

NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 05/07

APRIL 2009

DICKENS' BIRTHDAY PARTY - his 197th...



... unfortunately didn't happen here in Bristol. We were afflicted with unaccustomed (for us) snowy weather and the event had to be cancelled.

We had, however, invited Alan Dilnot (of the Melbourne Branch of the Fellowship) to join our festivities at the party, so its cancellation was somewhat more of an inconvenience than it might otherwise have been. Alan's son lives near Wedmore, and he tends to stay there at this time of year. Alan is a lecturer in English at Monash University, Melbourne. He frequently lectures at Conferences and was a superb host at the Melbourne Conference - the first in the Southern Hemisphere - in 2004.

To make up for the disappointment of his not being with us at the party, Sally, with her usual aplomb, organised another lunch. We couldn't contact everybody at such short notice, so members of the Committee and people who had met Alan in Durham at last year's Conference were invited. Susan Ham, who lives not far from Wedmore, acted as chauffeur for Alan, and we all enjoyed his company and a superb lunch. Thank you Sally.

FS

BRISTOL AND CLIFTON DICKENS SOCIETY AT THE TOBACCO FACTORY

Even before the closure of Bristol Old Vic, the Tobacco Factory in Bristol had established a fine reputation, particularly for performing Shakespeare. The impressive red brick building, originally owned by the Wills tobacco company, has been transformed into a very good working theatre space, and a sizeable, attractive bar and restaurant.

So when the education department at the Tobacco Factory 'phoned Frankie to ask her if the Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society could put on some readings during the Christmas season we were all, understandably, thrilled to bits: performing at the prestigious Tobacco Factory was a real feather in our cap.

The Christmas show there was A CHRISTMAS CAROL, and so, to consolidate the Dickens theme, as well as asking our group, Dr Tony Williams, from

the Fellowship, was invited to give a lecture.

Sally was about to prepare a reading from OLIVER TWIST for the December evening for our own group. So with work to produce a shortened version of this, to fit the time we had been allotted, it fitted the bill well.



We settled on some choice selections, including favourite characters such as Fagin and the Artful Dodger, comic scenes with Bumble and Corney and finishing with Dickens' own reading of murder of Nancy by Bill Sikes. This last piece is very harrowing

but very dramatic and kept the audience spellbound.

Everybody taking part performed brilliantly; Walter Browning transformed into an extremely evil-looking Fagin; Martin Crossley-Evans was a superlative Bumble; and Charmian Howard and Don Brown gave heart-wrenching performances as Nancy and Sikes. Sally Fry's young friend, (Duncan), also gave us a suitably soulful and vulnerable Oliver.

Carrie Rhys-Davies, the Tobacco Factory's education officer, was very impressed by the quality of the performances and the costumes, which surpassed her expectations.

Those of us who took part had a wonderful time, the audience was most appreciative, and we have high hopes of being invited back to the Tobacco Factory again.

EF

DICKENS ON STAGE IN DECEMBER

From childhood, Dickens wrote, produced, and performed plays with and for his family and friends. His novels, too, are intensely theatrical, with large casts of strongly-defined characters, dramatic situations and clearly described settings, which transferred successfully to the stage of his day and later to film, radio and television.

Christmas as we know it owes much to Dickens. His sympathy with contemporary scholars' desire to record age-old traditions, which had faded with the reformation and Commonwealth and were in danger of vanishing amid growing industrialisation and urbanisation, produced *Pickwick's Christmas at Dingley Dell* and a series of Christmas Books, of which *A CHRISTMAS CAROL* is the most famous.

OLIVER TWIST

Clifton College presented a well-paced *Oliver Twist* (adapted by Neil Bartlett) using simple properties against a static, suitably-dingy set, highlit to denote scene changes: interiors, alleys and London Bridge. A large cast used the stage with ease to characterise the well-contrasted pairings of innocent Oliver and street-wise Dodger/ Narrator, 'kindly' Fagin and brutal Sikes, genteel Rose and brash Nancy, with only the Bumbles to provide light relief, albeit of an unpleasant kind.

NICHOLAS NICKLEBY

The Clifton Preparatory musical *SMIKE* (by Roger Holman and Simon May) opened in a modern school, whose rehearsal- of the Dotheboys Hall episode is transported to 1819 and then back, after all have learned the value of friendship. Despite a maximum age of twelve, another large cast acted, sang and danced with enthusiastic confidence, Mrs Squeers being especially convincing.

CHRISTMAS

(*A Christmas Carol*)

In Tony Farrow's pantomime-style version at The Tobacco Factory, Scrooge became a Bristol money-lender "who holds the docks to ransom", supported by a lively cast of six, who played a range of

characters, shifted props and sang to accompany the old man's transformation from selfish miser to popular philanthropist. Comedy prevailed over the book's darker social comments, but the essence came through in this very enjoyable production.



The Fezziwig Ball
(*A Christmas Carol*)

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

In 1852, Dickens spoke at the inauguration of the Manchester Free Library. The present Central Library's Christmas Exhibition included original and early Dickens' texts - including a German *Christmas Carol (Der Weihnachtsabend)*; fittingly, therefore, its intimate basement theatre was host to *Great*

Expectations, in another Neil Bartlett version, firing on all cylinders... "deserving a gold star for inventiveness" (Manchester Evening News).

On a sinisterly dark stage right, a huge disc provided both percussion (struck Rank-like by Pip to open the play) and a scene-changing screen for shadows, sunlight, Miss Havisham's clock-face, St Paul's Cathedral, the Thames current and steamboat paddle. Lighting changes suggested night, day and the fire, with a few rapidly-moved properties to allow the story to flow seamlessly. The set was inventive, with up to eight tall grey doors representing tombs, walls or openings through which characters came and went. The doors glided about effortlessly becoming the corridors of Satis House, as Estella took Pip to meet Miss Havisham. Sound effects - gunfire, anvil, lapping water, electronic music, wreathing marsh and river mists and a back-projected London silhouette, completed the setting.

The cast of eight brought this sombre novel to life, giving their all to provide a powerful Magwitch, a shrewish Mrs Joe, a pert Estella and a commanding Miss Havisham, all influencing Pip's uncomfortable progress from boyish naivety to adult awareness. Surely the author would have approved!

Dickens decided against a professional stage career, but in 1853 devised a new dramatic entertainment of public readings from his works (enabling him to play all the parts himself!). Between 1853 and 1870 He travelled all over Britain and America, giving readings, reaching vast audiences and making his works hugely popular. This tradition continued via Branby Williams, Emlyn Williams, Simon Callow and Gerald Dickens - his own great-great-grandson. Dickens wrote as a Victorian for Victorians, but his works are for all time. How many enthusiasts have been inspired to a lifetime of reading delight by a version - traditional of innovative - in the medium so dear to its creator?

GETTING TO KNOW YOU - LIONEL REEVES



There is surely no-one in our group who doesn't know Lionel. He was our Hon. Secretary almost without a break from 1984 - 2004. Charles Darling (Susan Ham's father) was President of the society when Lionel first became Secretary. Bob Wilson (Sally Fry's father) was Treasurer; and Vera Buret (whom many of us fondly remember), was Dramatic Secretary.

Lionel is also well-known among the International Dickens community.

Whenever I attend Council meetings in London, or International Conferences wherever they may be, people enquire after Lionel.

He first joined the Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society in 1963. He was at that time a member of Stella Wilson's drama group when Colin Berkovitch was taken ill after a dress rehearsal and was unable to play Noah Claypole. For one performance Lionel played Noah Claypole, memorising the part in that short time, which was more than Stella (Sally Fry's mother) had expected of him. She had asked him to stand in, but to read the part.

Lionel has attended conferences all over England and was heavily involved in the two conferences we have hosted in Bristol, in 1993 and 2003. He remembers particularly the London conference of 1970, which included a service in Westminster Abbey to celebrate the centenary of Dickens' death. He says that perhaps the highlight of his membership was organising the 1993 conference together with Rowena Fowler of the Department of Continuing Education of Bristol University.

A teacher by profession, Lionel was for a number of years an active member of the Schools' Libraries Association. He worked for 11½ years at Dunmail School, Southmead. At the moment he is writing a History of our society, with early detail still to be researched. Besides being such an active member of the BCDS, Lionel was for many years a Blue-Badge Guide for the South West; and is currently Head Guide of Bristol Cathedral. He loves theatre, and was for a time on the Committee of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre Club, and Chairman of their Reading Group. He is often to be seen at operas at the Hippodrome, and concerts at the Colston Hall. I once came across him at St. David's Hall, Cardiff, where he follows the Welsh National Orchestra and Choir.

From the Reading Groups and the Dickens Birthday parties in February, we all know Lionel to be a most generous host. And this not only to us, but to many other people as well. Thank you Lionel.

TRIP TO THE BLACK COUNTRY MUSEUM, DUDLEY

Up the M5, right next to Dudley Zoo, is The Black Country Museum.

On Saturday 4th October last year, about twenty of us arrived by coach and, after a brief welcome from one of the guides who gave a useful briefing - and a warning that queues formed early for the fish and chip shop - we were let loose on the best day out I've had in years.

The museum covers a large area, and there's still room to re-erect more buildings as they become available. I walked down a long slope to the school (later I found out the trolley buses and... were free). A school room with slates and coal scuttle, edifying pictures on the wall and high windows. It was useful to be reminded that 5½ yards make one rod, pole, or perch, and I never did master the volume tables.

You could watch chain-making demonstrations, gawp in shop windows - I liked the lace and the hardware shops.

Lunch time and we had only scratched the surface of all the delights on offer. The fish and chips were worth the queue even though they cost £5. Cooked in dripping, it was a year's cholesterol in one meal - and then there was the pub!

Roll up for the canal boat trip into the limestone tunnel. It took an hour, cost £4.30 and we're all season-ticket holders, so can return as often as we like until this October. The tunnel runs some 2½ miles vaguely south towards Stourbridge Canal. On the return, Frankie demonstrated her legging skills, lying on a plank and walking the boat along the tunnel wall. It still cost her the same as the rest of us.

On the walk back up the hill I ignored the Working Men's Club. Being a snob, I preferred to go round the fascinating collection of old motor vehicles.

Thanks to Sybil for having the bright idea and to Eve for being i/c transport.

FURTHER NOTES ON 'SAM WELLER'S LANE' AND AMELIA EDWARDS



The First Appearance of Mr. Samuel Weller Phiz (Halbot K. Browne)

Sylvia Kelly's illustrated article in the last issue, exploring the possible identity of the property where Sam Weller's reunion with Mary took place was very welcome. A ramble organised by our Society on September 1908 started with a visit to 'Sam Weller's Lane' before setting out for Shirehampton and Penpole Point. ⁽¹⁾

It has been assumed that Dickens selected this location when he was assigned to visit Bristol in November 1835 to report the election speeches of Lord John Russell for *The Morning Chronicle*. Dickens would have gained a general impression of the city on that occasion and probably made notes for further use, but certainly not with Mr Pickwick in mind; he was first approached by Chapman and Hall to write what became *The Pickwick Papers* on 10 February of the following year. ⁽²⁾

Dickens arrived at *The Bush Inn*, Corn Street Bristol at 9 pm on 8 November 1835. The following morning he wrote to his fiancée, Catherine Hogarth -

'My dearest, Kate. You must not be surprised by the brevity and matter-of-fact style of my letters, for we have so much to do, and so many cares and anxieties about the successful result of our expedition, that I am scarcely able to devote one moment to any other considerations than those connected with the business.' ⁽³⁾

Dickens' overriding aim was to have his report on the London streets ahead of the rival daily newspapers.

When our Society's founder and first Honorary Secretary, J W T Ley, wrote his annotated edition of Forster's *Life of Dickens* (1928) he observed 'how vague are the references in *Pickwick* to Bristol, whilst the references to Bath are marked by the fullest detail.' Ley points out that in 1835, before the construction of the viaduct, Park Street ⁽⁴⁾ was much steeper at the bottom. Approaching from College Green there was a 'short steep dip' before the rise of the 'long steep hill'. At this juncture, in Frogmore Street, stood an 'old-fashioned chemist's shop' that Dickens could have noted and used as his model for Sawyer, late Nockemorf, in Clifton. Once at the top of Park Street, the writer concludes, there were 'scores of houses that would answer the description of the house in which Arabella Allen and the pretty housemaid lived.' ⁽⁵⁾ As Sylvia Kelly noted, during the Dickens Fellowship Conference, held in Bristol in 1911, leading Dickensians visited the area but were unable, despite 'a brave attempt' to identify that lane. ⁽⁶⁾

But, despite being so busy, had Dickens managed to squeeze in a visit to his maternal relatives living in Bristol in 1835? (They were leading citizens; his great-uncle, John Barrow, had been mayor in 1823/24). It seems unlikely, for in 1851, when Dickens was performing with his theatrical company at the Victoria Rooms, he met John's son, Robert Gay Barrow, for the first time. Dickens told Kate, 'I find the Barrow who lives here (to my great astonishment) a gentleman of condition and a very agreeable man.' ⁽⁷⁾

Turning to the novelist, Amelia Edwards, she contributed to the writing of Dickens' *Christmas Stories*. Following the success of his five *Christmas Books*, when Dickens launched his weekly journal, *Household Words*, in 1850, each year he issued a Christmas Number containing a story to which other writers were invited to contribute chapters. In 1859 *All The Year Round* succeeded *Household Words* but the tradition of Christmas numbers continued. Amelia Edwards contributed material for *A Message From The Sea* (1860) and also wrote a chapter for each of the following; *Tom Tiddler's Ground* (1861), *Mrs Lirriper's Lodgings* (1863), *Mrs Lirriper's Legacy* (1864) and *Mugby Junction* (1866). If you have a volume of the collected *Christmas Stories* it will almost certainly contain only the chapters written entirely by Dickens, ⁽⁸⁾ although some full versions have been published in recent years.



Amelia Ann Blanford Edwards (1831-1892)

Lionel Reeves

- (1) Bristol Daily Mercury 7 September 1908 p 6 col. E
- (2) HOUSE, Madeline & Graham STOREY, (eds) *The Letters of Charles Dickens vol 1*: Clarendon Press Oxford 1989 p 12 seq
- (3) *Ibid* p 91
- (4) Dickens mistakenly transferred Park Street Bristol to Bath.
- (5) LEY J W T (ed) *The Life of Charles Dickens*: Parker 1928 p 70 seq
- (6) Bristol Times & Mirror 7 February 1912 p 6
- (7) STOREY, Graham et al: *The Letters of Charles Dickens vol 6*: Clarendon Press Oxford 1988 p 538
- (8) THOMAS, D A: *Dickens and the Short Story*: Batsford 1982 pp 149-152

LITERARY LUNCH

On Thursday, January 8th over 20 of us assembled at Sally's for the first Bristol & Clifton Dickens Society New Year Literary Lunch. It was Sally's brain-child, heartily endorsed by the Committee as a great way to usher in 2009 in true Dickensian style. The Committee was to provide the lunch; and some people came prepared to do a short reading on the theme of Winter.

Sally's house looked beautiful. She and Trevor must have worked so hard to lay the tables so elegantly, each one with its own pretty floral arrangement. We all had coffee and a chat on arrival, (it was lovely to see John and Cynthia Palser again) and then we got down to the business of the readings. There was a fine selection of extracts from Dickens' works and one or two others of non-Dickensian origin - we even had a piece from Sir Thomas More's "Utopia" which Peter Michael challenged us (unsuccessfully!) to identify! We were surprised and delighted that there was not one single duplication. Needless to say, all the readings were much enjoyed.

Then came lunch. Committee members had prepared one or two dishes each, and acted as waitresses. The food was hot, plentiful, delicious and was enjoyed and praised by all. But what really stood out was the most wonderful party atmosphere which pervaded the event from beginning to end. This was largely thanks to Sally's legendary hosting skills and to Trevor's tireless efforts behind the scenes. We owe them both our sincere thanks for making it an event to remember for a long time. Dare we hope that it might be the first of many?

Liz Croucher

The Garrick Club... *is instituted for the general patronage of drama; for the purpose of combining the use of a Club, on economic principles, with the advantages of a literary society; for bringing together supporters of drama; and for the formation of a theatrical library, with works on costume.*



Membership is by invitation. The original assurance of the committee was "that it would be better that ten unobjectionable men should be excluded than one terrible bore should be admitted (Charles Dickens was elected, but Jeremy Paxman was initially refused because "he was full of himself"). Today the Club, founded in 1831, has some 1,300 members including many of the most distinguished actors and men of letters in England.

Don Hill

(Oft time recipient of Club hospitality)



The Julian Trust... in July 1996, moved into Little Bishop Street (opening event pictured above), with facilities that met high standards in environmental health, and a lease from Caring at Christmas that would secure tenure hopefully for 50 years. It would of course be wonderful if the need for a Night Shelter had disappeared long before 2046!

THE JULIAN TRUST OPEN DAY

To love a human being is to accept him as he is. If you wait until he is changed, you are only loving an idea."

Julian of Norwich

This is the motto and guiding principle of the Julian Trust, the only freely accessible night shelter for the homeless in Bristol, a charity which is supported by the Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society.

In September a group from the Society visited the Trust on their Open Day. The Julian Trust is supported entirely by voluntary donations, receiving nothing from the government or the local authorities.

In the course of one year the charity provides 3,600 breakfasts and 19,200 dinners.

Fifteen beds are available for the first 15 in the queue, on five nights a week, at £1,170 a week. Guests are made welcome, given a clean comfortable bed, and can shower, and wash their clothes. They leave after breakfast the next morning.

Many more come just for the evening meal, and would stay if more beds were available; sadly this is not possible, unless more volunteers can be found for the night shift. We were told that the official figure of seventeen sleeping rough in Bristol is vastly underestimated.

We were impressed by the bright welcoming atmosphere, and by the dedication of the Trust volunteers.

All the money raised by our members from out-readings goes to this deserving cause; I am sure Charles Dickens would give it his enthusiastic support.

Pat Cemlyn-Jones

GARDEN PARTY AT 71 MAPLE ROAD

Your programmes say there will be a garden party at my house in July; but left the date to be decided. That decision is now made. You are all invited to my house on the evening of Friday, 3rd July. No need to bring anything with you. I should like you to come as my guests. In my 'new' house - anything seems new for a long time when you have lived in a house for 37 years, as we did in Logan Road - we have the kind of back garden you want to share with other people. So I shall look forward to seeing as many of you as possible then - between 6.30 and 9.30 pm, so that people who work can come and relax after a hard week's work.

It would be helpful if you could let me know if you will be unable to come. But if you have done this and your plans change, come anyway.

We had winter Dickens readings at the Literary Lunch. It would be nice to have summer readings at this summer evening event. Not many summer readings come immediately to mind, so this may prove to be quite challenging.

FS

DR TONY WILLIAMS

Dr Tony Williams, a former Joint Honorary Secretary of the Dickens Fellowship, paid two visits to Bristol before Christmas. He visited our group in November, to talk on "Dickens and the Moving Age", and in December he gave a public lecture at the Tobacco Factory about Dickens' extensive reading tours.

Tony is a very popular and informative speaker; his entertaining talks always full of interesting details. Dickens was keen on railways and travelled on them extensively in both Britain and America. He was involved in a bad train crash at Staplehurst, in Kent, where many people were killed, and where he worked frantically rescuing injured passengers, including his consort, Ellen Ternan, and her mother. A similar train crash appeared in *Dombey and Son* - our book for next year!

Tony made Dickens tours and interest in railways come alive, and was much appreciated by his audiences.

EF

WAITROSE AND THE JULIAN TRUST

Last August I picked up a leaflet in Henleaze Waitrose.

They are running a scheme called "Community Matters". Each month the branch donates £1000 to be divided between three local good causes. Customers are invited to nominate a cause they deem worthy of inclusion; the nominations are considered, and three are chosen for each current month.

Each customer is given a green plastic disc on every visit to the supermarket. The customer chooses which of the causes they would like Waitrose to support by slipping the disc into one of the three clear plastic containers provided by the exit. It is then obvious how each charity is faring (the more tokens a cause gets, the greater the share of the £1000 it receives).

I nominated the Julian Trust for the Homeless (which our Dickens Society supports). I first contacted Meg Grimes, the Chair and founder member of the Trust (in a roundabout way via our Treasurer, Liz Croucher, and a past Treasurer of the Trust).

When I discovered that Waitrose had chosen the Julian Trust as one of the three charities for the month of October, I was elated - I felt as though I walked on air - arthritis and all!

Waitrose has now sent to the Julian Trust a cheque for £485. Well done Waitrose and their customers for their empathetic choice.

Deirdre Browning

BIRTHS

Last year, at critical times in the Dickens calendar, three of us were awaiting the births of grandchildren. Susan Ham had to miss the AGM because of the birth of George James, to David and Kate Ham, on his parents' wedding anniversary. And in September, just as the last Newsletter was coming out, your editors were, so-to-speak, 'expecting'. On 9th September Miriam Sylvie Leah Berry was born to Eve's son Danny and his partner Rebecca; and on 18th September Frankie's daughter, Tara, gave birth to William Edward Rimmington - the 5th generation of Richard's family to be either William Edward or Edward William (Richard - Tara's husband - is William Edward Richard).

Bristol & Clifton Dickens Society

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

COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER 25TH JULY 2009

Contact Frankie of Eve with your news

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

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