



*Somebody turns up*

# *Mr Dick's Kite*

FOR ALL DICKENS FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS

**No 89**

**May, 2012**

“We are too umble, sir,” said Mrs Heep, “my son and me, to be the friends of David Copperfield. He has been so good as to take his tea with us, and we are thankful to him for his company, also to you, sir, for your notice.”

“Ma’am” returned Mr Micawber, with a bow, “you are very obliging: and what are you doing Copperfield? Still in the wine trade?”

**David Copperfield , ChapterXVII**

## ***The Mystery of Edwin Drood***

### 1. Four Stars for the BBC's Adaptation

In earlier editions of "*The Kite*", we have discussed the futility of trying to complete Dickens's unfinished novel by simply extrapolating from its first half. He did not write like that. So, when the BBC announced a new, two-part "completed" adaptation for 10/11 January 2012, high expectation was tinged with scepticism. On 10<sup>th</sup> January, the present writer joined with Gerald Dickens on BBC's News 24 - one in Hampshire the other in Scotland - to give our pre-viewing thoughts of what Dickens might have been feeling about it; it was agreed he would have been delighted it was being done, and, like us, excited to see whether the adapter would make a half-right attempt to get the sort of surprise(s) into that "lost" second half which he specialised in, even if she did not work out his own finale.

In the event, an inspired Gwyneth Hughes gave us an ending that was a real solution to the "Mystery", realistically adventurous (with its two Edwin Droods) if not the right one, and well worth the watching. It might even inspire a completion of the written book, with all the original characters: there are only just over twenty, and Ms Hughes did not have to mystify us further with the added disappearance of Billikin and Tartar.

### 2. An Italian Adaptation

In 1989, two literary Italians – Fruttero and Lucentini – completed *Drood* with a "*hilarious pastiche*" with detectives gathered in Rome to solve the mystery. The result was "The D Case or the Truth about Mystery of Edwin Drood" though we only have **an** English translation of its title.

That paragraph is a summary of a letter in the *Guardian* by Alfonso Frigerio, who was inspired by the coincidence of the death of Lucentini and the BBC adaptation to suggest that Dickensians would benefit from a translation of the rest of Fruttero and Lucentini's book.

**AJP**

(This piece was inspired by a note from Elsie Sadler from Worthing.)

## **Dickens and Hypnosis. Part I: Discovery.**

There is no doubt that Charles Dickens knew how to use hypnosis to put an individual into a trance-like state, one where they were suggestible and sensitively responsive. At the time he was practising it, hypnosis was usually referred to as "mesmerism", and that is the term almost always used for it in biographies, though sometimes "magnetism" or "animal magnetism" or "fields of influence" are used: even the great *Oxford Readers' Companion to Dickens* (Schlicke) defines Dickens's "mesmerism" as "an early form of hypnosis" which hardly does it justice.

When it was demonstrated in Austria by the charlatan Dr Franz Mesmer in the 1760s, his inducing of trances by so-called "magnetic influence" was only one part of the expensive mystical healing stunts for

which he was discredited in Vienna and Paris. Talking of Dickens's hypnosis as mesmerism is like talking of astronomy as astrology.

When he first saw demonstrations of "mesmerism" accompanied by conjuring tricks, seductive music and maidens in poses and little else – the young Emma Hamilton became famous in such exercises – Dickens dismissed them as confidence tricks. However, after seeing a public demonstration by Dr John Elliotson at University College Hospital in 1838, he recognised the clinical benefits of what is now known as "hypnosis". He got Elliotson (later his family doctor) to teach him the technique, possibly seeing a potential use in helping someone close to him; and he defended him when his work was criticised – as some may do with, say, acupuncture even today. Eventually, Elliotson was forced to resign from the Hospital, but his reputation with his clients remained.

Dickens first mentioned practising hypnosis in America in 1842, four years after being taught. He and Catherine were in a group on a train near Pittsburg and there was a discussion of the performance and effects of mesmerism. It seems there was a doubter, and Dickens hesitated to give a demonstration, for Catherine proposed that she should act as subject for him. He wrote afterwards: "In six minutes I had magnetised her into hysterics, and then into a magnetic sleep", though "hysterics" then had its own clinical meaning, nothing to do with laughter.

Some have supposed that was the first time Dickens had hypnotised anyone, but that is most doubtful: he would hardly have hypnotised Catherine in public unless he was sure it would work. He would have learnt from Elliotson that it is impossible to hypnotise a person who is not willing to cooperate – as some will not. Dickens obviously knew the difference between a trance and a hypnotic sleep; also that it was more important to be able to hypnotise a subject out of a trance than into it. (In June 2011, three people were hypnotised on stage when the hypnotist tripped and knocked himself unconscious. The manager would not have them wakened until the hypnotist recovered.)

The fact that Catherine volunteered herself to be hypnotised in public when Dickens was reluctant, suggests she knew the procedure well and had confidence in his doing it safely. (The fact that this was the first time Dickens had mentioned "magnetism" was probably due to the tendency to privacy in married life, and, as there were witnesses, he felt the event was bound to be reported anyway, which it was.)

**AJP**

### **Portsmouth Conference, 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> August**

More information has been posted on <[dickensportsmouth.co.uk](http://dickensportsmouth.co.uk)> with daily rates for those who cannot attend all the conference, and a change of programme (with the Statue sculptor giving a lecture): or contact Geoffrey Christopher below. More details to follow.

**GC**

## A Very Personal Present to Charles Dickens

On 8<sup>th</sup> March, a silver snuffbox was offered for auction - Lot 446 - at an unassuming saleroom in Great Malvern. For me, it was a rare chance to purchase a very personal gift to Charles Dickens. Rectangular in shape, chased with a floral border, it was made in 1836 by Nathaniel Mills (then the leading snuffbox maker in Birmingham) and measured 3" by 2" and weighed 3.67 troy ozs. The box was beautifully engraved on the lid:

*To Charles Dickens Esquire  
"The Inimitable Boz"*

*With no less admiration for his gentleness and generosity than  
for the devotion of his brilliant talents to the advancement of  
literature and the melioration of the condition of the distressed.*

*From his Sincerely attached Friend and former Tutor  
W. Giles.*

Dickens received the Snuff-box at 48 Doughty Street the first week of November 1837, the month when *Pickwick Papers* was complete. In response, he sent to this William Giles, Jnr (who had taught him at Chatham during 1821-22) a letter of thanks (undated), a one-volume presentation copy of *Pickwick Papers*, and two small books, *Sunday under Three Heads* and *Sketches of Young Gentlemen*.

**NS** (Nicholas Shaw, Birthplace Branch)

The Box will be present and discussed at the Annual Conference in August.



## Dickens's New Words

A short time ago, the Kite discussed "dead as a door nail", a term in *Christmas Carol* that some had attributed to Dickens, though he had resuscitated it from the 14<sup>th</sup> century. Well, we have now seen a review circulated by Michael Quinion based on the OED which discusses more words and phrases often attributed to Dickens; and he identifies a

goodly number that were, like that “door nail” one, not original to him but revived by him and preserved for future generations. Quinion identified that process of revival as one of Dickens’s most important contributions to the language: an example is the slang word “kibosh” or “kibosk”, while some were just delightfully idiomatic, like “tintack” and “devil-may-care”. And Dickens gave new life to some of these by using them in new ways or by giving them a slightly different but more exciting meaning.

Yet, Dickens did have a number of his own creations, or “neologisms”, to his credit, well over 200 of them. For example, “butter-fingers”, “angry-eyed”, “spification”, “whizz-bang”, “sawbones”, “unpromisingly”, “messiness”, “tousled”, “hunger-worm”, “proud-stomached”, “fancy-dressed”, “coffee-imbibing”, “ginger-beery”, “copying-clerk” and “crossing-sweeper”, though one imagines there might be more out there, missed by the OED, among his vast journalistic output.

Besides his new or revived words, a variety of derived words have developed from his characters, like “Podsnapian” or “Pecksniffian”, or “Wellerism” or “Micawberism”, though best known is probably “Gamp”, as a type of umbrella. And then there is always “Dickensian”. **AJP**

### **The Most Important Doctor in Dickens?**

There are about three dozen medical doctors or physicians or surgeons in the novels of Charles Dickens, if we count medical students, like Bob Sawyer and Ben Allen in *Pickwick*. Some of that number are wholly anonymous, even though they are drawn with the usual precision and flair Dickens applies even to his minor characters - like the anonymous Scottish doctor in *Bleak House*, somewhat testy at being dragged from dinner to look at the dead Nemo, or the doctor who acts as coroner at the travesty of an inquest on the remains of Krook in a bar room.

Several physicians have totally memorable cameo parts, like Mr Chillip in *Copperfield*, or Dr (later Sir) Parker Peps in *Dombey* both of whom made more than one appearance, attending at deaths as well as births. And some, like Dr Slammer and Dr Payne in *Pickwick*, had roles totally divorced from their medical profession, except that both were set on Mr Winkle being turned into a corpse. Then there is Doctor Marigold, who did not pretend to be a medic, and the American Dr Dunkle in *Chuzzlewit* who definitely did. But two doctors, fundamental to the plots of their host novels, stand out as both men and medics.

Dr Allan Woodcourt is a surgeon/physician in *Bleak House* among a number of rivals, and trainee rivals (like Carstone) and failed rivals (like Harold Skimpole). He may be thought of as the main love interest in the story, appearing in more than a quarter of the chapters, but almost always as a physician. He, unknowingly, attends when Esther Summerson’s father, Captain Hawden, dies. He early falls in love with

that lady (and she with him) before he goes (so Mills and Boon) to India as a ship's doctor and becomes famous for his services in a shipwreck. As part of his chosen work of freely ministering to the poor, he attends Jo the crossing sweeper when he is dying in a scene that provides one of Dickens's strongest perorations. He acts as friend and adviser to the hapless Carstone. He provides Esther with an interesting prospective mother-in-law who could have been a model for Mrs Norton in *North and South* less than two years later. Esther's guardian effectively orders him to marry his ward, and he goes quietly with her to live and set up his practice in John Jarndyce's wedding gift to them, a nice Bleak House.

Yet, important as Woodcourt is to *Bleak House*, Alexander Manette is, as a doctor, the source of the story central to the existence of *A Tale of Two Cities*. The book virtually opens with the words "Returned to Life" when he is freed from his 18-years in the Bastille, where he was sent, at the behest of a St Evremond aristocrat, solely to prevent him telling of his experience, as a physician, with the family of Madame Defarge.

If the plots of novels may exist through coincidences, few can have so relied on them – successfully - as *TTC* has; and they mainly revolve round Dr Manette, who is present in 60% of the Chapters. His daughter Lucy Manette married a husband related to the aristocrat who had her father imprisoned and who is the double of her dysfunctional lawyer-admirer. Arrested in Paris, her husband is saved by the word of her father, whose earlier written testimony, in Madame Defarge's hands, then gets him re-condemned to death. The rest is legend. **AJP**

### **Tales from Hoffmann?**

There can be few readers of *Mr Dick's Kite* who do not know how to calculate Dickens's young age on 25 June 1822. On the other hand, there is strong possibility many do not relate that date to anyone or anything; still, it was on that day E. T. A. (Ernst) Hoffmann (1776 – 1822) died, a name best known from the title of an Offenbach opera.

I mention Hoffmann on purpose as he was the greatest German storyteller, a man who exploited both the grotesque and bizarre in a manner unmatched by any other writer of the Romantic era. He was also fascinated by gothic horror, extreme mental states, supernatural events and so on, just like someone we know well. He had a great influence on many future writers, from Dickens and Poe, to Russian authors like Gogol and Dostoevsky and even today in some Vargas Llosa or Umberto Eco works there are recognizable Hoffmann's traits.

In the light of this, I would like to refer to the start of *Bleak House* where we find the imagined megalosaurus which is "waddling like an elephantine lizard up Holborn Hill"; for that part of the opening chapter



bears a remarkable affinity with the mythical Salamander inhabiting the city of Dresden in Hoffmann's novel *The Golden Pot*.

So my question is, if they exist, where exactly can one find more of those so called 'Hoffmannesque' moments in Dickens's novels; where are they actually 'hidden'? Anyone help? **Edin Volk (Sarajevo)**

### **Celebrating John Dickens of Portsmouth**

Portsmouth's Bicentenary celebrations led to a renewed interest in John Dickens, the very un-Scrooge-like Founder of the Feast; and Dickens's favourite flowers are displayed by the "Friends of the Dockyard Porter's Garden" where his father would have passed each working day.

John's seven-year posting to the busiest port in the world, his promotion to a high salary (equal to £25k today), and his renting a house so much better than the average dockyard employee's, has led to him being recognised as manager of the Portsmouth Naval Pay-Office. Some may query that claim, but two additional matters support it.

Long family tradition has it that, on the evening of 6<sup>th</sup> February 1812, Elizabeth Dickens was hurried home from an officers' dance in the Beneficial School Assembly Hall near the dockyard when her labour started. That would have been a private function, and she and husband John would only have been invited if he held a senior dockyard post\*.

Just as persuasive is the fact that, when the family left what is now the "Birthplace Museum", his landlord sought to attract new tenants by including in his advertisement the fact that the house was "late in the occupation of John Dickens", thus identifying the 27-year-old John as an important, respected, well-known person in the dockyard. **GC**

\*Though this anecdote came down via Elizabeth's son Henry and two of his great-grandsons, it has been doubted because, in 1939, writer Gladys Storey – not the best source - referred to the event as "a ball"; and there was no ball advertised in Portsmouth that 6<sup>th</sup> February. Yet the Beneficial School only held private functions.

### **The Deed of Separation**

It has been realised, with surprise, that the legal Deed covering the separation of Catherine and Charles Dickens has never been published: also, that it was prepared by Catherine and her solicitor before being given to Dickens to sign; also, that there was nothing in it that required her to leave her home, only a clause that gave her full rights to live where and with whom she wanted. A change was made to her first draft of the Deed: the clause that gave her only limited access to her children, Dickens had changed to give her access to them any-where and any-time. Also, as she had rejected his offer to give her £400 pa and keep a coach, horses and coachman for her use, that was changed for £600 pa (£60,000 net today) - which may have cost Dickens less. We have

worked out that he paid for her new house separately, but that needs checking. (If anyone can improve on the above, please do.) **AJP**

### **Matters Arising**

The mention in the last “Kite” of James Joyce’s take on the lust that seemed to surround Nell in *The Old Curiosity Shop*, created its own error. As Malcolm Andrews points out, Joyce actually retitled the book *The Old Cupiosity Shape* (not Shop). How thoughtless of him. **GC**

### **Central Fellowship Meetings:**

DICKENS AND CHILDHOOD - conference at the Museum of Childhood, Bethnal Green, Monday 18 June. This one-day conference, organised by the Dickens Fellowship, the English Association and the Museum of Childhood, includes walks, lectures, readings and parallel sessions on topics that will appeal to students, teachers, Dickens experts, and the ‘interested reader’. There will be an evening symposium of children’s authors speaking on how Dickens has influenced their work.

Contributors include: Ian Brinton, Anthony Burton. Lucinda Dickens Hawksley, Brita Granstrom, Mick Manning, Peggy Reynolds, Michael Slater, Rowan Watson, Tony Williams, Marcia Williams and Jacqueline Wilson. For further info and booking form, contact Joan Dicks, 020 7242 8575, or go to: [www.le.ac.uk/engassoc/conference/D2012.html](http://www.le.ac.uk/engassoc/conference/D2012.html). **JD**

### **Front Page Picture**

David, having left London and the wine bottling factory, walked to Dover to his Aunt Betsey’s, and was taken in, and saved from the wrath of Mr Murdstone. She sent him to Dr. Strong’s school in Canterbury, and arranged his accommodation with her solicitor, Mr Wickfield, through whom he got to know both Agnes and Uriah Heep. Uriah, who always claimed to be so “umble”, while all the time planning to defraud his employer and take over the business, has wheedled his way into friendship with David and invited him to tea with himself and his mother. It is on that occasion, the subject of the front page picture, that Mr Micawber happens to pass by and sees David through the open door. He makes an “in” joke about wine, and introduces himself to Uriah.

**GC**

### **Contributions**

Comments and short items for the Kite are always welcome. Please send them either through [alanwatts1@supanet.com](mailto:alanwatts1@supanet.com) or (for Geoffrey Christopher, (39 Northern Parade, Hilsea, Portsmouth, Hants., PO2 9PB) [geoffreychristopher132@btinternet.com](mailto:geoffreychristopher132@btinternet.com)

In fellowship,

Compiled by Alan S. Watts and friends, for The Dickens Fellowship.