
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

MEMBERSHIP RENEWALS – NEW WEBSITE

Treasurer, **Eddie Jones**, says: “For members from before the launch of the new website, I am pleased to let you know that all members have been transferred to our new website and have been emailed a user ID and password to login. If you haven’t received this email, please send your email address to treasurer@dickensfellowship.org

“You can renew your membership and switch to an auto-renewing option online. The system will email you more details in December. A renewal form for 2022 is also enclosed.

“Those who have already elected to pay by Standing Order need not do anything, as their membership will be automatically renewed. For members who have joined via the new website, please ignore the above – the system will email your renewal option by the month before membership is due to expire”.

CHRISTMAS LUNCH This year we will be holding a Christmas lunch as opposed to a Christmas supper. The venue will be the Union Jack Club, Sandell Street SE1 8UJ (opposite Waterloo Station). The cost will be £38 per head. Full details and booking information are attached.

Bleak Health Congratulations to DF member **Dr Nick Cambridge**, whose new book on the medical history of Dickens and his family, *‘Bleak Health’*, is due to be published by Edward Everett Root Scholarly Publishers in May 2022. Nick has agreed to give a talk to Central DF members in London on **22 November 2022**, outlining the fruits of his researches.

Mr Pickwick traces his roots While on the way to visit Bath, Mr Pickwick’s trusty servant Sam is indignant at finding the name “Pickwick” written up on the side of the coach in which they are to travel.

He adds that, *‘not content with writin’ up Pickwick, they puts “Moses” afore it, vich I call addin’ insult to injury, as the parrot said ven they not only took him from his native land, but made him talk the English langwidge arterwards.’* Sam is aghast at his master’s matter-of-fact response, asking *‘Ain’t nobody to be whopped for takin’ this here liberty, sir?’* **Cindy Sughrue**, Director of the Charles Dickens Museum, tells me how, holidaying recently in the West Country, she approached Corsham, a market town near Bath; she was astonished to see a signpost to the nearby village of – Pickwick! It is thought CD borrowed the name from Moses Pickwick, a coachman who was born in the village of Pickwick and ran coaches between Bath and London. It seems that he was the great-grandson of a man, abandoned at birth, who was named after the village where he was found. Corsham, Cindy says, has embraced the CD connection, with a post-war housing estate populated with Dickensian street-names, as well as a new Housing scheme called Dickens Gate!

Well-meaning but ... The group ‘Hope Not Hate’ has asked the Attorney General to review the “obscenely lenient” two-year suspended sentence given to an extremist who had documents on guns, explosives and white supremacist material in his possession. The man had also been ordered to read Dickens and Shakespeare, ‘on which the judge will test him regularly’. Patrick Kidd, in *The Times*, 3 Sept, quoted a judge in Missouri in 2018 who instructed a poacher convicted of illegally killing hundreds of deer to watch *Bambi* once a month for a year.

Podsnappery Anne Treneman, Notebook, *The Times* 23 July, has been listing unusual words. She says, *‘Word of the week is “podsnappery”.* It is based on the character John Podsnap, who lived entirely in his own world, from *Our Mutual Friend* by Charles Dickens. It is now defined as “insular complacency” and “blinker self-satisfaction”. Hmmm. Perfect for our times?’

Michael Slater, in his biography of Charles Dickens, describes *‘the stifling middle-class complacency and dogmatism incarnate in Mr*

Podsnap', who refuses to recognise anything disagreeable or improper. "I don't want to know about it; I don't choose to discuss it; I don't admit it!" He had even acquired a peculiar flourish of his right arm in often clearing the world of its most difficult problems, by sweeping them behind him (and consequently sheer away) with those words and a flushed face. When a fellow guest refers to the fact that "some half-dozen people had lately died in the streets, of starvation", 'I don't believe it', he said, putting it behind him....

.... **Podsnap and John Forster** Podsnap shared some mannerisms with CD's friend and first biographer, John Forster—the indignant flush, the sweeping gesture of dismissal – 'but nobody who knew Forster doubted his entire inability to see himself there'. Edgar Johnson, in his biography of CD, notes, however, "It is possible that they were wrong; just around the time that the chapter on Podsnap appeared in *Our Mutual Friend*, near the end of July, 1864, "Forster fluttered about in the Athenaeum", CD wrote to Georgina, "as I conversed in the hall with all sorts and conditions of men – and pretended not to see me – but I saw in every hair of his whisker (left hand one) that he saw Nothing Else".

Johnson also quotes an incident involving Forster which could be classed as mild podsnappery. When a play was being produced of Dickens's Christmas story "*The Battle of Life*", rehearsals were going so badly that CD summoned the entire company to Lincoln's Inn Fields (where Forster lived) and, despite a frightful cold, read the script to them to show how it should go. Forster provided seventy-six ham sandwiches by way of refreshment, and sent the forty-two that remained uneaten to be distributed to the poor. His strict injunctions to the servant, Dickens said, 'to find out very poor women and institute close enquiry into their life, conduct, and behaviour before leaving any sandwiches for them, was sublime'.

Pop and Mr Popular Sentiment DF Hon Gen Sec **Paul Graham** tells me he has seen the following "tweet" from *The Bookseller*: 'Viking Books has scooped a "brilliantly original" short non-fiction book by Nick Hornby – *Prince and Dickens* - looking at the creative lives of Charles Dickens and the pop star Prince, with Prince and Dickens promising to be "brimming with life, ideas and laughs"'. To be published autumn 2022.

CD and the Prince Not the pop star, but Prince George, aged 8, was reported the other day by his father, the Duke of Cambridge, as being confused and annoyed after he and his schoolmates did a litter-pick near their school. The following day they went out again and found

there was just as much litter as before. "Why hasn't it gone?" he asked. CD gives this disgusting fact of modern (and Victorian) life an almost romantic image in *OMF*: "***That mysterious paper currency which circulates in London when the wind blows, gyrated here and there and everywhere. Whence can it come? Whither can it go? It hangs on every bush, flutters in every tree, is caught flying by the electric wires, haunts every enclosure, drinks at every pump, cowers at every grating, shudders upon every plot of grass, seeks rest in vain behind the legions of iron rails.***"

COP26 - what would CD have thought? Dickens was intensely interested in scientific progress, but he hated the polluting and dehumanising effect of the factories that produced them. This features strongly of course in *Hard Times*, with its famous description of Coketown (based on Preston): "***It was a town of red brick, or of red brick that would have been red if the smoke and ashes had allowed it; but as matters stood it was a town of unnatural red and black like the painted face of a savage. It was a town of machinery and tall chimneys, out of which interminable serpents of smoke trailed themselves for ever and ever, and never got uncoiled. It had a black canal in it, and a river that ran purple with ill-smelling dye, and vast piles of building full of windows where there was a rattling and a trembling all day long, and where the piston of the steam-engine worked monotonously up and down like the head of an elephant in a state of melancholy madness. It contained several large streets all very like one another, and many small streets still more like one another, inhabited by people equally like one another ... to whom every day was the same as yesterday and tomorrow, and every year a counterpart of the last and the next.***" Dickens didn't know about the state of the seas and the rain forests, but I can't help feeling we'd all have a much better chance of saving the planet if he was sitting in on the COP26 discussions. To quote Old Jolyon (*The Forsyte Saga*, John Galsworthy): "He'd astonish their weak minds!"

'There's not a Hand in this town ... but has one object in life. That object is, to be fed on turtle soup and venison with a gold spoon'* (*Hard Times*). **MY one object in life is to receive more contributions or comments, please, to be sent to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans17@outlook.com*