

Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society

Founded in 1902 and affiliated to The Dickens Fellowship : www.dickens-society.org.uk www.dickensfellowship.org

President Mrs Sally Draper Fry

NEWSLETTER

Spring 2020

Scenes from BCDS Life March Meeting 2020



Sally introduces Pat's talk on 'Dickens' Landladies'.
Lorna and Don as readers



Eve's topic was Mr Jingle

Peter spoke of 'The Quiet Hero'
Sorry, no photo!

Dates For Your Diary

BCDS Meetings - held on Mondays:

Meeting Cancelled - April 6th: May 11th

Decisions to cancel these meetings will be taken
nearer their dates - June 15th: September 14th

Bath Festival – 20th May, 1.45-2.45 pm

'Celebrating Charles Dickens' a talk by Claire Tomalin
For details visit www.thebathfestival.org.uk or 'phone
01225 463362. Check for cancellation before attending.

Dickens Fellowship 2020 Conference 15th-20th July

Organised jointly by The Dickens Fellowship, The
Dickens Museum and The University of London, and
to be held at Goodenough College, London.

2020 will be the 150th anniversary of the death of
Charles Dickens and the Conference is entitled "'Lord
keep my memory green"- Dickens in 1870 and after.'
Full details at [www.dickensfellowship.org/annual-
conference](http://www.dickensfellowship.org/annual-conference). Bookings are now open. Some
accommodation onsite. Lots of hotels nearby.

Dickens Fellowship Annual Conference 2021

Provisional dates 28th July to 1st August 2021. To be
held in The Netherlands, venue to be confirmed.
Arrange your own accommodation.

Our Book of the Year 'The Old Curiosity Shop'

'One must have a heart of stone to read the death of
Little Nell without laughing.' Oscar Wilde

However, when Wilde was in prison Dickens'
works were among the books he requested.

(see Reading Experience Database. [www.open.ac.uk/
Arts/RED/index.html](http://www.open.ac.uk/Arts/RED/index.html))

News from the Dickens Museum, Doughty Street, London

Great news of a large recent acquisition - a private collection of over 300 Dickens items - letters, personal items, artwork, manuscripts, books from Dickens's library.

"This is a treasure trove - a true once-in-a-lifetime moment for the Museum... We are looking forward to sharing the items with our visitors, both online and in person in the rooms of Dickens's home"

Cindy Sughrue, Director

Your membership card entitles you to free admission, plus discounts in the shop and café.
www.dickensmuseum.com

REVIEWS OF DICKENS PRODUCTIONS

ON FILM

'The Personal History of David Copperfield'

Directed by Armando Iannucci - Released January 2020.

Review 1 Against

Having never read David Copperfield I feel eminently qualified to criticise the film and make up for Roma's excess of knowledge. (! Ed.)

At two hours long it omits Barkis, Traddles and Sophie, Rosa Dartle, Littimer-I think, Mell the schoolteacher, Jack Maldon and I think Mrs Annie Strong appears only in a crowd scene. Miss Murdstone does not appear as companion/chaperone to Dora, whose death is neatly accomplished by her remarking that she feels out of place, and doesn't fit in, before walking off screen and out of the story. The bit I eagerly anticipated when the Murdstones are routed by Aunt Betsey, did not happen, because they did not visit her. But perhaps, with Mr Dick and Micawber playing more prominently in the film than the book, it would have taken three hours to tell the story. Billed as a comedy, I find Copperfield a distressing story, and only smiled twice. But the audience were laughing throughout. The same actress plays Dora, and Clara Copperfield, pointing to David's Oedipal leanings and saving a bit more money.

Don Brown

Review 2 For

Some things I liked, such as the sets and costumes, the colour-blind casting and the use of a multitude of regional accents. I liked seeing David turning into an author, which we don't really see in the book. Some things I didn't like, such as David's employment at the factory seemingly lasting to adulthood, and his

journey to Aunt Betsey as an adult rather than as a small boy lost its pathos. The insertion of made-up scenes at the expense of existing ones was baffling, but understandable if you want to showcase particular actors. A film of a book is always a different kind of animal and that's sort of OK, but it must work hard if you know and love the book as we do! I liked it well enough, but the friends I went with *loved* it, and one of them knows the book well. You can't replicate the book in 2 hours of film and if the spirit is in there and some principal characters, is that enough? I would say it's worth going to see it, but whether this David turns out to be the hero of his life, you must decide.

Roma Hussey



Filmed in Bury St Edmunds

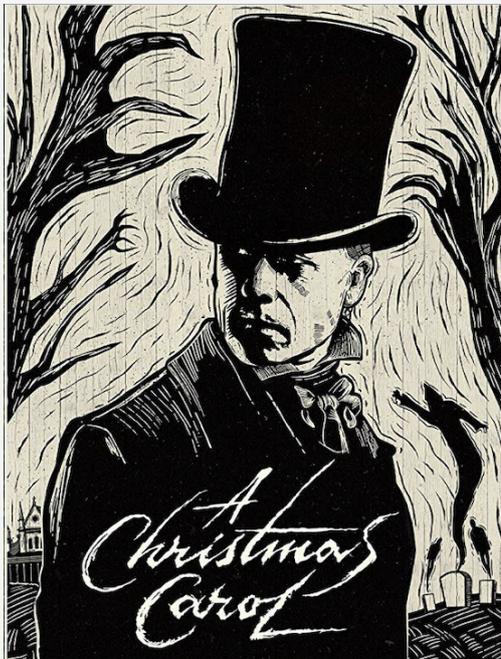
ON TV

"A Christmas Carol"

A fantasy on the original, written by Steven Knight - BBC1, December 2019

If you were expecting the warm, life-affirming, story penned by Charles Dickens in 1843 from the latest BBC offering, you would be sadly disappointed. There have, of course, been many versions of "A Christmas Carol" over the years, including versions from Alistair Sim, to Albert Finney, Shane Ritchie, and the madcap Muppets. This latest production is very dark, quite unsettling, and seemed to have very little to do with Charles Dickens' original story. Written by "Peaky Blinders" author Stephen Knight, and featuring the Australian actor Guy Pearce – whom I remember from "Neighbours" some twenty years ago before his move to Hollywood. There were some similarities with Dickens' tale. It was set in the same historical period, most of the characters were retained, the ghosts appeared, Scrooge's meanness and cruelty was stressed, and an eventual realisation of the plight of others less well off than himself, leading to an apparent conversion. Keeping Charles Dickens' "memory green" does, to a certain extent, mean that

his stories will be adapted to suit current trends and tastes. Lots have been successful, and have helped to maintain Dickens' popularity. It does depend on what you expect your audience to get from your production. If it is the authentic voice of Charles Dickens, and his view of the social conditions of the society of which he was a part, then you stick closely to the original. If, however, you want to use Dickens' story, and adapt it to "shine a torch on our current society" and draw moral conclusions that fit in with twenty first century life, you risk changing the original story out of all recognition, and losing Dickens' voice. I am sure Stephen Knight would argue that he picked up his ideas from the original text. How far is this true?



The setting is Victorian London, the characters are in Victorian dress, the names of most of the characters are the same, but one or two I did not recognise are included, with little effect on the development of the story. Jacob Marley's ghost appears throughout the whole story, not in the original. I can see no good reason for this. Marley's miserable state of Purgatory is made very obvious from the start, that is why he has appeared to haunt Scrooge, and serve as a warning if Scrooge does not mend his ways. Why keep stressing it? Poor downtrodden Bob Cratchit is portrayed faithfully, the Cratchit children had more substance in the original, and Tiny Tim is suitably pathetic. In the original, however, his disability was not seen as medical, just a result of little money, poor nutrition and poor living conditions.

The ghosts were rather unsatisfactory, seemingly to keep "popping" in and out, instead of showing Scrooge his life in a sequence, how he gradually descended into this cruel, mean, miserly creature, despite having opportunities to change. His horror at being shown his gravestone, present in the original story, was not emphasised enough. I was not convinced by his

conversion, as I was in the original. And where was his nephew?

Perhaps the scene that was a complete deviation from Dickens' story was Scrooge's treatment of Mrs Cratchit. There is no indication whatever that they ever met, let alone that he tested her in such a fashion. Scrooge claimed that he was testing her moral resolve, to see how far she would go, as far as sleeping with him so that he would pay for Tiny Tim's medical treatment. If only Scrooge had enough interest in his fellow human beings for that to ever cross his mind! The sight of a half-naked Mrs Cratchit was extremely tasteless. I can think of no literary or artistic reason why it should have been included, so must conclude it was to attract attention, to give the production a false "edginess" and to pander to today's taste for prurience.

Similarly the inclusion of the "f..." expletive, which not only was not in the original, but was not in use in the current vernacular in Dickens' time. It added nothing to the story, but every time it was used the action lost a lot of power and the scene was considerably diminished. It was a complete failure, Mr Knight.

The eventual conversion of Scrooge to a mellow, philanthropic do-gooder was very grudging in this version and did not convince that there had been any fundamental change of heart.

The most interesting part was how Marley and Scrooge made their money. It did reflect conditions that exist today, and gave an insight into Victorian practices, showing that little changes in commerce. But hasn't Charles Dickens done that already in his excellent novel?

I do wonder why anybody thinks that they can "improve" on Dickens. By all means use his basic premises and plots – they are universal anyway – but write your own story and leave Charles Dickens and his genius alone. To quote one critic; "This is Dickens for those who don't like Dickens," and to misquote Mr Spock : "It is Dickens, Jim, but not as we know it!"

Eve Fitt

Next time you're in Westbury-on-Trym village, go and look at the WW1 memorial on the roundabout. A correspondent, John Moore, tells us that Joshua Robbins was a descendant of Mary Ann Bartlett, a maid at CD's Devonshire Terrace home in the 1851 census.

Photo from www.warmemorialsonline.org.uk



1812-1870-2020

It seems no time ago that we were celebrating the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens' birth, on 7th February 1812, in Portsea. And now, 8 years later, it is the 150th anniversary of his death, in 1870. What an action-packed life! What an amazing amount he fitted into his 58 years!

Dickens' death was not exactly unexpected. Friends, family and doctors noticed how he exhausted himself with his final reading tour; the need to take more responsibility for 'All the Year Round' after the illness and semi-retirement of W. H. Wills, the sub-editor; and his work on 'Edwin Drood'.

During the last year of his life, although apparently active both socially and professionally, his health gave him considerable trouble. George Dolby, Dickens' reading manager from 1866 - 1870, noticed that he 'was suffering very much' and looked 'pale and worn'. During his final Christmas, he was in too much pain to come down and join the family until after dinner. Mamie, his daughter, said that during a particularly busy patch towards the end of his life, 'he grew quickly and easily tired'.

There are a number of versions of his actual death, but it seems generally accepted that on 8th June he was working on 'Edwin Drood' in the chalet at Gad's Hill. He came over to the house for dinner with Georgina and suffered a stroke from which he never recovered, despite the prompt arrival of both family and doctors. He died on 9th June, five years to the day after the Staplehurst train accident.

Despite his declared wish for a simple funeral and to be buried in the grounds of Rochester Cathedral, he had become such a national figure that the Dean of Westminster offered a ceremony and burial in the Abbey, where an annual wreath-laying ceremony is held to this day.

Frankie Sahni

The Next Issue

Information, photos and articles (of around two to three hundred words) for the Autumn newsletter should be sent to romahussey@hotmail.com or given/posted to Roma by 17th August 2020.

How to Join Us

Annual subscription is £20.

Apply online www.dickens-society.org.uk

or contact Hon. Sec. Mrs Roma Hussey on romahussey@hotmail.com

or send your contact details and a cheque made payable to 'Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society' to Roma at 47 Rownham Mead, Bristol BS8 4YB, or phone 0117 9279875.

Editor RH