

## **BROADSTAIRS DICKENS FELLOWSHIP NEWSLETTER AUTUMN 2021**

*The Sun Was Shining  
The Beach Was Packed With Sunbathers  
The Promenade Was Packed With People Eating Chips And Ice Creams  
And Nuckell's Gardens Was Packed With Fellowship Members Meeting Up  
For The First Time In Nearly Two Years.*



### **The Broadstairs Dickens Declaimers: Alan, Clive, Val, Liane, Eddy and Viv**

The afternoon of Wednesday 8<sup>th</sup> September 2021 saw the first meeting of the Fellowship for quite a long time. Every year (except 2020) there is a meeting in the open air in Nuckell's Gardens close to the Dickens House Museum and the Charles Dickens pub in Broadstairs. This year more than 30 members turned up to be entertained by the Dickens Declaimers and to enjoy a glass of Prosecco. The garden is a quiet haven, hidden from the promenade by shrubs and trees and was a perfect venue on such a warm, sunny day.



The Declaimers entertained us with two performances, an excerpt from *Animal Magnetism\** and a series of Dickens character vignettes.



*Animal Magnetism* is a farce by Elizabeth Inchbald and Dickens put on performances of the play at his London home in January 1857. In playing the role of the Doctor, Alan Root followed directly in Dickens' footsteps who also played that role in his production. Also taking part was Val as Constance, Liane as Lisette and Clive as Jeffery. Clive's realistic limp and poor eyesight from being blind in one eye was a highlight of the performance but all four Declaimers threw themselves into the production with great enthusiasm and made it an entertaining performance. (Ed. \*Previously performed on zoom by the Declaimers at Conference.)

The Declaimers then went on to present some character vignettes from their productions over the past few years. These were short and snappy and featured many characters and quotes that we all know (and love). For instance, Liane gave us Nancy from *Oliver Twist*, Eddy impressed as Mr Bumble, Alan was uncanny as



Mr Dick, Clive brought Scrooge to life and Val really was Aunt Betsey. However, special mention must go to Viv Wilson who has just joined the Declaimers and was giving her very first performance as Mrs Jellyby from *Bleak House*. It was an excellent rendition and I am sure we all look forward to hearing future performances from her.

So, that was it, we finished the Prosecco, tidied away the chairs and headed back out into the sunshine. I really enjoyed the afternoon. Not only were the Declaimers still as good in the flesh as they were over Zoom, but it was good to see friends again and to catch up with what has happened to them during the past months. I am now looking forward to more meetings and talks at the Pavilion over the coming months.

**Andrew Stokes** (Ed. *We are grateful to Andrew for his photographs at Nuckell's Gardens*)

## Ken's Corner – Anne of Broadstairs

A humble, 18-year-old servant who Charles Dickens dubbed 'Anne of Broadstairs' rose through the ranks of his domestic staff to become one of his most trusted confidantes.



The novelist was on a family holiday in Broadstairs in September 1839 when he decided to hire a maid for his wife Katie who was eight months' pregnant and already had two children aged under three.

They were staying for a month at 40 Albion Street, a three-storey, end-of-terrace house (now part of the Albion Hotel) where he was writing the closing chapters of his new book *Nicholas Nickleby*.



*The Albion Hotel, Broadstairs, in the early 20th century. When the Dickens employed 'Anne of Broadstairs' in 1839, they were staying at No 40 Albion Street (seen here on the far left). The end-of-terrace house was incorporated into the hotel in the 1850s*

Dickens made inquiries around the village to discover if there was a suitable young woman who would assist Katie until the family returned home to London.

Why Anne Brown, the daughter of a London builder, was in Broadstairs that autumn isn't known. But she was brought to Dickens' attention and after an interview was taken on for the four weeks. This part-time appointment would have profound and life-changing consequences for Anne. The Dickenses were so impressed by Anne's hard work, quiet efficiency and cheerful nature that they offered her a permanent role in their household.

Back in London Anne joined a small team of servants at 48 Doughty Street but from early on she was the favourite employee. And over the next 20 or so years she became the couple's constant companion, accompanying them on all their travels – to America, Italy, Switzerland and returning with them to Broadstairs on many occasions.

Dickens took a keen interest in her and many of his letters to friends included news of Anne. From America in 1842 Dickens wrote to his friend John Forster: 'Kate is quite well, and so is Anne, whose smartness surpasses belief.' When they stayed in a hotel at Niagara he was amused by Anne's total lack of interest in the awe-inspiring waterfall. He told his brother-in-law Henry Austin: '[Anne] never

looks at a prospect . . . or displays the smallest emotion at any sight whatever. She objects to Niagara that “it’s nothing but water” and considers that “there is too much of that”!!!’

It was whilst planning his 12-month tour of Italy in 1844 that Dickens revealed her link to Broadstairs. In a letter to a friend he said the family would be accompanied on their Continental travels by three female servants ‘commanded by Anne of Broadstairs’.

When Anne married in 1855 and resigned her post, Dickens was devastated. He wrote to her: ‘I cannot tell you how grieved I am to lose you, or what an affectionate remembrance I shall always preserve of your friendship and fidelity during sixteen years.’ He gave her a wedding gift of £35 guineas (about £4,000 today). Within two years, Anne, now Mrs Cornelius and a mother, was back working with the family as housekeeper. Dickens was delighted at her return, writing that she was ‘invaluable’ and ‘more friend to both of us than servant’.

In 1856 Dickens bought Gad’s Hill Place, near Rochester, Kent, as a country retreat whilst keeping Tavistock House in Bloomsbury as his London home. The fact he made Anne housekeeper at Tavistock House – in charge of the day-to-day running of the 18-room mansion whilst he was staying at Gad’s Hill Place – shows just how much he trusted and treasured her.

When the Dickenses’ marriage began to disintegrate in 1857 and Dickens decided he would no longer share a bedroom with Catherine, it was to Anne that the novelist turned. Writing to her from Gad’s Hill Place, he instructed: ‘I want some little changes made in the arrangement of my dressing room and the bathroom. And as I would rather not have them talked about by comparative strangers, I shall be much obliged to you, my old friend, if you will see them completed . . .’

Anne was told to hire carpenters to convert Dickens’ dressing room into his new bedroom with the doorway connecting it to Catherine’s boudoir boarded up and covered with shelves. Following the couple’s separation in 1858, Anne chose to stay with Dickens rather than the mistress she had served since 1839.

When Dickens sold his London home in 1860 and moved permanently to Gads Hill Place, Anne finally left his employment. But she stayed in close contact and Dickens even paid for her daughter Catherine to be privately educated.

The final tribute that Dickens paid to his ‘Anne of Broadstairs’ came following his death in 1870. In his will he bequeathed ‘the sum of £19 19s 0d’ to my faithful servant Mrs Anne Cornelius’ and left the same amount to her daughter. Whilst other long-standing servants received similar amounts, Anne is the only one mentioned by name in the document.

**Ken Nickoll**

## **“In this life we want nothing but Facts sir, nothing but Facts”**

*(Thomas Gradgrind in 'Hard Times')*

*In this section we highlight true facts about Dickens himself, his circle, his works and the times he lived in.*

James Stephen may not be a name with which we are acquainted, but in 1838 he was the Permanent Under Secretary at the Colonial Office in London, an office which had responsibility for the 32 crown colonies controlled by Government. Its run-down dilapidated office in Downing Street was the hub for all the copious correspondence arriving by, and sent by, merchant ships, a process which took weeks if not months. Letters flocked in from around the globe; places as far flung as Australia, Canada and Africa, and Stephen's job meant an 18 hour day, six days a week. He described this deluge of correspondence saying, "I shall soon become a mere bit of blotting paper myself!" The politician Charles Buller wrote about the rooms at the Colonial Office where people waited for hours in the hope of appointments, calling them the 'sighing rooms.' And it was these shadowy and grubby rooms containing countless people waiting, waiting, ever hopeful to be seen that gave Charles Dickens his inspiration for the "Circumlocution Office" in *Little Dorrit*, "...there was an awful inner apartment with a double door in which the Circumlocution Sages appeared to be assembled in council, and out of which there was an imposing coming of papers, and into which there was an imposing going of papers, almost constantly..."

There is speculation that Sir James Stephen was the model for Mr Tite Barnacles in *Little Dorrit*, "Mr Barnacle dated from a better time when the country was not so parsimonious and the Circumlocution Office was not so badgered. He wound and wound folds of white cravat round his neck, as he wound and wound folds of tape and paper round the neck of the country."

Sir James Stephen, whose most notable work was drawing up the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, was made a KCB and a Privy Councillor. He died in 1859 and is buried in Kensal Green Cemetery, London.

### **Chris Ewer**

#### **A Talk by Professor Carolyn Oulton**

**“ ‘I couldn't bear to spend eight months with those people.’  
Gladys Waterer and the Dickens connection.”**

Such an interesting presentation given by Professor Carolyn Oulton on Gladys Waterer. (Photo: Professor Oulton on Gladys Waterer's bench at Nuckell's Gardens)

She took us on a journey through Gladys' writing career and found that she was an accomplished author and writer; but the only place



you can find them is in Margate library and her books are still in copyright.

Gladys started the Dickens Festival in 1937- although we cannot find any link to the Margate Antediluvian Book Club or Society, an organisation often associated (or blamed) with the formation of the current Fellowship. However, there had been a festival before. In the late 1890s to raise money for the memorial on Bleak House (Fort House), the whole town was involved and they portrayed different books. It must have been a sight to behold, even in those days! Gladys Waterer lived where the Dickens House Museum is now.

(Photo: Professor Oulton outside Dickens House Museum)



The festival started as a play of *David Copperfield* to commemorate the centenary of Dickens' first visit to the town, and Gladys asked some of the local people to dress in costume to promote the play. Ever since then the festival has grown, only ever stopping for WW2 and Covid. She adapted all but one of Dickens' books for the plays she put on from 1937 onwards. The one book she would not adapt was *Oliver Twist* because it took her eight months to write the script and "I couldn't bear to spend eight months with those people" referring to the characters in the book, which is funny, as you would have thought it would be *A Tale of Two Cities*, or even *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*.

Gladys seems to me a woman who wanted to do things for her community and was also committed to looking after her family, something that makes her more human rather than just a 'known name'.

It's a shame we haven't got the older Ladies and Gentlemen that we had when I started 20+ years ago so I could have spoken to them about Gladys "if they knew her", which some of the much more mature members at the time would have done. It's also a shame we don't know what she was like as a woman or even her thoughts on the future of the Broadstairs Dickens Festival and Fellowship. We can only speculate on her desires for the festival and her *raison d'etre*.

This presentation was fascinating, interesting, despite the fact nobody present knew her personally. As they say people will forget what you do, but if documents are saved, future people may remember. Who knows what the future holds for any of us? Gladys may have had a good guess.....

**Louise Woodcock**