

# Mr Dick's Kite

FOR ALL DICKENS FELLOWSHIP MEMBERS

No.96

Summer 2015



TRYING ON FOR THE DOLLS' DRESSMAKER

*“Look here. There’s a Drawing Room, or a grand day in the Park, or a Show, or a Fete, or what you like. Very well. I squeeze among the crowd, and I look about me. When I see a great lady very suitable for my business, I say ‘You’ll do, my dear!’ and I take particular notice of her, and run home and cut her out and baste her.”*

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND. CHAPTER 11 BOOK THE THIRD

## Dear Readers,

Here is another selection of pieces which I hope will be of interest to you, and thank you to those who have contributed to our little magazine.

**Front Cover:** The front cover for this issue is from *Our Mutual Friend* and shows Miss Jenny Wren the little doll's dressmaker who is crippled, finding her fashionable model in the midst of London society in order to copy the dress design and replicate it for her dolls.

In this issue there is a piece found amongst the notes of a past member of the Dickens Fellowship whom many will remember; Mr Mostyn Harper.

I understand that he used to lead some very interesting walks – and that they usually ended up in the pub! Good for him!!

Also going through some old correspondence I found a fascinating letter from Mr Harry Gregory responding to an article originally printed in *Mr Dick's Kite*, No 79.

\*If you read this Mr H Gregory, please get in touch with the Editor who has been trying to make contact with you, and forgive the long delay in publishing your article.

Finally, in July this year, Mr Alan Watts celebrated his 96th birthday. 'Many Happy Returns' to the originator of this magazine!!

Don't forget. I am always grateful to receive any contributions for *Mr Dick's Kite*.

Please send them to  
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or by post to  
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## An Interesting Offer

The following piece of information has been passed to me by Paul Graham, and may be of interest to Dickens Fellowship members.

Ashgate Publishing have informed us of the publication of *The Art of Adapting Victorian Literature*, details of which can be accessed by the link below.

The work examines the dramatizing of *Jane Eyre*, *David Copperfield* and *The Woman in White* in the period 1848-1920.

The author of the book, Karen E. Laird, is really keen for her work to be promoted to members of the Dickens Fellowship, and Ashgate Publishing are offering members a 20% discount on the cover price of £60.

Members just need to enter the discount code C15JRS20 for a 20% discount on this book when ordering from the Ashgate website. This offer is valid until 31st October 2015.

<http://www.ashgate.com/isbn/9781472424396>

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## The Funs

Mr Weller knew perfectly well how he was going to use his money. When he came into an inheritance he had no hesitation in saying that he would like to put what might be due to him in 'the funs'. He asked his son: "*wot do you call them things again?*"

"*Wot things?*" enquired Sam.

"*Them things as is always a goin' up and down in the City.*"

"*Omnibuses?*" suggested Sam.

"*Nonsense,*" replied Mr Weller. "*Them things as is always a fluctooatin', and getting theirselves involved somehow or another vith the national debt, and the chequers bills, and all that.*"

"*Oh! The funds,*" said Sam.

*Pickwick Papers Chapter 52*

ASW

## From our Postbag

Some items have been waiting in the Postroom for some time, I'm afraid, but they shall have their day in the sun.

But first, let me express the great sadness with which my father and I received the news of the sudden death in April 2015 of Elaine Oakley of Christchurch New Zealand Dickens Fellowship.

This lovely lady was a friend of both my parents, and was known to many other Dickensians here in England and around the world. She will be greatly missed, not only by her own family of which she was the heart, but also by the Christchurch Dickens Fellowship members. Our thoughts go out to all those who knew and loved her.

### Gads Hill

Two items of interest came in the post regarding Gads Hill Place.

The first from the Monterey Peninsula Dickens Fellowship, whose newsletter *The Mutual Friend* contained a piece about the school at Gads Hill which has opened once again for visitors, and mentioned how Dickens's desk and chair, having been purchased recently for £800,000, is now at the Dickens House Museum in Doughty Street on view to the public. This desk used to stand in the study at Gads Hill.

In the haunting picture of Dickens's study, painted after his death by Luke Fildes and called "*The Empty Chair*", standing next to the desk in the foreground of the painting is a very large basket. Could this be a waste paper basket, I wondered? Did Dickens ever need one, and if he did so, surely not such a large one as this? As I understand it he made very few notes, annotating his manuscripts and sometimes jotting down ideas about his characters, but that was all. Hardly any notes were found after his death. He kept his plot ideas in his head and his manuscripts were all originals, he never made copies.

Although it is true that he did have a large correspondence, he preserved most of these letters, burning many of them in a major clearout only later in his life. So what went into this bin? Perhaps the many and varied begging letters he received, or maybe the bills, once paid

The second item came from Beth Bliss in the Cleveland Branch Dickens Fellowship newsletter *A Twist of Dickens*, who wrote about her first visit to Gads Hill and the

Sir John Falstaff Inn in company with Alan and Marjorie Watts.

*"I arrived at Gads Hill in a state of stun. I was actually going into the house that Dickens had owned at the end of his life. I wandered over the grounds loving it. We went into the house. The Watts' had been there many times before and this made me feel very comfortable. I got to look around seeing familiar parts I had only seen in pictures. We went into his study. We closed the door that looks like a bookcase. We sat down and they started chatting as though this was all normal. I could barely breathe. Dickens's study! It was just what I had imagined it to be.*

*After we had finished at Gads Hill, we went to the Sir John Falstaff Inn for lunch. This is where Dickens ate lunch. While we were eating, Cedric Dickens, a prominent descendant and author, now deceased, came to our table and greeted Marjorie and Alan warmly. They introduced me to him; he had some business nearby and had stopped for lunch at the Inn.*

*Wow! I don't think I have ever enjoyed a day more in my life."*

*Below: Luke Filde The Empty Chair*



# Dickens's Calm Approach

With the 150th anniversary of the Staplehurst railway accident being commemorated in June this year, it is interesting to reflect how different things might have been if Dickens had not remained calm in dealing with this appalling situation. He could so easily have lost his life.

The carriage that Dickens was travelling in was left hanging over a bridge in a most perilous position and although he may not have fully realised the extent of the situation, if he had made a sudden movement to open the carriage door or if his travelling companions had lost their heads, they and the carriage, could have fallen to their doom.

Dickens was praised by many people for his fortitude and courage in the aftermath, when he helped injured passengers and although he was hurt himself, appeared to others to be calm and in control. It was only later that the shock of the accident caused him to suffer ill health and terrible anxiety.

His calm attitude certainly prevented further mishap for his two fellow travellers, one of whom was Ellen Ternan, and the second her mother, both of whom were understandably very afraid.

Dickens wrote to Thomas Mitton on 13th June 1865 that the younger lady screamed and the older lady cried out "My God!" In this extreme situation he told them "Pray don't cry out. We can't help ourselves, but we can be quiet and composed." Ellen's mother immediately replied "Thank you. Rely upon me. Upon my soul I won't call out, or stir," while Ellen said in a frantic way, "Let us join hands and die friends."

Dickens asked them to remain there, while he got out of the window and sought help. We must suppose that he could not have realised that the carriage was balanced most precariously, and his movements could have sent it over the edge. Amazingly he managed to climb out and get assistance. The two ladies remained very still, in a corner of the carriage holding hands until rescue arrived.

Previously, in 1861 during his second public reading tour, his calm approach to danger had enabled another serious incident to be averted.

In Newcastle, he was about to begin his reading in a tremendously over-crowded room, when the large

central gas-apparatus fell down. People began to panic and make a rush for the stairs, which would have caused mayhem and possible deaths. Dickens saw that a lady at the front came rushing towards him, and could see that it was a place where she would be visible to the whole hall. He instantly spoke to her, laughing, and half-asked, half-ordered her to sit down again. She immediately did so, and in a few moments calm was restored to the rest of the people and all was over.

The men who came to fix the apparatus were extremely worried about what might have happened and the very real danger of fire. The gas-man complimented Dickens saying "*The more you want of the master, the more you'll find in him*"

*Fleur Hogarth*

## Christmas in Ipswich

An invitation was received by my wife and myself to join a Dickens Christmas Event at The Great White Horse Inn in Ipswich, the very hotel where Mr Pickwick found himself in the wrong room and terrified the lady in yellow curl-papers!

I was asked to play the part of Mr Pickwick, while my wife dressed as Mrs Bardell and we were asked to host the festivities.

There was a Ball, and a Conjurer, plenty of music and singing of traditional songs, while the guests regaled themselves with punch.

The evening ended with one guest being asked to get everyone to dance The Lambeth Walk.

Finding the way back to one's room after this was not easy, as one recalled what had happened to Mr Pickwick. There was a maze of corridors with steps up and down and not an even floor in the building.

However all the guests seemed to have been accounted for in the morning.

ASW

## The Lady is not for turning! – Eliza Lynn Linton 1822 -1898

In the latest *London Particular* I read the article headed *An Important Find* about the discovery of the *All the Year Round* annotated record of previously anonymous contributions from well known writers.

Strangely, a newspaper article was passed to me in which I read the same story, but with mention of another writer of whom I had never heard, a lady called Eliza Lynn Linton. I looked her up.

She was the first female salaried journalist in Britain, and an anti-feminist to boot!

She was largely self educated, and left home in Cumbria to earn her living as a writer in London in 1845. She married an eminent wood-engraver, brought up his seven children from a previous marriage, parted from him amicably after nine years and went back to London in 1867 to continue writing!

She was a protégé of Dickens's friend Walter Savage Landor and joined the staff of the *Morning Chronicle* and *Household Words*.

Her views against the feminist movement were strong. She believed that women should not have the vote, as politics was naturally the sphere of men; should not court fame for themselves, but rather be the wife of a great man or the mother of a hero.

Her obituary noted "*her animosity towards some of those facts which may be conveniently called the 'New Woman'*".

However, in some of her fiction she had certain sympathy for the modern woman, and supported the right of married women to have their own property and independence.

It would be interesting to identify and read the articles that this lady contributed to Dickens's publication!!

FH

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## Sikes Sighted in Budapest!

Celebrated housebreaker Bill Sikes was sighted in Budapest Hungary, in February 2015. London Fellowship member NEIL ZOLADKIEWICZ was presenting his own adaptation of *Oliver Twist* at the Kolibri Children's Theatre in the heart of the city. Neil is Head of Drama at Richard Challoner School in New Malden Surrey and his Drama students have been appearing in Hungary since 1990. They have previously presented his own adaptations of *A Tale of Two Cities* and *A Christmas Carol* there among other productions including Shakespeare, Wilde, American drama and recently a new Sherlock Holmes thriller set in Budapest and a play about the childhood of Charlie Chaplin (whose favourite novel was *Oliver Twist* – he read it once a year, having been a workhouse boy himself!).

Neil commented that performances in the English language for young people have been very popular over the years in Hungary, which is very gratifying for his Drama students who play to full houses. Dickens is on the High School curriculum and the Hungarian students who attended the performance (including some of junior school age) knew *Oliver Twist* and the characters very well.

Prior to the tour, performances were given at the school, including a Gala to celebrate 25 years of the Hungary tours attended by the Hungarian ambassador and Ruth Richardson, author of

*Dickens and the Workhouse* (which inspired Neil to write a new adaptation).

On the day of the performance at the Kolibri Theatre, Mr. Vladimir Putin, President of Russia was also in the city. With roadblocks and transport diverted, Neil wondered whether his company would get to the theatre to rehearse and perform or whether an audience would turn up. However his fears were unfounded and the play was performed highly successfully to a full house. Not even Mr. Putin could prevent another triumph for Mr. Dickens!

N. Zoladkiewicz

## To be Little Dorrit or not to be ... that is the question!

In *Mr Dick's Kite* No79 January 2009, there was an article by Professor A.J. Pointon “*Who was Little Dorrit?*” speculating on Dickens’s possible inspiration for the character of *Amy Dorrit*. This was extremely well researched. Several ladies were mentioned, a Catherine Thompson Maynard being the favourite candidate.

A letter was sent from Mr Harry Gregory of Orpington, responding to this article and providing some interesting thoughts. This was also dated January 2009, and unfortunately it never got published. I have tried to reach Mr Gregory without success, but if he reads this article perhaps it will make amends for late publication!

His letter states:

*“Obviously AJP has made some excellent research into this, but I thought he might like to consider another source for the Amy original. My favourite reading in the 1930’s (I was about ten) was always ‘Little Dorrit’ and I used a pre-war edition published by HAZELL, WATSON & VINEY LTD that my mother had given me. The Editor’s Preface (Editor’s name not mentioned) gave a definitive statement for the lady’s name. He states that it was a Mrs Mary Ann Cooper of Southgate, who was alive in 1910.*

*I must confess that Catherine Thompson as a firm candidate, (with “no question”) sounds extraordinary, with her sad background, to inspire the part.*

*Dickens was typically sympathetic but had to polish it up considerably into the impossible, but romantically, beautiful little Amy we all know and love. Thank you Mr Dickens.”*

Although Mr Gregory agrees with AJP that Catherine Thompson, being a prostitute and single mother, was most likely not the model for the saintly Amy, both gentlemen have got her name entirely wrong! She was Caroline Thompson – not Catherine!

So who was Caroline? I went in search of information about her in Dickens’s letters (*Pilgrim Edition 1853-55*) and I found several references. Her brother had appealed to Dickens for help on her behalf, and Dickens when he met her was impressed with both her appearance and her gentle manner.

She was a deserted woman with a 2 year old child and was struggling to support herself as well as her brother and sister. She was willing to try anything to make a living for herself and her family. Dickens was most sympathetic to her plight. He investigated fully into her character and found that although she had got herself into prostitution, it seemed that it was the only way left to her to make a living.

Dickens was involved at the time in a housing scheme together with Ms Angela Burdett-Coutts, helping women in similar situations to reclaim their lives. He wrote to Ms Burdett Coutts about Caroline, saying “...I feel confident that there can never have been much evil in her, apart from the early circumstances that directed her steps in the wrong way.”

After some difficulties, Ms Coutts helped Caroline set up as housekeeper, first in a lodging house which unfortunately failed to succeed, and later with urging and assistance from Dickens, Ms Coutts helped Caroline to emigrate to Canada with her child and to start a new life.

So perhaps there *is* more of Caroline Thompson in the stoic character of *Amy Dorrit* than anybody realised? Of Mary Ann Cooper I can find no trace, alas.

FH

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## Dogs

Edward Preston kindly sent me the following piece. In a second hand book which he purchased from the Fellowship and which was once owned by Mostyn Harper, he found the following note written by Mostyn and obviously to be included in a future talk.

*“Dickens interest in dogs (as in the habits and ways of all animals) was inexhaustible, and he welcomed with delight any new trait. The following, told him by a lady friend, was a great acquisition”.*

*“I must close with an odd story of a Newfoundland dog” wrote Dickens in a Letter to John Forster, May 14<sup>th</sup> 1867. “An immense black good-humoured Newfoundland dog.*

He came from Oxford and had lived all his life at a brewery. Instructions were given with him that if he were let out every morning alone, he would immediately find out the river; regularly take a swim; and gravely come home again. This he did with the greatest punctuality, but after a little while was observed to smell of beer. She was so sure that he smelt of beer that she resolved to watch him. Accordingly, he was seen to come back from his swim, round the usual corner, and to go up a flight of steps into a beer-shop. Being instantly followed, the beer-shop-keeper is seen to take down a pot (pewter pot), and is heard to say "Well, old chap! Come for your beer as usual, have you?" Upon which he draws a pint and puts it down, and the dog drinks it. Being required to explain how this came to pass, the man says "Yes ma'am, I know he's your dog, ma'am, but I didn't when he first

come. He looked in ma'am – as a bricklayer might – and then he come in – as a bricklayer might – and he wagged his tail at the pots, and he giv'a sniff round, and conveyed to me as he was used to beer. So I draw'd him a drop, and he drunk it up. Next morning he come agen by the clock and I drew him a pint, and ever since he has took his pint reglar!"

In November 2014 I heard a talk given by Dr Beryl Gray on "*The Dog in the Dickensian Imagination*" from which I learned quite a lot about the dogs in Dickens's fiction, as well as those he himself owned. I got the impression that although he loved his dogs, he could by our present day standards, appear rather cruel when dealing with them and seemed to understand his fictional ones a little better.

FH

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## Angels the costumier

In the latest Oscar nominations list one of the categories was for costume design and the winner was *The Grand Budapest Hotel* starring *Ralph Fiennes*. The spectacular costumes were all designed and made by Angels of London.

*Angels* started life as *Nathans*, a company founded in 1790 producing sturdy clothing for the military; costumes for Court, and later historically accurate costumes for both professional and amateur theatres. Charles Dickens was a patron, and rented, or had made, costumes for most of his many amateur productions.

According to his letters, during 1847 and 1848 Dickens was heavily involved in putting on productions in London, Birmingham and Edinburgh. These were originally intended to help the writer Leigh Hunt who was in some financial distress, but they proved so popular especially with Dickens, that his Amateur Players company continued to put on play after play.

Nathan himself must have had the patience of a saint, as he had to follow Dickens's entourage up and down the country with the costumes required for the various performances. They travelled by train, and Nathan was always going on ahead by the Mail train ready for the next performance. Dickens wanted everything to do with the production to be first class including the costumes, and nothing was left to chance. For

the production of *The Merry Wives of Windsor* costumes for minor characters and servants as well as the main players were needed.

In June 1847, Dickens requested that "*Bobadil's dress needs smartening, and a piece of armour burnished*"

Dresses were required in August 1847 for the productions *Comfortable Lodgings*, and *Turning the Tables*. Later in 1848, Dickens put on *Every Man in his Humour* and *Used Up*.

Sometimes things did not work out.

He wrote to Nathan in February 1848 from Devonshire Terrace, cancelling an order.

"*Circumstances have arisen which have led to the abandonment of the contemplated Amateur performance. You will therefore please to proceed no further with the dresses at the present.*

*I hope that Five Pounds will be sufficient compensation for your trouble and charge."*

This letter has pride of place on the wall in the current premises.

FH

## An Opinion

I was reading a book called *Victorian Essays*, selected by WD Hancock, and came across an extract from a publication by Walter Dexter (1877 - 1944), who was the second editor of the *Dickensian*. He also edited several volumes of letters of Charles Dickens, and the selection in this particular volume was from *Mr and Mrs Charles Dickens: His Letters to her*:

The interesting points that Mr Dexter makes throw a strange light on to the Dickens marriage, and to the effects the whole situation had upon his writing. Feminists beware!!

*"Nothing will make of Dickens a simple character to understand. But for those critics who believe that every work of art is the artist's substitute for going to bed with someone, or his excuse for going to bed with someone else, will find singularly little in these letters to substantiate their lunes.*

*Of an ordinary man, one would say that, having found he had married the wrong woman, he made the best of the situation till the children were growing up and then resolved to end it by an amicable parting. But then, the ordinary man has an office to go to, a shop to manage, a ship or a battalion to command: in any case, an area of work, where the most incompatible wife, even if she neglects his children and makes his home uncomfortable, can work no serious disturbance. Dickens's work was done in his imagination, and after David Copperfield his imagination was beginning to flag. The effort was greater, the returns less. He felt it: we can feel it. His sap had gone into David Copperfield, and he needed*

*a season of refreshment and quiet before it would run again. The right wife would have provided it, and Catherine could not. In Bleak House we are aware that the wheels are grinding; in Hard Times they can hardly move the machine. If Little Dorrit were an Elizabethan play, critics would have been ready to prove that it was the work of an imitator with some incomparable scenes, the Marshalsea, the arrival at the Hospice, the death of Merdle, by the master's hand. The Tale of Two Cities is so far removed from Dickens's way that it hardly belongs to the canon.*

*A business man would cut his losses and reorganize. Dickens separated from his wife. To judge by the results, it was the wisest thing he could do: and if it were done with a shocking want of dignity, it was done cleanly, firmly and generously. Having done it, he recovered control of his genius: he found his way back to the world where he was sovereign. He wrote Great Expectations: he ended on Edwin Drood: a serene evening after a splendid morning and baleful afternoon."*

W.Dexter

\*Many people do feel that Dickens's later works are not as good as his early ones, but this Editor cannot entirely agree with these statements.

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## Headgear

In the piece *Gads Hill on Fire (Mr Dick's Kite No 95)* a hat was mentioned - a Stetson, belonging to Dickens's great grandson Cedric. Amongst his own collection of hats Dickens was especially fond of his "wide-awake" a low-brimmed soft felt hat. This was the hat which figures in an adventure at Boulogne when he encountered the French Emperor, Napoleon III and Prince Albert, the Prince Consort who had come on a visit to France in 1854, during the Crimean War campaigns.

Dickens had gone into the town which was full of excitement for the visit, but wishing to save himself for the evening entertainments, he set off on his usual country walk. He wrote to John Forster: *"Coming home by the Calais road, covered with dust, I suddenly find myself face to face with Albert and Napoleon, jogging along in the pleasantest way...and attended by a brilliant staff of some sixty or seventy horsemen. I took off my wide-awake without stopping to stare, whereupon the Emperor pulled off his cocked hat; and Albert (seeing I suppose, that it was an Englishman) pulled off his. Then we went our several ways. The Emperor is broader across the chest than in the old times*

*when we used to see him so often at Gore House, and stoops more in the shoulders."*

Less than a year and a half later Dickens encountered the Emperor again, this time in Paris, and was shocked at the change in his appearance. He wrote *"I suppose mortal man out of bed never looked so ill and worn as the Emperor does just now. He passed close by me on horseback and I never saw so haggard a face. Some English saluted him, and he lifted his hand to his hat as slowly, painfully, and laboriously, as if his arm were made of lead."*

Alan S. Watts