

Mr Dick's Kite

FOR ALL DICKENS FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS

No.94

Autumn 2014



Mr Pinch and Ruth unconscious of a visitor

It was a perfect treat to Tom to see her with her brows knit, and her rosy lips pursed up, kneading away at the crust, rolling it out, cutting it up into strips, lining the basin with it...

Dear Readers,

Here is another selection of pieces of interest for our little magazine.

The Front cover shows the illustration from *Martin Chuzzlewit*, where little Ruth Pinch makes her first beefsteak pudding!

The handsome young John Westlock suddenly appears at the door and her dear brother Tom unwittingly invites him to stay for supper, whereupon "*poor little Ruth was seized with a palpitation of the heart when Tom committed this appalling indiscretion, for she felt that if the dish turned out a failure, she never would be able to hold up her head before John Westlock again*" Many of us know that feeling all too well!

We understand that there have been several enquiries for copies of *A Short Introduction to the Novels of Charles Dickens* by Alan Watts. These are available from the publishers Grayswood Press. To order copies please contact them at Grayswood.Press@tiscali.co.uk or phone on 01428 652306. Cost is £8.50 inclusive of postage.

Readers may also be interested to note that after a hiatus of a few years, there is a welcome return of the *Dickens Magazine* – Series 7 on Dickens's *Christmas Carol* and will comprise of two fully illustrated 36 page issues packed full of articles on the *Carol* – topics include: synopsis, characters in focus, the historical, social and economic background to the novella, comprehensive survey and analysis of the illustrations to the various editions, Ragged schools, Hungry Forties, 19th Century carols and Biblical allusions, and the adaptations for film, television and stage. Part B will include articles on M R James and ghost story traditions, Thackeray and Christmas, Thomas Barnardo and Street Children, and the growing Dickens Family, amongst other interesting items.

Alan Watts and Lucinda Dickens Hawkesley are distinguished advisors to this series, while Professor Philip Allingham of Canada is the Editor in Chief. Further information available from Grayswood.Press@tiscali.co.uk

A far better thing...?

Reading *London Particular for July 2014* to my father Alan Watts, he was intrigued with the piece on **Virginia Woolf & CD** which quotes from a letter she wrote to Hugh Walpole. In it there is mention of Thomas Wright's *Life of Dickens*.

"That book was given to me as a prize for English Literature when I was a lad" said my Dad. He also told me that the previous year, his English master had read to the Form Dickens's *A Tale of Two Cities*.

The boys waited expectantly as the book neared the end for the hero to be rescued, or for him to devise some devilish plan of escape at the last minute.

They couldn't believe it when the hero died on the guillotine! No swashbuckling tale, or silent film they had ever seen, had ended with the hero's death!

FH

Charles Dickens Statue

I was told recently that since the unveiling of the statue of Charles Dickens in Guildhall Square, Portsmouth, his knees have taken on an extra shiny appearance! This is due to the number of children who climb up and sit on his lap.

Fleur Hogarth



HISTORY is MADE in PORTSMOUTH

“Oh my god, this is awesome!” exclaimed one of the many press photographers recording the amazing scenes in Guildhall Square on 7 February, succinctly summing up the occasion and echoing the thoughts of hundreds of others there.

In the city of his birth, 202 years later, we witnessed the unveiling of the first statue of Charles Dickens in Britain.

Costing £140,000 (towards which the Nottingham Branch contributed), and taking three years to complete, the statue is the work of sculptor Martin Jennings and depicts Dickens 1¼ life-size, seated, with a book in his hand and a stack of books at his side swathed in a great cloth like a theatrical curtain. The unveiling took place after

speeches and readings given by the Lord Mayor of Portsmouth – Councillor Lynne Stagg, Prof. Tony Pointon – Chairman of the Statue Fund, actor Edward Fox and his wife actress Joanna David. Ollie Dickens, a great, great, great grandson and Esha Abedin from the Charles Dickens Primary School – both nine years old, helped lift the white cover and there was the Great Man, in glorious sunshine, looking over the square towards the statue of Queen Victoria and, half a mile away, his birthplace.

Before the ceremony we had been entertained by members of the Pickwick Bicycle Club, riding around the square on penny-farthings, bone-shakers and other weird and wonderful contraptions. Free hot chestnuts were available and local Dickensians in costume mingled with members of the public and with 40+ Dickens descendants while the brass band played.

Later on invited dignitaries and funders attended a reception in the Guildhall, when more short speeches ensured everyone was thanked and congratulated – especially Tony Pointon who had worked so hard and fulfilled his dream at last. I had chance to catch up with some Dickens Fellowship friends including Tony Williams, a great favourite of our branch, and Lucinda Hawksley Dickens who spoke to us a few years ago. Unfortunately, Gerald was performing (in Leicester) so couldn't attend. His brother Ian, who lives in the city, has been very involved in the project from the

beginning. The local newspaper quoted him saying "I actually saw the statue in the foundry last week and I was quite emotional when I saw it for the first time. To see it today is overwhelming, it's a feeling of pride."

To finish the proceedings around 40 of us stayed to hear a very informative, yet light-hearted talk from Martin Jennings about the statue's construction, and his research into the character of his subject. Apparently the 1½ tons of clay used gets recycled and started off as John Betjeman at St. Pancras Station then became Philip Larkin in Hull then morphed into Charles Dickens and will soon appear as George Orwell outside the BBC's Broadcasting House.

At the end of the afternoon the crowds had dispersed and I caught Edward Fox taking a long, close look at the statue. He, like the rest of us, appreciated the significance of the occasion. "Awesome" doesn't even come close!

KATHY POWIS, NOTTINGHAM DF

Last Requests

Having read a short piece from the Portsmouth newspaper about the unveiling of the statue of Charles Dickens after many years of dispute, I am wondering just what rights a descendent has over a person's clearly expressed final wishes.

I am referring of course, to the wish that Dickens expressed in his Will: *"I conjure my friends on no account to make me a subject of any monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever. I rest my claims to the remembrance of my country upon my published works and to the remembrance of my friends upon their experience of me in addition thereto."*

This all seems very plain and straightforward until we consider whose

memorial we are thinking about.

We must take into account that Dickens was no ordinary man and that most, if not all, of his expressed wishes regarding his funeral etc., fall to the ground because of this.

There must surely be a time when the wishes of a person as great and as respected around the world as Dickens, should be overridden.

ASW

Dickens Face to Face with Death

Over the period of his life Dickens had several near misses with death. The most famous being the Staplehurst rail crash in June 1865, when the South Eastern railway's Folkestone to London boat train was crossing a viaduct where several yards of track had been removed. The train crashed over the viaduct killing 10 passengers and injuring 40.

Dickens was travelling in the first carriage, which hung partly over the viaduct and thereby saved his life. Also on the train were Ellen Ternan and her mother, whom he managed to extricate. He also ministered to other passengers, several of whom died while he was with them. He never fully recovered his equilibrium after this accident. He lost his voice for the following two weeks and was forever afterwards nervous of rail travel.

He had been working on the manuscript of *Our Mutual Friend* and climbed back inside the wrecked carriage to retrieve his copy. As a result of his trauma he was two and a half pages short in episode 16! He explained the situation to his readers in the postscript.

"I remember with devout thankfulness that I can never be much nearer parting company with my readers for ever than I was then..."
(Postscript to OMF)

However, there had been a few other incidents earlier in his life which could have ended a promising career.

Dickens's biographer and friend, John Forster records:

'In August 1844, in Albaro, nr Genoa, Dickens was invited to a great reception at the Marquis di Negro's on the occasion of his daughter's birthday. The celebrations were held outside in the gardens and walkways, and Dickens was enjoying himself immensely when he suddenly

realised that the Genoa gates closed at twelve; and that as the carriage had not been ordered till the dancing was expected to be over and the gates to reopen, he must make a bolt for it if he was to get back to Albaro'

Dickens sent details of what happened next, in a letter to John Forster.

I had barely time to reach the gate before midnight; and was running as hard as I could go, downhill, over uneven ground, along a new street called the strada Sevrà, when I came to a pole fastened straight across the street, nearly breast high, without any light or night watchman – quite in the Italian style. I went over it, headlong, with such force that I rolled myself completely white in the dust; but although I tore my clothes to shreds, I hardly scratched myself except in one place on the knee. I had no time to think of it then, for I was up directly and off again to save the gate: but when I got outside the wall, and saw the state I was in, I wondered I had not broken my neck....."

Although unsurprisingly, he had a short attack of illness following this event, he seemed to recover quickly.

Two years earlier, he and Kate had set off from Liverpool in the steamship *Britannia* heading for the United States of America.

Their passage out is well documented in *American Notes* in Dickens's slightly wry humorous style, but the facts are that ship

hit severe weather, and a hurricane with torrential rain tested the little ship severely. It was a miracle that they did not end up at the bottom of the sea.

The chief engineer said that he had never seen such stress of weather, and the Captain later said *“nothing but a steamer, and one of that strength, could have kept her course and stood it out”*

Several of the passengers raised a subscription to present the Captain with a piece of silver plate in gratitude for his courageous conduct during the storm and Dickens was elected to make the presentation in the saloon of the Tremont Theatre, Boston.

The Atlantic crossing was no light matter. Only the previous year, the steamship *President* had been lost in gales crossing from New York to Liverpool, and her wreckage was never found.

ASW

From Our Post-Bag

In response to the article ‘*Obsessions with Collections*’ (MDK Spring 2014). Andrew Gasson, Chairman of the Wilkie Collins Society has sent a note: *“Thanks once again for the current excellent edition of the Kite. Could I add a couple of notes to the piece on Townshend?”*

He was a poet, author and contributor to *Household Words* and the dedicatee of *Great Expectations*. Amongst his collecting interests, he was one of the first connoisseurs and collectors of early photography. Townshend was a witness at Kate Dickens’s wedding to Charles Collins in July 1860. Wilkie Collins met Townshend

at Tavistock House and later in Boulogne and Lausanne.

It is very likely that Limmeridge House in *The Woman in White* is based on Townshend’s house in Norfolk Street and that Townshend, himself a renowned hypochondriac with a servant called Henri Footers, forms the model for Mr Fairlie with his jewels and valet, Louis. Collins describes in the novel *‘...a large, lofty room with a magnificently carved ceiling... little stands in buhl and marquetterie, loaded with figures in Dresden China, with rare vases, ivory ornaments, and toys and curiosities that sparkled at all points with gold, silver and precious stones’*

Many of these can be seen at the excellent little museum in Wisbech.”*

(* *The Wisbech and Fenland Museum opened in 1847*)

This article from the West End Extra 22/8/2014 was sent to us recently.

Dickens Museum Café asks for more ...drinks.

“There is no such passion in human nature as the passion for gravy among business men” declared old Mrs Todgers, the boarding house keeper in Charles Dickens’s epic story Martin Chuzzlewit,” writes Richard Osley.

“But at the museum in Bloomsbury celebrating the author’s life and work, managers look to serve something a little stronger.

The Charles Dickens Museum based in the writer’s former home in Doughty Street, has upset its neighbours by asking for an alcohol licence – running to 10pm – for its on-site café.”

The article goes on to quote from ‘a neighbouring property’ who complain “The noise has gone up considerably with the advent of the café and alcohol will only make this much worse”

I think Dickens, who loved nothing better than entertaining his friends, would have been rather amused. Would he perhaps have blamed it ‘on the salmon’?

Possibly he would have invited his ‘neighbour’ to join the fun, with his well known charm and good humour!

In response, the museum has insisted it will prevent the potential for disturbance with floor stewards, a limit on the number of visitors and a refusal to serve alcohol to anybody who appears drunk!

FH

From The New South Wales Dickens Society’s HOUSEHOLD WORDS Edition 42.

A Rare Find

Apparently, amongst the covers in Cleveland Ohio Public Library’s *Special Collections Department* there was discovered an original first-edition copy of the classic Charles Dickens tale *A Christmas Carol*.

Staff are not sure when the 170 year old book was donated, or by whom, but they do know what a treasure it is to have a copy since only 6,000 were originally printed.

**I believe that Dickens did have some extra printings made to give to friends and acquaintances, but perhaps readers can tell me if he had these printed*

privately and not through Chapman and Hall?

My father has the name of “Whiting” in mind as a printing company?

Does anyone have any information on this?

**Do any of our readers have a “first edition” of the Carol?*

FH

Looking down the throat of old Time?

Edward Preston (Previous Hon.Gen. Secretary of the Dickens Fellowship) writes:-

One cannot at the moment see ‘*the giants going at it at twelve o’clock*’ (see *Copperfield ch23*) at St Dunstan-in-the-West.

The mechanism has worn out and needs repairing or replacing.

I had taken a friend to see them, and after waiting for about half an hour, a beadle from one of the premises opposite, who had seen us waiting and watching, informed us of the sad state of affairs.

Apropos of which, Sir John Stow quaintly states: St Dunstan called ‘*in the West*’ (for difference from St Dunstan in the East)

The Church is now an Anglican Guild city church serving the local working community of Fleet Street, and the Romanian Orthodox community.

The Clock dates from 1671 and was the first in London to have a minute hand. The two Giants used to rhythmically strike the hours and the quarters. Ed.

The Sincerest Form of Flattery

Booker Prize winning novelist Ian McEwan has recently published his latest work of fiction: *The Children Act*. It relates the story of a female High Court judge in the family court faced with making a judgement in the case of a teenager whose parents support his refusal to receive medical treatment on religious grounds. The opening lines are:

*'London. Trinity Term one week old.
Implacable June weather.'*

I wonder how many modern readers will recognise the Dickensian echo.

Public Reading of *The Chimes for Christmas*

On 16 December the Guildhall Library in the City of London will host a festive reading of *The Chimes: A Goblin Story of Some Bells that Rang an Old Year Out and a New Year In*. The readings will run from 11am until 3pm with a break between 12.30 and

1.30. Volunteer readers will read a section of the work for around 15 minutes before handing over to the next reader. At the time of writing the Library are still looking for volunteer readers – to volunteer contact them on 020 7332 1868 or e-mail guildhall.library@cityoflondon.gov.uk or just attend and listen (booking advised). Lucinda Dickens Hawksley will launch the event and mince-pies will be available at the interval.

Fleur Hogarth and Alan Watts

It was suggested that I post a sort of identikit picture so that Readers know who I am and what I look like!

This wasn't easy, but I have found one that might be appropriate and also shows my dear Dad, Alan Watts.

If anyone recognises me henceforth, I hope they will also come up with a piece for Mr Dick's Kite!

All contributions are gratefully received
email alan.s.watts@btinternet.com

