

# NEWSLETTER

**JUNE 2014**

## **THE 107th INTERNATIONAL DICKENS FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE Boulogne-sur-Mer, France, June 26th - July 1st 2013**



As I was the only member of the BCDS able to attend the conference, I was very pleased that a coach had been hired to take delegates from the Charles Dickens Museum in London to Boulogne and back.

There was much excitement meeting and greeting old friends, having a coffee and seeing the Museum in Doughty Street. A 'Dickens Walking Tour' set off outside leaving room for us to board the coach and on our way, via the Euro Tunnel to France. It was good to see farms and countryside before reaching the pleasant seaside city and port of Boulogne.

The first evening saw us visiting 'La Mairie' (the Town Hall in the Old Town) for a reception attended by the Mayor. Then on to 'Nausicaa', our restaurant for three course dinners and entertainment from local groups.

We enjoyed interesting lectures linking Dickens with France - 'Dickens in Boulogne'; 'Dickens the Historian and Carlyle the Novelist and Dickens'; 'Dickens's French Contemporaries'; 'Dickens and French Theatre'; 'A Short Walk in Paris with the Uncommercial Traveller'.

We had a guided walk through the 'Vieille Ville' with its fortified walls, old castle, Church, bell-tower and dwellings. Also a service in St Nicholas' Church. The AGM was on the Saturday.

On Sunday were two lectures, 'French Dickensphilia'; and 'Dickens and the Sea'. Then a lovely excursion along the coast to Condette - a pretty village where we visited the church and Churchyard. We took a stroll up the main street to view a house that Dickens had stayed in. We stood in the sunny courtyard while the present owner told us the history of the house, and peeped into the garage, once a large salon, and the important salon. The afternoon ended on a perfect note - at the Chateau Hardelot with a classical concert.. The King's Consort, from England, performed Handel's 'Acis and Galatea'. Then back to Boulogne for our last dinner and entertainment. This was a choir singing traditional French songs; our translator encouraged us to take part at the end of the programme - a fitting farewell to the conference.

**Susan Ham**

## **THE 2015 CONFERENCE - BRISTOL**

The 2015 conference sub-committee meet regularly at Sally's house. We have decided on Wills Hall as the Conference Centre; it has a new, state of the art conference room, en-suite facilities and good disabled access. The guest speakers have been approached, and are all happy to attend. Peter has costed the event, taking all contingencies into consideration. An interesting and entertaining programme is being worked on, with the theme of "Dickens: the Travelling Man". We will welcome help from members next year, at the conference, to meet and greet, and to be around to help visitors in any way.

EF



## PHILIPPA BOWKETT

On 9th February 2013, Jag and I, Sally and Trevor were invited to the 90th birthday party of Philippa Bowkett. As it happened, I was the only one of the four of us able to attend the party. And a wonderful affair it was - 180 guests! Fancy knowing 180 people when you are 90! Philippa is a kind and considerate person, and realising that I would not know most of the company, kindly placed me on her table, with her son and daughter and their spouses and two Bishops and their spouses. One was the retired Bishop of Birmingham, Michael Dickens Whinney, a great great grandson of Charles. You can imagine what a splendid evening I had!



Some of you will have met Philippa at conferences (she was at the Durham Conference in 2008). Philippa lives in Weston super Mare, and is very familiar with the Weston and Brean area, where she lived as a child. At the first Dickens Conference I ever attended, her late husband, Cyril, was the Chaplain to the Dickens Fellowship, and had a high profile in the Conference Service in York Minster. Canon Bowkett was Rector of St. George the Martyr (the Little Dorrit Church close to the site of the Marshalsea Prison) in Southwark for many years.

You may appreciate a conversation between my brother and one of his friends in relation to the party picture. Don showed Jane the photo. "Oh, there's Frankie with two vicars!", said Jane. "Oh no!" came the reply. "Two bishops (or Bishops if you prefer)."

FS

## GARDEN PARTIES

*(weather permitting!)*

You are invited to a garden tea party at Liz Croucher's house, 38, Church Road, Easton in Gordano, North Somerset, BS20 0NB, at 2.30pm on Saturday, 12th July...

...and a lunch garden party at Frankie Sahni's house, 71 Maple Road, Horfield, BS7 8DR, at 12.30pm on Saturday, 2nd August.

In both cases, please bring food to share.

## DIAGNOSES BY CHARLES DICKENS

The Internet is an extraordinary beast. You use it to find out a particular piece of information and a host of other things, often things you have no interest in at all, appear on the screen.

Recently I googled 'Ellis Peters - author' and chose an Encyclopaedia Britannica article, only to find on the same page, under the heading 'LISTS', other information one could click on, including 'Diagnoses by Charles Dickens'. Of course I clicked, to find the following introduction:

'English novelist, Charles Dickens, had a knack for expertly portraying the symptoms of medical conditions. He also had a tendency to slip these descriptions into his works in subtle terms, such that historians and physicians have made it something of a hobby to interpret them medically and to attempt to diagnose afflicted characters. In some cases Dickens' descriptions actually predated those offered by medical doctors, revealing his skill for observation. "Dickensian diagnoses" ascribed to nine of the novelists's characters are explored in this list.'

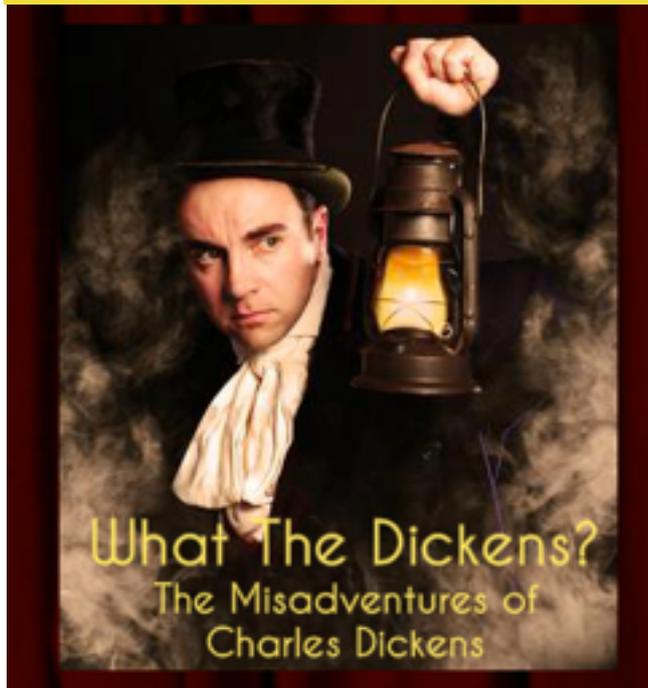
There follows a list which includes: Scrooge's possible poisoning with the hallucinogenic fungus ergot, once a common contaminant of rye bread; Tiny Tim's possible vitamin D deficiency; Mr Krook's dyslexia - "He can make all the letters separately and knows most of them separately when he sees them ... but he can't put them together"; and six others. If you are interested in the more detailed analyses available, google 'Ellis Peters - author' (even if you are not interested in her), go farther down the page to 'LISTS', and click on 'Diagnoses by Charles Dickens'. Amazing! FS

## APOLOGIES ...

...for the dearth of newsletters recently. Personal circumstances (illness and subsequent death of my husband) left me with little energy to cope with much other than personal activities. I am returning to normal, and plan to produce the usual two newsletters a year. Please keep contributions coming in (no more than 750 words). This offering is an amalgam of items from the past eighteen months rather than a completely up-to-date compilation.

FS

## WHAT THE DICKENS



To quote "Star Trek": "It's Dickens, Jim, but not as we know it." The local group "Gonzo Moose" performed a lively, funny, slightly disrespectful play featuring young Dickens as a newspaper reporter. There were three performers, taking on a variety of roles. Young Charles was played by Mark Conway, portraying the author as fresh-faced, cheerful, and a tad naive, with an Irish accent. (Did Dickens have Irish ancestors?) He was also very acrobatic (Mark did train at Circomedia!)

Emily Murphy played male and female roles, showing her singing talent off to great acclaim, (Morys getting a kiss from her busty, pouty nightclub singer). Chris Porter admirably demonstrated the range of his talent from pretentious newspaper fop to false philanthropist.

The play was based on lots of Dickens books, using recognisable "Dickensian" characters. The money grubbing, mumbling old woman, the false brother, the undertakers, pouty young women, shouty bullying bosses, the preoccupation with death, and London as the backdrop. Lots of references to be spotted: Hard Times, Barnaby Rudge, Edwin Drood, Our Mutual Friend, Great Expectations. The writers obviously are very familiar with Dickens' work, and used it to great effect in this witty, fast-paced and funny play, the story culminating in a chase over the dome of St. Paul's.

The set, though in a small space, was moveable, and versatile, brilliantly capturing the atmosphere of Victorian London. If you missed it, look out for it at other venues. An evening well spent! EF

## A CHRISTMAS CAROL The Musical

I saw two versions: equally enjoyable yet so different, apart from presenting Scrooge as middle-aged rather than elderly.

The Redgrave Theatre hosted Philip Monks's adaptation performed by Bristol Old Vic Theatre School, featuring a gaunt, angry Scrooge, with thirty one other parts brought to life by only nine players. In this well-paced production, street scenes took place against a backdrop of St. Paul's and the City, while the versatile indoor set was re-dressed. This was more a 'play with music', with folk carols, songs and dances used to link and enliven the scenes, as in the far from melancholy tavern where Scrooge, dining apart from the revellers, resisted the (interpolated) landlady's attentions, and at Fezziwig's ball. In this 'Festive Family Musical', the book's scary elements were downplayed. We were merely startled when Marley suddenly sat up in Scrooge's bed; and Christmas Yet To Come in bustling, trained black gown, was stately rather than sinister as, veiled in a tall mantilla, she glided slowly past the audience. A rousing chorus celebrated a happy ending for all - including Scrooge and the landlady!

Bath's tiny Rondo Theatre proved ideal for Dougie Blaxland's pared-down version for 'Live Wire', in which eerie lighting and sound effects, dry ice, drab costumes and monochrome background of gloomy frosted windows evoked the book's sombre side. This was a true musical, with Natalie Farmer's original score used to great effect by the four singer-actors: a morose, embittered



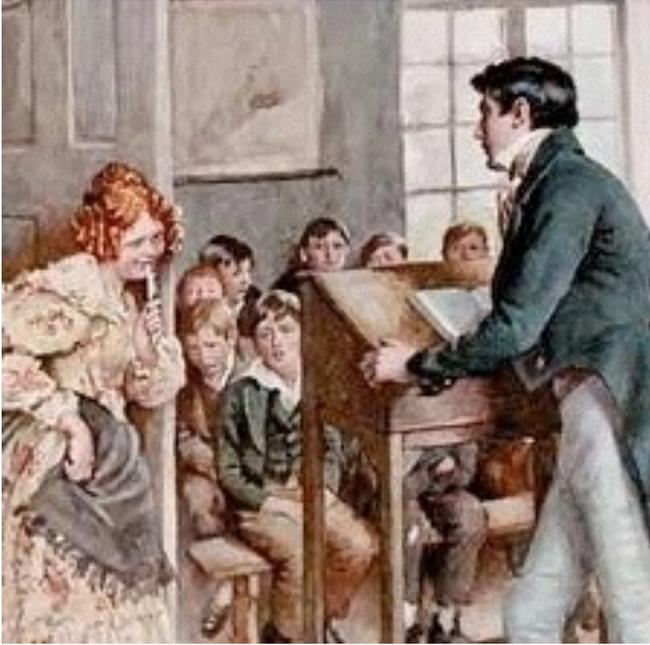
Scrooge, with two women and a man playing all but the Spirits (sinister, life-like puppets) and Tiny Tim (a mop!). This sober, telling interpretation was as appreciated by its audience (including two very small children) as the Redgrave's upbeat version.

Sadly, Dickens's great story, a period piece in my youth, is as relevant to modern Britons as to its contemporaries. Let us look forward to many more productions to spread its message through memorable entertainment. **Julie Weaver**

**ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS** - In the last Newsletter, of September, 2012, I used photographs of the Portsmouth Conference which I should have acknowledged as the work of Herb Moskowitz, of The Friends of Dickens, New York. Thank you, Herb. Herb produces a wonderful online Dickens magazine called the Electronic Buzfuz.

Thanks, too, to Lucinda Hawksley, who kindly let me have her copy of 'Rome and Turnips' when we were at Wroxeter.

**TUESDAY BOOK GROUP**  
**Nicholas Nickleby Open Forum 12<sup>th</sup> March 2013**



**PROGRAMME**

**Welcome and Introductory Presentation**  
*Leila Gilmore*

**Discussion**

*questions submitted by Pat Cemlyn-Jones (PCJ), Lionel Reeves (LR) and Jane Tozer (JT)*

- (a) Does Nicholas learn from his experiences and achieve maturity at the end of his adventures? (PCJ)
- (b) Are the Cheeryble brothers philanthropic or patronising? How do their methods compare with the benevolence of Mr Jarndyce? (PCJ)
- (c) Michael Slater considers 'Nicholas Nickleby' to be Dickens's masterpiece (in the original meaning of the word), yet, although it was extremely popular with the original readers it has received little critical attention. Is this justified? (LR)
- (d) What do we make of the marriage theme in this novel? (LR)
- (e) We often hear Ralph Nickleby talking but very seldom enter his mind. Then, suddenly, there we are in chapters 59 and 62 entering into his thoughts and feelings. Why does Charles Dickens make him 'come alive' so late in the novel? (JT)
- (f) Who is the most fully developed and interesting person in the novel? (JT)

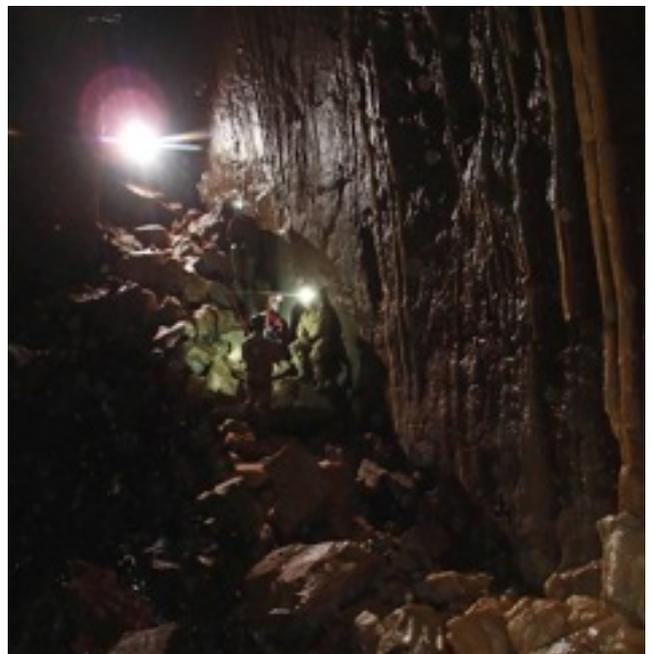
**THE FROZEN DEEP**  
**Dickens's Influence in Unusual Places**

Reading through copy of the "Mendip Times" for February 2013, I came to the caving section entitled: "Exploring The Frozen Deep". The Frozen Deep in Reservoir Hole, found the previous August in Cheddar Gorge, is the largest known chamber in any UK cave. Philip Hendy of Wessex Cave Club, and the writer of the article, says how fortunate he was to be able to see this remarkable natural wonder. The trip took three and half hours and was quite arduous. A large chamber leads to Grand Gallery- "A short climb up past some fine stalagmites leads to "GREAT EXPECTATIONS"; before long "HARD TIMES" is reached and the going gets tough.

Having reached The Frozen Deep, the chamber rock formations, stalactites, stalagmites and bat colony are all described in great detail. Then I read another familiar name: " One passage at a high level, High Country, is heading back towards the Gorge, but the other, DINGLEY DELL, descends steeply to a sump which has not yet, in view of the recent wet weather, been dived to a conclusion."

Cavers will be able to visit The Frozen Deep soon, but unfortunately it is unlikely that it will ever be accessible to non-cavers. If more caves are discovered what could they be called?

**Susan Ham**



**Bristol & Clifton Dickens Society**

Membership (£15 per year), via Liz Croucher at 38 Church Road, Easton-in-Gordano, Bristol BS20 0NB

**COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER - 29<sup>th</sup> OCTOBER 2014**

**Contact Frankie or Eve with your news**

Frankie Sahni, 71 Maple Road, Horfield, BRISTOL BS7 8RE

Eve Fitt: 19 Berkeley Road, Bishopston, Bristol BS7 8HF