
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

The Central Dickens Fellowship monthly meetings are now held at The Charterhouse, Charterhouse Square, London EC1M 6AN, a lovely venue dating back to medieval and Tudor times. Details and full programme on the website. There is an opportunity on **Sat 24 August** to take a free guided tour of The Charterhouse – meet at **2.30** at the Porter’s Lodge, Charterhouse Square.

The Annual Conference (Portsmouth and Isle of Wight) will take place slightly later than usual: **Monday 5 – Thursday 8 August**. Our thanks to the Birthplace Branch and Ian Dickens for organising such an exciting programme of lectures and events. The AGM will take place on the Tuesday morning of the conference. Details on the website.

The wreath-laying ceremony in Westminster Abbey, to mark the anniversary of Dickens’s death, will be on **Fri 7 June at 3 pm** – earlier than usual. The oration will be given by CD’s great-great-granddaughter, Marion Lloyd. Attendees should assemble at the West Door at 2.45 pm.

Cathy Waters’s term of office as President of the Dickens Fellowship ends in July. **Lucinda Hawksley** has agreed to be our next President. Many thanks to Cathy for her inspiring leadership - and welcome Lucinda, great-great-great-granddaughter of CD and a patron of the Charles Dickens Museum.

“Pictures from Italy” – I wonder if anyone saw a recent programme (*Sky Arts*) on *Pictures from Italy*, introduced by David Harewood, during which the charismatic presenter visited the main cities mentioned by CD, brandishing a well-thumbed version of the book. His enthusiasm and his high opinion of Dickens as a guide were infectious. He made the point that, as a man of colour, he had thought CD could have nothing to say to him, but *Pictures from Italy* had completely “converted” him. Excellent PR for CD!

Quilp’s ideal pet “XL Bully” dogs continue, horribly, to be in the news. I think the breed might well have appealed to Daniel Quilp (OCS). His obsequious friend, Sampson Brass, having spent a convivial evening with him, asks for a light to show him through the yard: *‘To be sure’, said Quilp, taking up a lantern. ‘Be careful how you go my dear friend... There’s a dog in the lane. He bit a man last night, and a woman the night before, and last Tuesday he killed a child – but that was in play. Don’t go too near him.’ ‘Which side of the road is he, sir?’ asked Brass, in great dismay. ‘He lives on the right-hand,’ said Quilp, ‘but sometimes he hides on the left, ready for a spring. He’s uncertain in that respect.’*

On another occasion, Quilp, expressing his delight at some piece of skulduggery in his own inimitable way by rolling on the ground in ecstasy, *“... had like to have met with a disagreeable check, for rolling very near a broken dog-kennel, there leapt forth a large fierce dog, who, but that his chain was of the shortest, would have given him a disagreeable salute. As it was, the dwarf remained upon his back in perfect safety, taunting the dog with hideous faces, and triumphing over him in his inability to advance another inch... ‘Why don’t you come and bite me, why don’t you come and tear me to pieces, you coward?’ said Quilp, hissing and worrying the animal till he was nearly mad, ‘You’re afraid, you bully, you’re afraid, you know you are.’”*

London Particular I found this item in DF member **Christine L Corton’s** book, *London Fog, The Biography*. “Next to ‘pea-souper’, ‘London Particular’ was by far the most common term for London fog. It was widely used as a term for the combination of fog and smoke but, as in the case of ‘pea-souper’, it came during the second half of the century to be employed with a degree of nostalgia. As early as 1855 the New York Times, describing a home-grown American fog, wrote that it had “nothing of the characteristics of our ‘old London particular’ except density”. The possessive suggests the writer was a home-sick ex-Londoner. In 1904 the scientist Henry Antoine Des Voeux, honorary treasurer of the Coal Smoke

Abatement League, said, "It is essential to recognise that we are discussing two different things. The essence of one is moisture, the essence of the other smoke... and today the true 'fog' has shifted away from London, and we are suffering especially today, from what is known as the 'London particular', which I should like to name 'smog', to show that it consists much more of smoke than of true fog".

A modern Circumlocution Office – without the humour A lady wrote to *The Times* recently, comparing the Post Office to CD's wonderful government department, the *Circumlocution Office*. I found myself wondering whether, even amongst all the laziness, ignorance, rudeness and evasion CD describes, there was such real cruelty and mendacity as has been shown to exist in the Post Office management today. Arthur Clennam, hero of *Little Dorrit*, visits the Circumlocution Office to ask a specific question. At his fifth attempt, he encounters Clarence, a junior member of the Barnacle clan which runs the CO. **"I say, look here!" he says. "You haven't got any appointment, you know", said Barnacle Junior. "No", said Arthur. "That is what I wish to have." "But I say. Look here! Is this public business?... Is it anything about – Tonnage – or that sort of thing?"**

Arthur later visits Mr Tite Barnacle at his home, who tells him, **"It is competent to any member of the – Public", mentioning that obscure body with reluctance, as his natural enemy, "to memorialise the Circumlocution Department. Such formalities as are required to be observed in so doing, may be known on application to the proper branch of that Department."** **"Which is the proper branch?" "I must refer you," returned Mr Barnacle, ringing the bell, "to the Department itself for a formal answer to that enquiry."** Arthur returns to the CO and finds Barnacle Junior singeing his knees at the fire, and gaping his weary way on to four o'clock. **"I say. Look here. You stick to us in a devil of a manner", said Barnacle Junior. Arthur repeats his question, saying "I want to know –". "Look here. Upon my soul you mustn't come into the place saying you want to know, you know", remonstrated Barnacle Junior. Incidentally, in the 1987 film version of LD, Tite Barnacle was played by John Savident, who died very recently. He spat out the word 'Public' to great effect!**

Did Dickens dislike old people? DF member Dr Mervyn Eastman says: "My background is in Social Work with a special interest in gerontology, which has prompted me to create a blog series on "How and Why CD Portrayed Older

Adult Characters" in his major novels. Thus far I have completed and posted *PP*, *OT*, *NN* and *OCS*. I am attempting to see the novels in the context of late Georgian and Victorian attitudes to old age and ageing, Dickens's life course and whether he was, or not, gerontophobic. I also, a while ago, presented a radio series (East London Radio) alongside The Dickens Museum with Dr Cindy Sughrue and Lucinda Hawksley. The series included an episode called *The Museum*; and another with Lucinda on the *Descendants of Dickens*. I believe the series is still available on ELR's Mixcloud.com platform under "Discovering Charles Dickens". The blogs can be seen at Cooperativemervynunleashed.blogspot.com and "Dickens's Older People" is on my blogsite."

News from the Charles Dickens Museum CDM Director, Dr Cindy Sughrue, tells me: "Our current special exhibition *Mutual Friends: The Adventures of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins* – generously funded by the Dickens Fellowship, Wilkie Collins Society, and a number of individual donors – has been extended until **21 April 2024**. The exhibition celebrates their friendship and collaboration and the huge body of works it produced, from articles in CD's *Household Words* to novellas and plays, such as *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* and *The Frozen Deep*. Star objects include letters between the two writers, and we are thrilled also to be hosting two loans of paintings of Wilkie Collins, one as a child with his brother Charles Collins by Andrew Geddes and one painted by Charles Collins of Wilkie aged 26, just one year before he met Charles Dickens: many thanks to Andrew Gasson and Faith Clarke for these loans.

"Our next special exhibition will open on **15 May 2024** and runs until **12 January 2025**. It will examine the role of animals and pets in Dickens's life and works. We know not everyone can get to London to see our exhibitions, so we have been developing the 'Explore' section of our website: - (<https://dickensmuseum.com/blogs/explore>) to include more exhibition content."

"For goodness sake don't ask me nothing, Arthur! I am frightened out of one half of my life, and dreamed out of the other. Don't ask me nothing! I don't know which is which or what is what!" (*Little Dorrit*). I hope you'll be more responsive than Affery to my request for contributions, to be sent to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET or by email – aligowans17@outlook.com