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# London Particular

The Dickens Fellowship Newsletter

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**HONORARY GENERAL SECRETARY** Most of you will know that at this year's AGM **Paul Graham** stepped down from the post of Hon Gen Sec of the Dickens Fellowship. Paul became HGS (jointly with Lee Ault) at the AGM in Portsmouth in 2012, so he's spent 11 years "before the mast", as he says. He served on the CD Museum Board as DF representative from 2012-2020. He looks forward to attending future events. Our thanks and very best wishes to Paul for his great contribution over that period. Elected in his place at this year's AGM are our new joint HGSs, **Dr Sati McKenzie** and **Dr Jacquie Stamp**. We wish them all the best in their new role.

**Sati** tells me she has a PhD in Theoretical physics (1975), then got involved in IT from the early '80s; she retired from Greenwich University after 23 years as Senior/Principal Lecturer in Computer Science. She joined the DF Management Committee in 2019, when she took on the role of website editor and ran the DF Central meetings online during the pandemic. Sati is also a member of the Emile Zola Society UK and the Anthony Trollope Society.

**Jacquie's** background is in teaching English, plus some time in personnel and training. She joined the Fellowship in 2014, while studying for a 'Dickens & Victorian Culture' MA, which led to a PhD in English Literature. Invited onto the Fellowship's Management Committee in 2019, she assisted with online events during Covid and was Chair of Council from 2021-2023. She collates and edits some material for *The Dickensian* and facilitates the Canterbury branch's hybrid meetings.

**Membership renewal** New membership cards, with details of our new venue and 2024 programme, will be issued by the end of November.

**News from the Charles Dickens Museum**  
CDM Director **Dr Cindy Sughrue** writes: "As usual at this time of year, Dickens's home at 48 Doughty Street will be decorated for a traditional Victorian Christmas, from **22 November 2023** until **7 January 2024**. Throughout this period, the Museum will be displaying the iconic Margaret Gillies 'Lost Portrait' of Charles Dickens, aged 31, painted during the six-week period in which he wrote A Christmas Carol.

"A new special exhibition at CDM, *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 – opens on **15 November 2023** and runs until **25 February 2024**. This exhibition examines the friendship between the two men, their collaboration and the huge body of works it produced, from articles in Dickens's Household Words through 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 their friends and family that give an insight into their friendship and writing process, and annotated copies of their collaborative work. We are thrilled 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.

"The Museum also has a small display in the Study until **7 January 2024** to mark 200 years since Dickens went to work in Warren's Blacking factory. The display includes original letters from Charles's father, John Dickens, including one where he is appealing for work as a journalist for the young Charles, as the family needed more income. Visitors can also see a blacking bottle like those Charles would have labelled, and learn more about how this experience influenced his writing, in particular *David Copperfield*."

**Surprised by CS Lewis** DF member **Roberta Berryman** writes: On reading CS Lewis's "Surprised by Joy, *The Shape of My Early Life*", I

was surprised to find the following: ***“Dickens I looked upon with a feeling of horror, engendered by long poring over the illustrations before I had learned to read. I still think them depraved. Here, as in Walt Disney, it is not the ugliness of the ugly figures but the simpering dolls intended for our sympathy which really betray the secret (not that Walt Disney is not far superior to the illustrators of Dickens).”***

**Dickens and Tourism** *The Times* (August 2023) reviewed a book called *Dickensland, The Curious History of Dickens’s London* by Lee Jackson - “a droll, enigmatic ride through the 150-year-old phenomenon of Dickens tourism. The first documented example of this was in 1866 when Louisa May Alcott, author of *Little Women*, visited the old Kingsgate Street in Holborn in search of the home of Mrs Gamp. By the 1880s, a decade after CD’s death, the tumbledown street exploded with attractions based on the now relatively obscure novel (Martin Chuzzlewit). At the end of the century visitors could even get a ‘Dickens shave at Poll Sweedlepipe’s “original” barbers’. The desire for preservation collided with the drive to modernise the metropolis and clean up its slums. In 1902 Kingsgate Street was demolished. One possible name for the new streets that became Kingsway and Aldwych was Dickens Avenue, even though CD’s London had come to stand for just what the council was trying to erase: the slum, the decrepit house, the narrow street”...

...Anyone who has read *Little Women* will know that Louisa May Alcott was a great Dickens fan: the March sisters set up their very own “Pickwick Club”, with the eldest, Meg, representing Mr Pickwick, the literary Jo as Augustus Snodgrass, “round rosy” Beth as Tracey Tupman and Amy (who was always trying to do things she couldn’t) as Nathaniel Winkle. When the girls become friendly with Laurie, the boy next door, he formally presents himself as Sam Weller, the very humble servant of the club. A character in a later novel tells Jo he’s in love with a girl called Dora. “Not a Dickens Dora, I hope!” she replies.

**Avoiding Dickens** An article in *The Times* in July described **Zadie Smith**’s code of conduct for her writing, which included two rules: i) never write a historical novel and ii) resist the influence of Charles Dickens. Smith, whose debut novel *White Teeth* won critical acclaim in 2000 (it was considered ‘Dickensian in scope’), has admitted abandoning both principles: her new book *The Fraud* is a historical novel that features Charles Dickens as a character. She said she had “read far too much of him as a child. Though I grew up to have all the usual doubts and caveats about

him – too sentimental, too theatrical, too moralistic, too controlling – I was never able to quite get out from under his embarrassing influence, much as I’ve often wanted to”.

**So that’s all right then...** According to findings revealed in *The Working Class at Home 1790-1940*, the poor were well off! (*Metro*, March 2022). The book claims that poverty was a myth created by writers such as CD. Portrayals of people living in hovels and pleading for gruel in workhouses were exaggerated, it seems, to catch the attention of middle-class readers. Co-editor Dr Joseph Harley, a history lecturer at Anglia Ruskin University, said: “concerned reformers painted a picture of severe deprivation, of rooms that were cramped yet bare. This is wrong. The material wealth of the poor was, of course, more modest but their homes contained a myriad of possessions. Many ordinary workers possessed expensive items such as clocks, watches and mirrors. Silver cutlery and tea-making items were commonly used.” Yes, some would have had such items, but – what about the rest?

**Ghostly pollution** We hear a lot about car exhausts and raw sewage nowadays, but Dickens encountered a different kind of pollution - in a church: ***“I find, to my astonishment, that I have been, and still am, taking a strong kind of invisible snuff, up my nose, into my eyes, and down my throat. I wink, sneeze, and cough .... The snuff seems to be made of the decay of matting, wood, cloth, stone, iron, earth, and something else. Is the something else, the decay of dead citizens in the vaults below? As sure as Death it is! Not only in the cold damp February day, do we cough and sneeze dead citizens, all through the service, but dead citizens have got into the very bellows of the organ, and half choked the same. We stamp our feet to warm them, and dead citizens arise in heavy clouds. Dead citizens stick upon the walls, and lie pulverised on the sounding-board over the clergyman’s head, and, when a gust of air comes, tumble down upon him.”*** (*Uncommercial Traveller, City of London churches*)

“Fred,” said Mr Swiveller, “remember the once-popular melody of ‘Begone dull care’; fan the sinking flame of hilarity with the wing of friendship; and pass the rosy wine!” (*The Old Curiosity Shop*). I would consider it friendly if you would pass me some comments or contributions, please, to be sent to: Alison Gowans, Danesdyke, 27A Ashcombe Road, Carshalton, Surrey SM5 3ET or by email – [aligowans17@outlook.com](mailto:aligowans17@outlook.com)