
London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

ZOOM MEETINGS IN JULY The pandemic means that the July Conference - and our meetings at Lumen - have had to be cancelled. However, the AGM will take place as intended on **Sat 18 July at 14.00** via Zoom and all three officers will seek re-election. Any additional nominations to the e-address below, please.

On **Tues 28 July** Dr Tony Williams will give a talk entitled “*I hope it is the best story I have written*”: Dickens’s *A Tale of Two Cities*. The talk (also via Zoom) will start at **18.00**. The Zoom link will be sent to all members who have supplied an email address. If you have not supplied an email address, but would like to attend using a laptop, please let us know at postbox@dickensfellowship.org and the link will be supplied.

The advertised talk by Dr Jeremy Tambling on **Tues 22 Sept** - ‘*Dickens and Capital Punishment*’ - will still take place, again via Zoom and at **18.00**: the same principles apply, as above.

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR, CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM The CDM will re-open on **Sat 25 July**. Further details will be available on the website: www.dickensmuseum.com. DF members will continue to enjoy free entry, but in order to ensure compliance with social distancing, all visitors are asked to book a timed entry slot in advance to ensure an

entry place and avoid queueing. The café cannot as yet re-open under current distancing measures, but it will, it is hoped, re-open later in the year.

Does this sound familiar? The irascible Mr Meagles (*Little Dorrit*) is speaking to Arthur Clennam in Marseilles. “It would be more creditable to let other people allong and marshong about their lawful business, instead of shutting ‘em up in quarantine.” “Tiresome enough, but we shall be out today.” “Out! What have we ever been in for?” “For no very strong reasons I must say. But as we come from the East, and as the East is the country of the plague – ” “The plague! I have been waking up, night after night, and saying, *now* I have got it, *now* I’m in for it, *now* these fellows are making out the case for their precautions. Why, I’d as soon ... be stuck on a card in a collection of beetles, as lead the life I have been leading here.” {The word ‘quarantine’ originally meant a period of 40 days – we’ve had to put up with a lot more than that! Ed.}

Edwin Drood 2020 being the 150th anniversary of Dickens’s death, it is also of course the 150th anniversary of the publication of *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*. DF member **Prof Tony Pointon** has brought out a book, *Dickens’s Last Case*, which explores the mystery of the murderer’s identity. Many have tried before, but Tony makes a case for a completely new suspect!

Jacob's Island and the Dickens Estate (*Allan Clack's item concluded*) In the 1960s, modern blocks of low-rise (two to five storeys) council flats were built on Jacob's Island as part of the Dickens Estate, commenced in 1929. Jacob's Island's slum area from the 19th century was a location famously used by CD as the setting for the dramatic death of Bill Sikes in *OT*. The blocks of flats, continuing from the previous blocks built in the twenties, were named as follows: Trotwood House, Wade House, Bardell House, Micawber, Rudge, Spenslow, Havisham, Haredale, Wrayburn, Tupman, Maylie, Dartle. Six more blocks were built in the same area, near to what is now Bermondsey tube station. They were Darnay, Carton, Giles, Casby and Bowley. The last block, taller than the others, was Lupin Point. It is striking to note the number of lesser-known characters whose names were used - and the number of females. An early example of feminism? A search of council records for the period and the Metropolitan Archives have proved unsuccessful in establishing who actually decided the names. Surely only a Dickens enthusiast would be aware of Lupin, Casby and Giles?

Dickens the Monster? Another book has come out this year – *"The Mystery of Charles Dickens"* by A N Wilson. As James Marriott says (*Times* 6/6), Wilson portrays CD as a diminutive, prematurely decrepit monster of lust, ego and demonic capitalist energy. John Carey (*Sunday Times* 7/6) comments that Wilson sees perversion everywhere in CD's novels. Is this due to his own childhood suffering? Wilson describes his preparatory school as 'in effect a concentration camp run by sexual perverts'. He claims that Fagin is 'manifestly paedophile'. [Evidence? Ed.] Mr Podsnap's (*Our Mutual Friend*) disapproval of anything that could 'bring a blush to the cheek of a young person' is interpreted as 'a subversive piece of

flagellant filth'. Surely a little strong... It should be added that ANW loves Dickens and remembers escaping to the books as a respite from a childhood of "abject misery".

A European honour for CD DF member **Prof Angus Easson** learned from **Mme Janine Watrin** of the Fellowship in Boulogne sur Mer that the path along the ramparts of the city had been given the name '*Promenade Charles Dickens*'.

Sadly, Mme Watrin died on 25 May, a great loss to the Fellowship. A full obituary will appear in *The Dickensian*. More details may be found here: <https://lasocietedesamisdedickens.wordpress.com>

Dickens the racist? Dickens describes some of the horrors of slavery in the southern states of the USA in graphic detail in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and also in *American Notes*, describing his first trip to America in 1842. '*Being now in Maryland, we were waited on, for the first time, by slaves. The sensation of exacting any service from human creatures who are bought and sold, and being for the first time, a party as it were to their condition, is not an enviable one. Although I was, with respect to it, an innocent man, its presence filled me with a sense of shame and self-reproach*'. A later chapter in *AN* is entitled "Slavery" and makes appalling reading – no one could express loathing and disgust more strongly than Dickens.

"A man must take the fat with the lean; that's what he must make up his mind to, in this life." (Mr Omer in *David Copperfield*). Contributions – fat or lean – please to: Alison Gowans, "Danesdyke", 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET, or by email – aligowans17@outlook.com

