

London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

ADDITIONAL MEETING AT LUMEN Members are advised of an additional meeting on this year's programme on **Wed 3 May** at 18.30 at Lumen, "Adapting Dickens for the stage and radio". Our speaker, Jonathan Holloway, has written and published a version of *Nicholas Nickleby* which toured throughout the UK. He has adapted and directed a version of *A Christmas Carol* and *A Tale of Two Cities* (currently being produced in Cantonese in Hongkong). More recently, Jonathan wrote a new adaptation of *The Signalman* which was broadcast on BBC Radio 4 on Christmas Day, starring Samuel West and James Purefoy; he will be directing this as a stage play in Oxford this month. Further details can be accessed via the links below:

<https://creationtheatre.co.uk/show/thesignalman/>
<https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/moo1ghw9>

ANNUAL CONFERENCE The annual conference this year will be based in London over the period **26 – 29 July**. Further details on our website:- <https://www.dickensfellowship.org/>. Any members who cannot attend the whole event, but would like to attend either the conference banquet at the Garrick Club on the evening of **28 July** or the visit to Gad's Hill and Rochester on the following day, are able to book these separately.

Alliance of Literary Societies The DF continues to be a member organisation of the ALS. A question-and-answer session with the ALS President, the broadcaster and author James Naughtie, is scheduled for **4 April** at 7.30 p.m. All members of all ALS societies are invited to join in this event (limit 100, first come, first served). If you wish to attend and ask a question, please send your question, with your name and the name of your society, in advance by **25 March** to allianceoflitsocs@gmail.com. You can book your place via: <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/meet-the-president-tickets-578279478487>.

Charles Dickens & Georgina Hogarth: a curious and enduring relationship Members may recall a talk given by DF Member **Christine**

Skelton at Lumen on 20.11.18 on the above topic. The talk was very well received and prompted much discussion. Christine, Emeritus Professor of Gender Education in the School of Education, University of Birmingham, revealed some of the research she had undertaken for her forthcoming book on the subject. Christine has now completed the book, which will be published in hardback by Manchester University Press on 18 April for the price of £20. Many congratulations to Christine on the culmination of her research into this fascinating topic.

Council and Annual General Meetings

Members are advised that the annual meeting of the DF Council will take place on **Sat 15 April** at 2.30. Those Branch Secretaries, or those who represent branches, will receive the agenda and supporting papers in due course. The AGM of the DF will take place on **Sat 22 July** at 2.00. Both meetings will be held in the boardroom of the Charles Dickens Museum. All members are entitled to attend the AGM.

Great Expectations: the sense of an ending

The last (November) issue of LP contained an item about the use of Dickens's original – sadder – ending in a novel ('*Girl*') by Edna O'Brien. While watching an old (and very good) TV serialisation of *GE* from 1967, starring Francesca Annis as Estella, we were astonished to find they had used the original ending which CD discarded. We wondered if this was commented on at the time. There does not appear to be any reference in editions of *The Dickensian* published that year.

Playing with Dickens

Leading Dickensian scholar and DF member **Dr Leon Litvack** is developing a game in which players will meet a recreation of the writer, based on more than 15,000 of his letters (*DT Feb 13*). A game with graphics and sound would allow people to interact with a virtual Dickens recreation, using Artificial Intelligence. "We could use natural language processing to get a machine to learn how Dickens spoke", Dr Litvack said. "His letters are not literary, they are conversational, so more like his actual

speech. They could be manipulated to get Dickens to speak to you. Children could be drawn to playing games and spending Christmas with Dickens". All processing would break down the author's mannerisms and create new sentences in his style.

Boris quotes Pickwick An article in the Metro (20 Jan) tells us that, at the recent World Economic Forum in Davos, Boris Johnson (famed for his literary references) said of Mr Putin's veiled threats to deploy nuclear weapons: **'He's like the fat boy in Dickens. He wants to make our flesh creep. He wants us to think about it. He's never going to do it.'**

Save our Simpsons From an article (*Times* 2.11.22) entitled 'Dickens of a Predicament': "The cry has gone up in the City of London: "SOS – Save our Simpson's". After 265 years of serving meat to hungry bankers, the famous Simpson's Tavern faces the chop. The hostelry off Cornhill, where Dickens, Pepys and Thackeray used to enjoy the house special of "a sausage on the side", has been forced to close by its landlord and is trying to raise £350,000 on a crowd-funding website to fight eviction. It is said that Simpson's was the model for the tavern where Scrooge takes his melancholy dinner before his night of repentance. Its loyal fans will hope that this haunt has several Christmases yet to come." [I believe the tavern was made a "community asset" in December and perhaps this will save it. Ed.]

Chimney sweeps Recent news items have highlighted threats to health posed by various kinds of pollution (the death of a young girl living on a main road and a little boy dying in a mould-infested flat). I found a puzzling line in *Sketches by Boz* - "*Scenes – The Streets – Morning*", where **'the little sweep, who, having knocked and rung till his arm aches, and being interdicted by a merciful legislature from endangering his lungs by calling out, sits patiently down on the door-step ..'** I found a reference, though not an explanation, in Wikipedia (see in bold below). I also found rather more than I bargained for regarding conditions generally for such boys.

Sir Percivall Pott reported in 1775 on "Chimney sweeps' carcinoma". Sweeps called it "soot wart". It occurred during and after puberty – the first industrially-related cancer to be found. Pott describes how "*painful, ragged sores pervade the skin and membranes of the scrotum, seize the testicle and thence pass into the abdomen. General neglect, stunted growth and deformity of the spine, legs and arms are thought to be caused by remaining in abnormal positions for long periods of time, before their bones had hardened;*

knees and ankle joints sores, inflammation of eyelids that can lead to loss of sight". The Chimney Sweeps Act 1834 laid down many much-needed regulations, e.g. boys could no longer be taken on under the age of 14 and **street cries were regulated.**

Master sweeps - and the public - resisted the new Act as they believed property would be put at risk. In February 1875, 12-year old George Brewster was sent up Fulbourn Hospital [Cambridge], chimneys, got stuck and was smothered. They had to take the whole wall down to get him out, still alive, but he died shortly afterwards. Master William Wyler was sentenced to 6 months' hard labour for manslaughter. Lord Shaftesbury seized on the incident to press his campaign again. The Chimney Sweeps Act 1875 required sweeps to be authorised by the police to carry on their business in the district, which produced the legal means to enforce all previous legislation.

So *Oliver Twist* was even luckier than we thought to avoid employment with Mr Gamfield, "*whose face was a regular stamped receipt for cruelty*".

Name that tune! Some time ago I mentioned an excellent BBC serialisation of *Nicholas Nickleby* from 1977, starring Nigel Havers as Nicholas. A lively and energetic tune introduced each episode (together with an imaginative backdrop of gas lamps and a wall covered in various appropriate posters). I put an item in LP and asked if anyone knew what the music was as it was not mentioned in the credits. We've just watched this serial again and still found the music as attractive as ever. By a great coincidence, a gentleman called **Tony Knightley** has just this week sent in an answer to my question (having applied direct to the BBC). It is *Scherzo in B Minor for orchestra* by Edouard Lalo. I looked back in past LPs to see when I asked the question and discovered it was ten years ago exactly, in the March 2013 issue. Everything comes to him (or her) who waits! Many thanks to Mr Knightley.

From a recent article on this month's weather in *The Times*: "Perhaps Charles Dickens summed up the month of March best in *Great Expectations*: 'It was one of those March days when the sun shines hot and the wind blows cold: when it is summer in the light, and winter in the shade.'" Whatever the weather, I would welcome your contributions or comments, please, to be sent to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans17@outlook.com