

London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

NEW SECRETARY NEEDED

As most members now know, the Joint Secretaries will not be standing for re-election next summer. This provides an opportunity for one or two people who are interested in helping to support the operation of the Dickens Fellowship. Detailed information about the nature of the work is available on application, or interested members can get in touch for a discussion about ways they might be able to contribute to the work involved. Please write to The Joint General Secretaries, The Dickens Fellowship, 48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX. We look forward to hearing from you.

A Town called Trotwood

Issue 9 of The London Particular noted a newspaper error – that Betsy Trotwood was said to have originated in *The Pickwick Papers* – and that there is a town in the USA named 'Pickwick'. Gerald Dickens wrote in: "Just to link the two stories, I had the pleasure, a few years ago, of performing in the charming Ohio town of Trotwood, named because the founding father's favourite character – Pickwick – had already been used by a neighbouring community!"

FORTHCOMING EVENTS

On Saturday 29th and Sunday 30th October, there will be a programme of activities presented at 48 Doughty Street, as part of the Open Weekend hosted jointly by the Museum, the Friends of the Museum, and the Dickens Fellowship.

One of the themes will be *Bleak House* in order to link up with the new television serialisation, due to begin earlier that week. There will be a short programme of readings, short talks on *Bleak House* and its illustrations and an introduction to

the current exhibition on *The Dickensian's* centenary. Visitors will also have the opportunity to explore the legal area of London where Dickens sets much of the novel. Refreshments will be provided throughout the day. Please come along and bring your family and friends. A detailed programme can be found on the websites for both the Museum and the Fellowship.

The Friends of the Charles Dickens Museum are hosting a cribbage evening at 48 Doughty Street on Friday 18th November at 6.30 pm. All welcome! We hope there will be a good mix of cribbage enthusiasts and beginners keen to learn one of Dickens's favourite card games.

On 14th February 2006, there will be an evening of talks on Dickens's Women Friends. The full programme of events for 2006 will be sent to existing Friends later this month. For information about the Friends group and its activities please email: info@dickensmuseum.com or contact Gayle (weekdays only) on 0207 4052127 ext 202

*The Museum will be dressed for Christmas from the 1st of December, and a superb programme of 18 events will take place during the month, beginning with Readings from Dickens's Other Christmas Books (Dr Tony Williams) on the 3rd, and including along the way: a special Christmas version of *The Sparkler of Albion* (a one-man show on the 7th and 14th, with tickets £16 in advance from 1st December and on the door if available); a Victorian Toy Experience (a children's drop-in activity on the 21st with timed tickets on the day); and Victorian refreshments, (which must be booked in advance) from 11.00-18.00 on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and Boxing Day.*

The Dickensian Centenary Conference, postponed from May 2005, will now take place on Saturday 11th February 2006 at the Institute of English Studies. See their website www.sas.ac.uk/ies or Tel: 0207 8628675 for further details.

DICKENS IN THE NEWS

It has been a boomtime for Dickens clippings, due mainly to the release of Polanski's *Oliver Twist* and the BBC's forthcoming *Bleak House*. Many thanks to all those who sent in Dickens-related articles spotted in the press. Apologies that some are omitted for lack of space. If you see something you would like to share with other members, please send it to the editorial address: Stephen Jarvis, 116 Riverbank Point, High Street, Uxbridge, Middlesex UB8 1JL, UK Or by Email: stephenjarvis@hotmail.com

Many reviews of *Oliver Twist* referred to anti-Semitism in the novel. The *Evening Standard* of 29th September noted that in the first 38 chapters of *Oliver Twist* there are 257 references to 'the Jew' against 42 to 'Fagin' or 'the old man'. It also noted Dickens's three-fold repentance towards the end of his life: in the creation of Riah, the noble Jew of *Our Mutual Friend*; in his textual revisions of *Oliver Twist*, removing all mention of 'the Jew' from the last 15 chapters; and in his portrayal of Fagin in his public readings, which was cleaned of stereotypical caricature – a contemporary report observed: "There is no nasal intonation; a bent back but no shoulder-shrug; the conventional attributes are omitted."

Articles about the film also commented on Polanski's pruning of the plot, considered an improvement by some critics. A huge piece from the *Mail on Sunday* of 21st August, sent in by Joyce Martin, remarked: "We can be thankful that we don't have to try to follow the intricacies of exactly how Oliver is related to the insufferable Maylie family, nor work out why everyone is trying to conceal his identity. I've read this novel ten or fifteen times and I confess I couldn't really tell you this without going back to mug it up. What is more, I am prepared to bet that, if one were to enquire by Ouija board – a form of posthumous fanmail that used to thrive among Dickens devotees – of the Inimitable, he would also be stumped."

An article in the *Sunday Times Magazine* focused on the actress Gillian Anderson's portrayal of Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House*. As Anderson is best known for her portrayal of paranormal investigator Dana Scully in *The X Files*, the article made the inevitable comment: "*Bleak House* even includes an instance of spontaneous human combustion, just the sort of spine-chilling case that Scully and her FBI partner Fox Mulder would have fallen over themselves to investigate." The

piece also remarks that Anderson has the perfect pair of assets for the role. Not – as one might think, from the photograph that accompanies the article, her thighs – but rather, her eyes. "Because Lady Dedlock has to remain completely in control on the surface, Gillian has to act with her eyes: they're the only windows through which you can see what's going on inside her. And Gillian's eyes are extraordinary: they can change texture – they can be soft and hard, and pretty much everything in between. They can glitter."

The Sunday Times featured another lengthy piece on BBC's *Bleak House* on 2nd October. The producer, Nigel Stafford-Clark, commented on the extraordinary difficulties of...er...producing a London Particular: "I thought in this day and age anything was possible. If you are outside and you make fog, it just blows away. This is an awful thing to admit, but there's not going to be as much fog as people expect. I think they're going to experiment with post-production fog." He confessed that he was rather jealous of some good fog they had in *Doctor Who*, and concluded that this must be because it was filmed in Wales.

Jan Recknal-Turner sent in an obituary from *The Times* of 17th September for Guy Green, who was one of the outstanding British film cameramen of the 1940s and 1950s. He won an Oscar for his work on David Lean's *Great Expectations*. The piece featured a splendid photograph of Miss Havisham in all her cobwebby glory.

Railway Lines

Allan Clack noted that a current South East Trains poster at main line railway stations quotes Dickens describing a railway journey through Kent: "...haystacks, sheep, clover in full bloom delicious to the sight and smell, cornsheaves, cherry orchards, reapers, gleaners, hedges, gates, fields that taper off into little corners, cottages, gardens, then a church..."

A Final Thought...

"...we have always believed [said Mr Boffin] a Secretary to be a piece of furniture, mostly of mahogany, lined with green baize or leather, with a lot of little drawers in it. Now you won't think I take a liberty when I mention that you certainly ain't that."

- Charles Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*