit of thought, all I could come up with was "Trigger", played by Roger Lloyd Pack, whose penchant for making sudden and completely irrelevant remarks put me in mind of Mr F's Aunt from Little Dorrit.....Ed.)

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**Wedding Cake** DF member Derek Hyde sent in an article from The Guardian (4<sup>th</sup> May): "I imagine it must be a pain being called Miss Havisham, especially if you get married. Some compensation is now being offered from the unlikely quarter of the Royal Society of Chemistry, which is looking for a woman with the maiden name Havisham to recount her successful wedding day. The Society is marking the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Great Expectations by recreating Miss Havisham's mouldering wedding-cake, and it wants someone to give it to!" (Complete with mice and spiders, I trust!)

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**Dickens Lorries** - "Dickensian" subscribers may recall reading about the haulage company, Moreton Cullimore, of Stroud, Gloucestershire, who name their lorries after Dickens characters and print the names on the side of their distinctive green and red vehicles. Latest news is that 'Tony Weller', 'Sir Leicester Dedlock', 'Mr Stryver' and 'Sir Mulberry Hawk' are now "off the road", but someone with a fine sense of

humour has named a 4-wheel tipper with a new body and crane 'Little Dorrit' and 'the Fat Boy' is a light vehicle. A recently restored vehicle is named 'Dr Alexandre Manette'. Keep an eye open for them, anyone in the west country!

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**A Dickens Descendant** Ethel Dickens (1864 – 1936), was the second of Charles Dickens junior's eight children. James Agate (1877 – 1947), dramatic critic and journalist, who employed her to do some typing, described her as "a retiring little lady who used to type J M Barrie's plays, and so much hated trading on her grandfather's fame that I did not discover the relationship for more than a year." Agate called her "the nicest but closest human being he had ever dealt with". Apparently her typewriter was so antiquated that it took a taxi-driver and Agate's manservant all their time and effort to get it into the house.

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**The King's Head, Chigwell** One of the earliest events of the Fellowship took place on 18<sup>th</sup> June 1903, when the famous actor, Bransby Williams, gave a performance of Dickens characters at the King's Head, Chigwell, the 'Maypole' of Barnaby Rudge. Williams gained countrywide fame in the early days of TV in the '50s with his Dickens portrayals. The King's Head is now a restaurant owned by Sir Alan Sugar. Anyone fancy a job as an apprentice waiter?

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**DICKENS PUB WRECKED** - One of Dickens's favourite pubs was severely damaged in March by arsonists. The 'Crispin and Crispianus' in Strood, Kent, is three miles from Gad's Hill and Dickens sometimes had a drink there. He mentions it in the essay "Tramps" from "The Uncommercial Traveller". 'So should we lie that night at the ancient sign of the Crispin and Crispianus (sic), and rise early next morning to be betimes on tramp again.' St Crispin and St Crispianus were said to have been the Christian sons of a British prince, living in Canterbury, who was executed by the emperor Carausius. The sons then fled towards London, but stopped at Faversham outside a shoemaker's workshop. The workers sounded so jolly, they decided to stay and lived to become champion shoemakers themselves. Well, that's the story.....

**“Dickens Therapy” (recommended for use in hospitals)** - *Jemima Lewis, a Daily Telegraph columnist, wrote (7.4.11) that during a recent hospital stay, she happened to have a copy of Oliver Twist in her bag and read it all before returning home. She was so happy in Dickens’s world, and so distracted from her woes by the cacophonous company of orphans, pickpockets, hypocrites, do-gooders and murderers, that she didn’t want to leave it. So when she got home, she kept reading until she had worked her way through the entire canon.*

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**Cleveland Street Workhouse** – The workhouse referred to in March’s London Particular has been saved from demolition. The building in Cleveland Street, Fitzrovia, London, has now been given Grade II listing by the government and its architectural and historical interest must now be considered in any development plans.

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**STORM IN AN INKWELL** - Many members were shocked, when watching a recent edition of ‘Antiques Road Show’ on TV, to hear an ‘expert’, examining an inkwell of Dickens, refer to Georgina Hogarth as CD’s mistress. A letter from former Fellowship Joint Hon Sec, Thelma Grove, subsequently appeared in the Radio Times, as follows:- “One of the objects featured in ‘Antiques Roadshow’ (20<sup>th</sup> March, BB1), was CD’s inkwell, given to him by his wife’s sister, Georgina Hogarth, with her letter giving its provenance. The expert’s frequent reference to Georgina as Dickens’s “mistress” and describing the relationship as “a love affair” are unforgivably inaccurate. They repeat the rumours current at the time of Dickens’s separation from his wife in 1858, which caused the serious breach between Dickens and Thackeray known as the “Garrick Club row”. To refute the scandal, poor Georgina was medically examined to prove her virginity.” The series’ editor apologised, agreed it was wrong and emphasised the importance of factual accuracy in the show, adding that he would talk to his team about it.

**And another inkwell....** used by CD while writing his last novel, Edwin Drood, has sold for £950 at auction. According to the auctioneers, Dickins Auctioneers of Middle Clayton, Bucks, the brass container was kept in Dickens’s Swiss chalet at Gad’s Hill and was bequeathed to members of staff, ending up in the hands of a house-boy, Henry Johnson.

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**Pickwick London Ladies’ Club.** Your Editor enjoyed an unexpected perk of the job when she received, a few months ago, an invitation to the ‘Spring Luncheon’ of the above organisation. She had a lovely day in the company of several enthusiastic ladies, styling themselves Mrs

Nupkins (aka Mrs Eileen Lawson, the delightful hostess), Mrs Bardell, Mrs Dowler etc, and was treated to a sumptuous lunch, which Mr Pickwick himself would have been proud to attend. Many thanks again to them and very best wishes to their thriving society.

**SOME FORTHCOMING EVENTS FOR YOUR DIARY:-**

**Sunday, 11<sup>th</sup> September – Michael Slater in conversation with Sam Leith, former literary editor of the Daily Telegraph, 3 – 4 p.m. at the London Jewish Cultural Centre, 94 – 96 North End Road, NW11. Details and bookings on [www.hamhighlitfest.com](http://www.hamhighlitfest.com) or 020 8511 7900.**

**Saturday, 17<sup>th</sup> September – Dickens and Turner Walk – Visit the watercolour exhibition at Turner Contemporary Gallery in Margate; then follow the designated Dickens and Turner footpath to Broadstairs (four miles flat walking). Tour the Dickens House Museum and reward yourself with a cream tea! Joint event with members of the Turner Society. Admission free, make your own travel arrangements. If interested, please contact Joan Dicks on [joan@dickshq.freeseve.co.uk](mailto:joan@dickshq.freeseve.co.uk) or 020 7242 8575.**

**Saturday, 26<sup>th</sup> November – Victorian Parlour Entertainment - By popular demand, fresh from their success at the Eastbourne conference, the Britannia Theatre Company will present an evening of music, laughter and song in the hall of the Artworkers’ Guild, 7 – 10 p.m. Light refreshments will be provided. Tickets £15, please contact Joan Dicks (see details above).**

**TV Great Expectations** – Another version is being filmed by BBC1, to be screened at Christmas ahead of next year’s bi-centenary. It will star Gillian Anderson (who was a superb Lady Dedlock on BBC a few years ago) as Miss Havisham, David Suchet as Mr Jaggers and Ray Winstone as Magwitch. A film version is also planned by the BBC for release next year. This is great news – but how about doing Barnaby Rudge for a change?

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Many thanks to those who have kindly sent in items for the LP. Like Oliver, however, “I want some more”. Please send to: Alison Gowans, “Danesdyke”, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email - [aligowans@hotmail.co.uk](mailto:aligowans@hotmail.co.uk)