

NEWSLETTER

NEW ZEALAND



*College House, University of
Canterbury*

As many will know, the proposed New Zealand Conference had to be cancelled because of the devastating earthquake: the venue at the University of Canterbury was needed to make up teaching that students had missed as a result of the earthquake. I have been in touch with Esme Richards, Secretary of the Christchurch Branch, and Jeni

Curtiss, their President. They hope to offer accommodation in their homes to any intrepid travellers unable to find hotels who make it to Christchurch at the time of the Conference, and to put on a few events in people's houses for themselves and those brave travellers. Helen Moulder tells me she will perform 'Playing Miss Havisham' in homes during this time. Susan Ham signed up for the New Zealand experience, so we hope to hear more from her later. It appears that some satisfaction - no doubt some pleasure - will be salvaged from a potentially dreadfully disappointing situation.

FS

JAPAN

There is a small but extremely enthusiastic branch of the Fellowship in Japan, recently hit by an earthquake and a tsunami. I have heard several inspiring lectures by Japanese scholars of English Literature at conferences over the years.

News has been received from Eiichi Hara, Secretary of the Japanese Branch saying that despite some difficulties, people in Tokyo have been all right. Sendai, Eiichi's hometown, however, was devastated by the tsunami and news of friends and relatives was still uncertain at the time of writing.

FS

A CHRISTMAS CAROL

St Paul's Players - 25th - 27th November 2010

Three generations of my family went to the matinee performance of 'A Christmas Carol' in St. Paul's, Southville. It was a cold November day, but such a warm, family-friendly atmosphere greeted us that any discerning Pickwickian would approve. We were escorted to our table. The little ones were pampered with cushions to see better and nibbles to occupy fidgety fingers. Hospitality was completed by the arrival of mince-pies and refreshments during the interval, as well as the mandatory raffle.

I loved the broad spread of actors, youth blending with maturity, about two score people in all were involved in this very inclusive production, that always stayed on the right side of that delicate balance between artistic merit and economy. Costumes, make-up, lighting, sound, stage direction and set design were all undoubtedly good, even excellent. The action moved seamlessly from one scene to the next, progressing through each vignette of Scrooge's Past, Present and Future in turn, using the full width of the church as a stage. Sometimes the actors came within touching distance of the audience as they progressed through each vignette led by stage lighting. Oh, and I haven't mentioned the music!

Carols and music interleaved and intersected the scenes so that the interest of even the youngest member of the audience was held throughout. The finale, a carol sung by the whole cast with audience participation, was a true Dickensian style climax.

While the whole production was good, particular compliments go to actors in the minor roles; they were brilliant. My only disappointment was that I didn't win the raffle! 'Well done' St Paul's Players. I look forward to next Christmas - follow the players via <http://www.stpaulsplayers.org.uk> .

Peter Michael

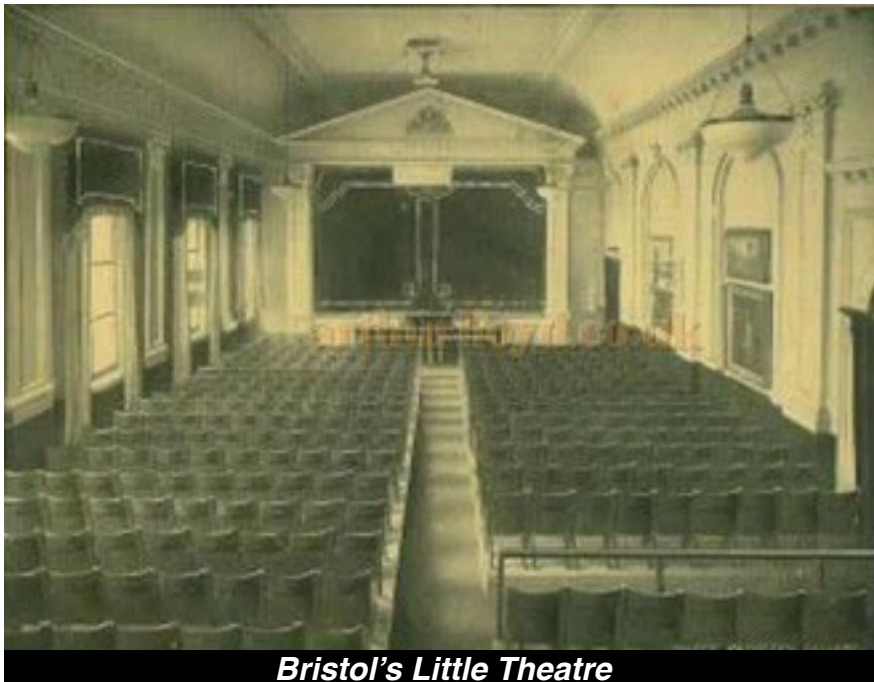
EDWARD PURCHASE

With our reading of 'The Dark Forest', directed by Sally Fry last November, old memories were revived as it was 50 years ago that Sally's mother, Stella Wilson, directed it as a stage production in December 1960.

Edward Purchase, or Ted, as he was known to us, produced many dramatisations for the Society, and today the same scripts are used extensively.

Ted wrote five plays on the life of Dickens at various times in Dickens's life, 'The Dark Forest' being one of them. Locally he wrote plays on the lives of such celebrities as Thomas Chatterton, Edward Colston, Mary Carpenter and Jane Austen.

He wrote original plays too numerous to mention. No sooner had he finished one than he was busy formulating the next - whilst walking across the Downs he once told me.



Bristol's Little Theatre

His first play for the professional theatre was "The White Flame" performed at the Grand Opera House, Harrogate, with Sonia Dresdel as Charlotte Bronte in 1935.

The Rapier Players, a resident company at Bristol's Little Theatre, performed several of his plays, and he also acted for them.

Chris Harris, who performed in our 2003 Dickens Conference, interviewed Ted in the auditorium of the Theatre Royal in a short film called 'The Crimson Curtain' which was shown on TV and relates to Ted's enormous knowledge of Theatre in times gone by.

The last play he might have written in his life was to be called 'The Chinese Cactus'. The subject was retirement and I'm not sure whether pen was ever put to paper.

The last act of Ted's life was overshadowed by events. His mother died and the house was sold. For whatever reason Ted was unable to look after or care for himself. For a time he lived with his sister and then various other places; and he ended up in the Salvation Army Hostel in Wade Street, where his musical abilities - playing the piano among other things - made him popular. He also played the organ at the nearby Spiritualist Church in Surrey Street.

I remember Ted as a remarkable man, difficult at times, but if I were ever to place an epitaph under his name, I am drawn to Sleary's philosophy in 'Hard Times': "Make the best of us, not the worst".

Walter Browning

Peggy Ann Wood (1912 - 1998)

Born in Chiswick in 1912, to the composer Arthur Wood, the man responsible for writing the theme tune to the radio drama, The Archers, Peggy Ann Wood first took to the stage at 15.

She first came to Bristol in about 1934 as the leading lady for the Bristol repertory group, The Rapier Players, who were based in the Little Theatre. It was here that she continued her career in theatre for the next 30 years, not only as an actress, but also as a writer and a director. In 1937 she married Ronald Russell, the producer of the Rapier Players and between them they provided a training ground for many actors including Timothy West, Michael Hordern and Constance Chapman.



DICKENS GOES TO THE DOGS

It was exactly 150 years ago, when in her sixtieth year, that Mary Tealby decided to do something. Mary Tealby was relatively poor, the widow of Robert Chapman Tealby a timber merchant. She lived in Victoria Road, Holloway, a poor area of London and she was in poor health. She had joined the RSPCA, but otherwise had few connections with society apart from her brother, the Reverend Edward Bates.



She apparently rescued an abandoned puppy and then realised the magnitude of the situation. The *Islington Gazette* reported Mary Tealby's views on 6th October 1860, that having found so many starving dogs in that district alone, "the aggregate amount of suffering amongst those faithful creatures throughout London Must be very dreadful indeed". Concerned with the fate of dogs dying of "lingering starvation" in the streets, Mary made an appeal in the local press and established "The Temporary Home for Lost and Starving Dogs". The Home was in a disused stable yard in St. James's Road, Holloway, where dogs could be exercised and lost dogs retrieved by their owners. As the rules made clear, the Home was to be neither a permanent home for "old, worn-out favourites" nor a hospital, but a "temporary refuge to which humane persons may send only those lost dogs so constantly seen in the streets".

The Home received a lot of bad press when it first opened, at a time when in Victorian London it was deemed immoral to spend time and money helping "dumb" animals when human beings were living in appalling conditions on the streets. Fund-raising was difficult, and although Mary was a tireless worker for her cause, she had insufficient influence among people in high places. Then along came Charles Dickens.

Battersea Dogs' Home 1909



In 1862, in his highly influential magazine "All the Year Round", Dickens published a single article entitled "Two Dog Shows" in which he compared the forerunner of Cruft's Dog Show with that of the unfortunate canines of Holloway. (*Author's Note: I have not traced the original article.*) This did the trick and gave wide publicity to Mary Tealby's worthy cause.

Within ten years "The Temporary Home for Lost and Starving Dogs" moved to its present location in Battersea in 1871, where it was eventually renamed "The Battersea Dogs' Home", and received royal patronage from Queen Victoria in 1833. It moved from strength to strength, even expanding to include stray cats. In all, over 3 million animals have passed through its gates.

What happened to Mary Tealby? Although she is now recognised as 'the foundress and unwearied benefactress' of the Battersea Dogs' Home, she never lived to see the fruition of her work. Mary was in poor health and died of cancer in October 1865. She was buried in St. Andrew's Church in Biggleswade, Bedfordshire along with her brother.

We may never know how or why Charles Dickens decided to support the cause of stray dogs, but the world of animal lovers is glad that he did. Without this one article, "Two Dog Shows", the whole Battersea Project may have foundered on the sea of public indifference. He certainly knew how to touch the Victorian conscience.

Peter Michael

ANGELA BURDETT-COUTTS



At our October meeting we enjoyed a very interesting and thoroughly researched talk by Frankie on the life and work of Angela Burdett-Coutts. We heard that she was a lady of wide-ranging interests, one of which was the plight of "fallen women" or prostitutes. She collaborated with Dickens in the provision and running of Urania Cottage, which was a brave attempt to offer a place of refuge and rehabilitation for such women. Some readings from *David Copperfield* and *Dombey and Son* were chosen to highlight Dickens's presentations of fallen women in the novels, after which some concluding remarks by Lorna attempted to define some of the approaches Dickens took towards such women. In summary, Lorna said:

The readings were chosen to feature some fallen women in Dickens's novels, and perhaps these are not unlike some of the girls that Urania Cottage was trying to help. One thing that emerges very clearly from the readings is the sense of shame that beset such girls, and the way they were ostracized by all levels of society. We saw that Ham in *David Copperfield* thought that the death

of his beloved Emily would be more merciful than such disgrace. Society appears to make little distinction between Martha and Emily, even though the latter is not a prostitute in Martha's sense. We understand that Emily's reputation might have been saved by marriage to her seducer, Steerforth, but her social inferiority would have made such a marriage completely unacceptable within the higher levels of society. You may recall that Steerforth, growing tired of her as he inevitably would, attempts to marry her off to the odious Littimer.

Not everyone, however, thought harshly of prostitutes. In *David Copperfield* Mr. Peggotty, David, Emily and Mr. Omer all feel compassion in various degrees towards Martha. In society it was not uncommon for girls like Emily to be seen as the victims of - often upper class - male vice. We have seen how deeply involved were Dickens and Miss Burdett-Coutts in the mission of outreach and rescue which went out from Urania Cottage. Even Gladstone himself was known to walk the streets of London at night in the hope of finding and rescuing fallen women. There were in fact a number of initiatives in the nineteenth century that attempted to reach out to the poor and the marginalized.



It is very apparent that Dickens does not see the women in our readings as bad at heart, and this was also the view of the two prison governors mentioned by Frankie, for they were said to be "well acquainted with the good that is in the bottom of the hearts of these poor creatures." We read that Alice Marwood had been transported as a criminal - though Dickens's style and language imply very strongly that the proceedings in the court were unjust. Evidently her life experiences have hardened her, and she seems the most desperate of the women featured in our readings. Be that as it may, she still is touched with the lingering brightness of a fallen angel.

Dickens's study of Martha is particularly compelling as she is so painfully aware of the stigma that attaches to her, to the extent that she feels a sinister lure from the dark, polluted river, polluted as she feels polluted, fit vehicle to bear her away to a lonely death.

In *David Copperfield* emigration is seen as the start of a new life - that blessed second chance which society would not grant to such girls at home. Emigration was, as we have heard, the hope for the girls who completed the programme at Urania Cottage.

Lastly we come to Edith Dombey - not at the point featured in the readings a fallen woman; one, rather, who is about to make what society would regard as a highly prestigious marriage and become mistress of a splendid establishment. And yet with bitterness of heart, and with a most savage irony of expression, she lays bare her complete lack of self respect, revealing how she has been paraded, put through her paces, made an object for sordid bargaining and finally a piece of merchandise to be sold off. Ironically, when she has eloped and has therefore become a ruined woman, she has far more self respect because she has asserted her independence: she has done things her way and can dispense with the approval of society.

Overall, Dickens seems to imply that if women are treated as objects and not as people, then there is a sense in which prostitution - often called in the nineteenth century "the social evil" - stalks throughout society at every level. As he puts it: "In this round world of many circles within circles, do we make a weary journey from the high grade to the low, to find at last that they lie close together, that the two extremes touch, and that our journey's end is but our starting place?"

Lorna Hughes

DISCOVER DICKENS

A Day Course at the University of Roehampton



This course was a new venture, run in collaboration with the Dickens Fellowship. It provided a very informative and enjoyable day, which can hopefully be repeated.

As we had to register by 9.30 am, Frankie, Charmian, and I set off from Bristol at 6.00am, for the three hour journey to Roehampton, near Richmond.

The day consisted of a choice of workshops, one in the morning, and one in the afternoon, and three guest speakers. The first speaker was Claire Tomalin, who wrote the book: "The Invisible Woman", the story of Dickens's relationship with Ellen Ternan. She spoke about Living with Dickens, the theme of her new book. She emphasised the relationship that Charles had with his father, John Dickens, and came up with some intriguing ideas and theories of her own, among them that John was not Charles's natural father. She drew some obvious parallels with John and some of Dickens's characters, such as Mr Dorrit, Mr Micawber and Mr Murdstone. The talk was fascinating, shedding a different light on certain aspects of Charles Dickens's

life. It sounds as though her new book will be well worth reading.

After lunch, Michael Eaton spoke about Dickens before Sound. He showed some very interesting early films of Dickens books. They illustrated how the works of Dickens propelled the film makers towards certain techniques, in order to tell the story. Among the clips were the death of Nancy from Oliver Twist, and The Cricket on the Hearth. Again it was a very entertaining and informative session.

Finally, Malcolm Andrews, a great favourite at conferences, focused on Dickens the Performer. He mentioned various people who influenced Dickens in his performances, including Robert and Mary Keeley, both actors, who taught Dickens acting, and William Macready, the well known actor/manager. He also made the point that performing undermined Dickens's health. Malcolm was interesting and informative as usual.

The workshops were led by members of staff at the university. At the morning

session I attended a workshop on "Making sense of History, Religion, Serialisation and A Tale of Two Cities." Dr. Mark Knight, who led this particular session, maintained that "A Tale of Two Cities" is about salvation, and that the book juggled the big themes of religion and the French Revolution. There was certainly plenty of food for thought. He also introduced the idea that writing in serial form leads to a different style of writing, as revision and rewriting under necessarily tight deadlines is not possible.

My afternoon workshop was on food, led by Professor Nicki Humble. The focus was more on Victorian food than with food as depicted in Dickens's books, so an interesting slant on a familiar theme. It was a pity, that some of the more colourful passages from Dickens's work were not included.

The day finished with sherry and cake (I had orange juice!), rounding off an extremely enjoyable and informative day, which I would recommend to anybody with an interest in Charles Dickens. I hope similar study days will be forthcoming.

NICHOLAS GREEN



In our April 2010 issue we featured Nicholas in our "Getting to Know You" slot.

Later on last year Nicholas, very sadly, died. He was the epitome of quiet fortitude; much loved by many of us who had known him for a number of years. He was a stalwart, with the sort of enthusiasm that has kept our Society ticking over through the decades.

Nicholas's passing has been a great loss for all who knew him but, of course, especially for his family, who showed incredible courage in coping with the loss of one so young.

What is there to say so soon after rejoicing in Nicholas's contribution to our group as we did last year? We can only give thanks for the privilege of knowing Nicholas as we did

FS

DICKENS DAYS OUT

Being unable to go to New Zealand for the Conference this year, I decided to treat myself to some Dickens Days in this country (including the Canterbury Mini-Conference in July, of which more in the next Newsletter). So 16th October saw me in London for the annual Birkbeck College 'Dickens Day'. I have been promising myself to go to one of these for a number of years now, so it was a satisfying feeling actually to find myself there.

It was an interesting audience, including a number of young people, presumably many of them students of English Literature and related subjects, as well as familiar Dickens Fellowship members from around the country. Included in the day and to make Fellowship people like me feel at home were some readings (including passages from 'Our Mutual Friend', our Book of the Year) by Michael Slater, Tony Williams and Thelma Grove.

"Mr Popular Sentiment: Dickens and Feeling" was the title of the day, which included papers on George Eliot and Dickens, Emotion, Morality and Realism in *Oliver Twist* and the Christmas Books, Materialising Mourning: Dickens, Funerals and Epitaphs (gloomy as it may seem, I particularly enjoyed this contribution), and 'Mr Popular Sentiment Conducts: Dickensian Journalism Then and Now (unfortunately I was too tired to stay for this one at the end of the day - desperately needed to get back to Bristol - apologies to Tony Williams and his colleague for such feeble fatigue). The standard of the presentations varied - there were some where it was difficult to follow the thrust of the argument because the speakers' presentational skills were not up to their academic ones, but the best were well worth hearing, and I would attend another such day.

Another venture was the excellent Roehampton Day that Eve, Charmian and I attended in February - of which more elsewhere.

FS

HELPING THE CHRISTCHURCH BRANCH

Pat Malyckyj had a wonderful idea that branches of the Fellowship, might wish to contribute some funds to the Christchurch Branch for any losses they might incur because of the cancellation of their Conference. Pat wrote a delightful piece about this intended for inclusion in this Newsletter, but I have since heard from Joan Dicks, Joint Hon. Gen. Sec. of the Fellowship that Christchurch were covered by Insurance, and were unlikely to be out of pocket. Thank you, Pat, for thinking along these lines, and I will let you know if more on this subject arises at future Council meetings.

FS

Bristol & Clifton Dickens Society

www.dickens-society.org

Applications for membership (£15 per year) should be sent to Frankie Sahni

COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER - 29TH JULY 2011

Contact Frankie or Eve with your news or thoughts

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