

The Dickens Fellowship, North East England

Branch no: 198

NEWSLETTER

Volume 13

June 2007

CONTENTS

- PART I: *On a sad anniversary of the hero's death, our Secretary finds cause for some celebration, and nowhere does he mention the agonies of a replacement knee operation.*
- PART II: *In which the editor offers a reminder that the hero had many talents, and begs forgiveness from those whom he has neglected.*
- PART III: *To our well-concealed astonishment, we see that the seedy and disreputable trade of journalism enticed the hero in his day.*
- PART IV: *We see that the lure of fame and money were enough to lead our hero into what many see as an error of judgement.*
- PART V: *Whereupon we stumble blindly into the strangest, and sometimes most tenuous, of connections between the hero and the trivial.*
- PART VI: *All heroes have their followers and we ask a distant colleague to discuss the nature of his devotion.*
- PART VII: *Like Gulliver in Lilliput, we see an attempt to bring our hero down to size .*
- PART VIII: *Of his brother, and we see that not all heroic qualities are inherited .*
- PART IX: *All heroes have their humours, and in this closing section we seek to have our own.*

PART I:

On a sad anniversary of the hero's death, our Secretary finds cause for some celebration, and nowhere does he mention the agonies of a replacement knee operation.

Dear Fellow Dickensians.

On the 9th of June, each year, Dickens Fellowship branches all over the world organise memorial luncheons, evenings, dinners etc., in remembrance of the death of The Inimitable Boz in 1870.

We were a part of these commemorative celebrations when we organised a lunch time gathering at the Marquis of Granby Hotel on the outskirts of Gateshead. As is usual with any of our gatherings we love to share a joke or two, have some really good conversation with one another and remember the life of a man who continues to give us pleasure in our lives.

It is also usual that, along with a really good meal, it is my honour to toast the memory of Charles Dickens. I always find this part of my duties as Branch Secretary very rewarding and it is always an honour to do so.

With regards to our hosting the 2008 conference in Durham City, well it won't be long before we will be saying we are next in line, as Philadelphia will be holding this years conference in July. We wish our friends well in their endeavours and sincerely hope to see many of them In Durham next year.

If by any chance any of our associate members are visiting Philadelphia for the conference a personal report of it would be really appreciated.

Also my dear friends if any of you are fortunate enough to visit the newly opened Dickens World Theme Park in Chatham we would love to hear your views on what was on offer.

I will close on these words and just say enjoy your summer.

Yours in fellowship.

Herbert Savory (Secretary)

PART II:

In which the editor offers a reminder that the hero had many talents, and begs forgiveness from those whom he has neglected.



FROM THE EDITOR: For many of us, it is the famous novels of Mr Dickens that first draw us into the world wide circle of admirers and Fellowship members. Indeed, it is through these works that Mr Dickens continues to enjoy popular acclaim, almost two hundred years since his birth in 1812. It is also his novels that continue to offer inspiration to many talented performers in the theatre, on radio, on television and in the cinema.

For Mr Dickens himself, however, his novels were only one part of a full, rich and varied life. They may be his most enduring legacy, but any examination of his day-to-day life in the middle of the nineteenth century can show that Mr Dickens devoted as much of his time and labours to his efforts as a journalist and a theatrical performer, as well as to meeting the burdens and responsibilities of family life, as he did to writing his novels.

In this newsletter, we have sought to explore some of these other activities. The recent discovery of the sad state of the grave of his brother, Frederick Dickens, in Darlington has prompted a number of thoughts on Dickens and his complicated relations with his family members. His journalism, an activity that preoccupied Mr Dickens constantly as editor of both *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, is also considered, and we reproduce a facsimile copy of one edition of his magazines (as we would now call them!) A love of the theatre was one of the mainstays of his life, and we also offer some further musings on Mr Dickens as a performer.

Such a concentration on what may be called his 'other' activities is not to distract from the marvellous and continuing pleasures that can be had from reading his novels – the lively discussions at our monthly Branch meetings show that his works can still stir the imagination and the intellect – but rather it is to acknowledge the very human nature of Mr Dickens. He was a ferociously **busy** person throughout his life, constantly travelling, writing, speaking, organising, urging, cajoling, fussing, laughing, mocking, teasing etc., etc., - a man that truly showed that the real glory and joy of life is to be actively engaged in all that one does.

(But, before we start; an apology. A number of Branch members have kindly supplied material for possible inclusion in this newsletter. Jill Spearman, Huw George, Bob Pykett, Herbert and Bob Kelly have all generously offered pieces that have, due to the inclusion of other contributions, had to be held over to later editions. I am hugely grateful for their efforts, and hope that omissions in this edition will not deter them from offering material in the future! Please, keep the stuff coming in...!)

PART III:

To our well-concealed astonishment, we see that the seedy and disreputable trade of journalism enticed the hero in his day.

Below is a summary – reproduced from the internet home page of the Dickens Fellowship - of Dickens' working life as a journalist. On the page opposite, we reproduce a facsimile copy of *All the Year Round*, to give readers an idea of how the magazine would have looked upon publication in the 1860's (We apologise for the 'quality' of the image, as they used to say on the television). Actual size would have been approximately 'A5' the size of this newsletter.

- 1829 - 31 **Freelance law reporter**
1831 - 32 **Parliamentary reporter, *The Mirror of Parliament***
1832 - 34 **Reporter, *True Sun***
1834 - 36 **Reporter, *The Morning Chronicle***
1837 - 39 **Editor, *Bentley's Miscellany***

First editor of the monthly magazine, Dickens found it difficult to work with the publisher, Richard Bentley. Replaced by William Harrison Ainsworth.

- 1840 - 41 **Founder and Editor, *Master Humphrey's Clock***

A weekly magazine, conceived and written entirely by Dickens, Master Humphrey's Clock failed in its purpose to be a popular miscellany. However, it survived as solely a vehicle for the serial publication of The Old Curiosity Shop, which had been launched in the fourth issue as a less ambitious work, and Barnaby Rudge.

- 1846 **Editor, *The Daily News***

Dickens soon discovered that he was not well suited to the editorial routines of a daily publication.

- 1850 - 59 **Co-founder and Editor, *Household Words***

For the last 20 years of his life, Dickens was to edit his own weekly magazine. Household Words published topical features, essays, short fiction and poetry by a variety of writers, including Elizabeth Barrett Browning, Wilkie Collins and Mrs Gaskell. Following a dispute between the publishers and Dickens, related to the separation from his wife in 1859, publication ceased.

- 1859 - 70 **Founder and Editor, *All the Year Round***

Dickens's new weekly magazine was similar to Household Words, but serial fiction was introduced as a major element. Among the novels published in All the Year Round were Wilkie Collins's The Woman in White and The Moonstone, and Dickens's A Tale of Two Cities, Great Expectations and Bleak House. Another major feature from 1860 was a series of stories written by Dickens, blending fact with fiction, recounting the experiences of an 'Uncommercial traveller'. These stories were later published separately as a book. The magazine continued to be published after Dickens's death, for 18 years under the editorship of his son Charley, finally ceasing publication in 1893.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND.

A WEEKLY JOURNAL.

CONDUCTED BY CHARLES DICKENS.

No. 1.]

SATURDAY, APRIL 30, 1859.

[PRICE 3d.]

A TALE OF TWO CITIES.

In Three Books.

BY CHARLES DICKENS.

BOOK THE FIRST. RECALLED TO LIFE.

CHAPTER I. THE PERIOD.

It was the best of times, it was the worst of times, it was the age of wisdom, it was the age of foolishness, it was the epoch of belief, it was the epoch of incredulity, it was the season of Light, it was the season of Darkness, it was the spring of hope, it was the winter of despair, we had everything before us, we had nothing before us, we were all going direct to Heaven, we were all going direct the other way—in short, the period was so far like the present period, that some of its noisiest authorities insisted on its being received, for good or for evil, in the superlative degree of comparison only.

There were a King with a large jaw and a queen with a plain face, on the throne of England; there were a King with a large jaw and a queen with a fair face, on the throne of France. In both countries it was clearer than crystal to the lords of the State preserves of loaves and fishes, that things in general were settled for ever.

It was the year of Our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-five. Spiritual revelations were conceded to England at that favoured period, as at this. Mrs. Southcott had recently attained her five-and-twentieth blessed birthday, of whom a prophetic private in the Life Guards had heralded the sublime appearance by announcing that arrangements were made for the swallowing up of London and Westminster. Even the Cock-lane ghost had been laid only a round dozen of years, after rapping out its messages, as the spirits of this very year last past (supernaturally deficient in originality) rapped out theirs. Mere messages in the earthly order of events had lately come to the English Crown and People, from a congress of British subjects in America; which, strange to relate, have proved more important to the human race than any communications yet received through any of the chickens of the Cock-lane brood.

France, less favoured on the whole as to matters spiritual than her sister of the shield and trident, rolled with exceeding smoothness down hill, making paper money and spending it. Under the guidance of her Christian pastors, she

entertained herself, besides, with such human achievements as sentencing a youth to have his hands cut off, his tongue torn out with pincers and his body burned alive, because he had not knelt down in the rain to do honour to a dirt procession of monks which passed within his view, at a distance of some fifty or sixty yards. It is likely enough that, rooted in the woods of France and Norway, there were growing trees when that sufferer was put to death, already marked by the Woodman, Fate, to come down and be sawn into boards, to make a certain movable framework with a sack and a knife in it, terrible in history. It is likely enough that in the rough outhouses of some fillers of the heavy lands adjacent to Paris, there were sheltered from the weather that very day, rude carts, bespattered with rustic mire, smuffed about by pigs, and roosted in by poultry, which the Farmer, Death had already set apart to be his tombs of the Revolution. But, that Woodman and the Farmer, though they work unceasingly, work silently, and no one heard them as they went about with muffled tread: the rather, forasmuch as to entertain any suspicion that they were awake, was to be atheistical and traitorous.

In England, there was scarcely an amount of order and protection to justify such nation-hoasting. Daring burglaries by armed men, and highway robberies, took place in the capital itself every night; families were publicly cautioned to go out of town without removing their furniture to upholsterers' warehouses for security; the highwayman in the dark was a City tradesman in the light, and, being recognized and challenged by his fellow-tradesman whom he stopped in his character of "the Captain," gallantly struck him through the head and rode away; the man was waylaid by seven robbers, and the guard of three dead, and then got shot dead himself; the other four, "in consequence of the failure of his ammunition;" after which the mail was robbed in peace; that magnificent potentate, Lord Mayor of London, was made to stand a deliver on Turnham Green, by one highwayman who despoiled the illustrious creature in sight of all his retinue; prisoners in London gaols fought battles with their turnkeys, and the majesty of the law fired blunderbusses in among them, less with rounds of shot and ball; thieves snipped diamond crosses from the necks of noble lords; Court drawing-rooms; musketeers went into Gilce's, to search for contraband goods, and

PART IV:

We see that the lure of fame and money were enough to lead our hero into what many see as an error of judgement.

The Last Readings **Dickens' British tour 1868-70**

By SUSAN HUDSON

In volume 12 of this newsletter, we looked at the work of Australian actor, Phil Zaccariah, who has recently sought to recreate Dickens on stage, performing readings from some of his most popular works. Phil Zaccariah drew his inspiration from the public reading tours to which Charles Dickens devoted so much of his time in the later years of his life. In this newsletter, we look at what it was actually like for Charles Dickens while on his last, great, reading tour.

Charles Dickens gave 425 readings in his lifetime, netting a handsome £45,000 over a dozen years. But while lucrative, the readings took a huge toll on his health.

The last were organized after his return from a tour of America in 1867. He had developed a fondness for travel and approached his publisher for time off to visit the USA. They advanced money for a fourteen-month holiday; Dickens would write about his adventures upon return. But even before this trip a persistent fistula from too much sitting at his desk had to be cut out (without anaesthetic) prior to leaving.

His fame had long ago spread to America and although feted on arrival, he upset some when he criticized the Americans for selling extracts from his books and not giving compensation, thus breaching International Copyright. Newspapers were hostile and Dickens was upset. In April 1868, he gave his last New York reading and returned home.

While he profited from the sea voyage, gained a tan, and looked several years younger on arrival in England, it was uncertain whether he was well enough for the rigours of a farewell British tour that included 100 readings, the first in just six months.

He was having trouble with his eyes and a foot and was distressed when his youngest son left for Australia (to join his elder brother) and a month later his brother, Frederick, died.

Despite all this he was buoyed by the prospect of taking his work to ordinary people again. Audiences were enthralled by readings so dramatic (especially his re-enactment of Sikes' murder of Nancy) that ladies sometimes fainted and were taken out 'stiff and rigid.' The intensity of emotion forced Dickens to change his sweat-drenched shirts several times during each performance.

The tour began at St Martin's Hall in London in October 1868 but even before the month closed he was having sick and sleepless nights. He hated travelling on trains (was this a legacy of the dreadful Staplehurst train accident with Ellen Ternan?) and later, when one foot went lame, doctors ordered him to cancel several engagements and rest. He consented but worried about the loss of £500.

The doctors attributed a later episode of weakness and numbness on his left side to overwork. In April 1869, when Dickens began mispronouncing words and forgetting names and numbers, a distinguished physician, Sir Thomas Watson, provided a more troubling diagnosis. He concluded, after a thorough examination of the great writer, that he was on the brink of a stroke as a result of 'over-work and excitement, incidental to his readings', and advised he cease work immediately.

But Dickens was resilient (and rebellious) and pleaded for a further twelve readings. It was agreed - but without rail travel. His last reading was given to St James Hall in London on January 1870 - six months before he died.

It was Dickens' ill-health - and a doctors prognosis - that finished his career as a public speaker. Instead he turned his mind to the completion of another book - *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* - of which only six of the planned twelve instalments had been completed at the time of his death in June 1870.

Sources: *Dickens A Life* by Norman & Jeanne MacKenzie (Oxford University Press, Great Britain, 1979)

The World of Charles Dickens by Angus Wilson (Martin, Secker & Warburg, England, 1970)

PART V:

Whereupon we stumble blindly into the strangest, and sometimes most tenuous, of connections between the hero and the trivial.

Mr Dickens and....

NUMBER 13:

Mr Dickens and.....a multi-million pound theme park !

(The following is reproduced from *The Independent* newspaper of 24th May 2007, a personal opinion written by John Walsh).

The first Dickens World theme park opens its doors today, May 24th. The £62m park, built on a 71,000 sq ft site at Chatham Maritime in Kent by the Continuum company, promises to let visitors "step back into Dickensian England" to become "immersed in the urban streets, sounds and smells of the 19th century". Visitors will find themselves stiffening, in a very English way, at the interactive approaches made by the 60-odd costumed Victorian "characters" who patrol the main courtyard, behaving in typically Dickensian ways. There's a rat-catcher, a schoolmaster and a policeman, but, sadly, no Beadle.

Among the attractions is The Haunted House of Ebenezer Scrooge, with its quartet of famous ghosts, Peggotty's Boat House (but not, presumably, the shipwreck which drowns Steerforth and Little Em'ly), and a long boat ride based on the escape of Magwitch the reformed convict in *Great Expectations*. Otherwise most of the "World" seems to deal in generic notions of what we think of as "Dickensian" - tragic orphans, heart-of-gold barmaids, burly ruffians, lovable-scamp pickpockets, looming authority figures, lovelorn spinsters and amiable, bald philanthropists.

The organisers are proud of the fact that they called in The Dickens Fellowship as consultants, to ensure the "authenticity of the time, characters and storylines," so that the School Room exhibit will carry the firm smack of Victorian discipline, and when you pass Newgate Prison on the boat ride, it will look broadly as it did in 1850, only smaller. But one suspects that the "multi-sensory animatronic experience" offered in the 250-seater theatre, and the "naughty delights" of the burlesque evening at the Free and Easy Victorian Music Hall will owe more to second-hand movie iconography than to Dickens's imagination.

It seems a shame that there are no dramatised scenes from the Dickens canon, to amaze audiences. The death by guillotine of Sidney Carton at the end of *A Tale of Two Cities* would wake up the most jaded scholar. Maudlin readers of *The Old Curiosity Shop* would flock to witness the death of Little Nell every hour. Children would surely enjoy Wackford Squeers's inept teaching at Dotheboys Hall ("C-l-e-a-n, clean, verb active, to make bright, to scour. W-I-n, win, d-e-r, der, winder, a casement. When the boy knows this out of a book, he goes and does it") before he is attacked and thrashed by Nicholas Nickleby.

It is frankly distressing to find, in Dickens World, that "Fagin's Den" is the soft play area for tiny children. Play area? It should be a key learning zone, teaching avid delinquents the arts of successful pickpocketing. It also seems a little perverse to close down the attraction on 25 December, when they could offer a theme-park coup: Enjoy Your Christmas Lunch with the Reformed Ebenezer Scrooge, a Giant Turkey and the Whole Cratchit Family!

Its intentions are reasonable enough - the park will offer "a new way to understand Dickens and his characters, as well as understanding the times and conditions people experienced in the early 19th century". Only a hardened cynic would argue that neither writers nor their times can be better appreciated by walking around a mocked-up simulacrum of London in the Olden Days, or that the best way - "new" or old -- to understand Dickens and his characters is to read his books again. But just reading won't bring the crowds will it? Remember the advice of Mr Sleary, the circus-master in *Hard Times*? "People mutht be amuthed. They can't be alwayth a-learning, nor yet they can't be alwayth a-working, they an't made for it.'

NUMBER 14:

Mr Dickens and....."I-Cue" technology

The *Sunday Telegraph* of August, 2006, noted the new technology of "I-Cue", in which novels can be downloaded onto a mobile phone and viewed in three formats - 'page', 'ticker' and 'flicker' (where the words are flashed up one at a time, at adjustable speed). The first work to be processed this way was *A Christmas Carol* "now available in spasms on a phone near you for around two pounds".

(From the 'London Particular' Oct '06, published by the Dickens Fellowship)

NUMBER 15:

Mr Dickens and.....the struggle against apartheid

In a recent edition of *Mr Dick's Kite* - an informal newsletter of the London Fellowship - there appeared a piece that suggested that the book *Oliver Twist* played a part in the historic struggle against apartheid in South Africa.

Apparently, a researcher examining the roots of the famous Soweto riots in 1976, discovered that classic books of English literature were able to escape the prohibitions of the censors and, for many, *Oliver Twist*, and *Nicholas Nickleby* provided a source of inspiration. It showed them, claimed the researcher, that suffering could be a universal condition, but that hope, redemption and salvation was also possible. One lesson in particular could be learnt - that every individual deserved a place in the conscience of friends, family, neighbours and history.

The article continues, "In spite of the efforts made by humanitarian organisations, the number of Dickens books that arrived did not meet demand. So they were read aloud in the evening by candle light, the youths seated in circle, so they could all benefit. A Soweto school calculated that they had three copies of *Oliver Twist* for 1,500 pupils but, in spite of that, all had 'read' it."

PART VI:

All heroes have their followers and we ask a distant colleague to discuss the nature of his devotion.

Mr Brian Johnson is one of Branch's 'exiled' members, living in London, the city of Dickens, as he has all of his life. He has kindly offered to share his thoughts and personal history with the rest of our members. Reading Brian's fascinating account of his own life, it is fascinating to see the connections between himself and Dickens – the school, his first job, the railways – all offer evidence of historical threads that stretch across two centuries and touch both Dickens and his readers in a tangible manner.

To be honest, have you actually read ALL of Dickens' works?

I must be honest in saying that I have yet to read all of Dickens's works.

Of those that you have read, do you have a particular favourite?

I must admit that my outright favourite of his works is *Christmas Carol*. However, I also have a love for the collection of articles and short stories in *Sketches by Boz* and *Uncommercial Traveller* because they offer an uncanny and fascinating insight into the London of the time.

Do those of your family and acquaintances who know of your affection for the works of Dickens think that you are ever so slightly barmy?

My family are all admirers of Dickens! My elder brother reads and loves Dickens and I have yet to encounter anyone who would consider it odd to have a love of his works.

What was it that first introduced you to a love of Dickens?

I was first introduced to Dickens at school and, as far as my memory goes, one of the books we read was *Pickwick Papers*.

And how did you become involved with the Dickens Fellowship?

I became involved with the Fellowship after I had read an article about Herbert and the NE Branch in *The Weekly News* magazine. I thought that Herbert might have been interested in reading the Government report into the Staplehurst rail accident in 1865, in which Dickens was involved. He was uninjured in the crash, but it is generally believed that the shock might have contributed to his early death exactly five years after the accident. I had obtained a copy of the report from the Public Record office, sent it to Herbert and things went from there.

Do you only read Dickens, or do you have other writers of whom you are particularly fond? If so, who?

As far as other fiction is concerned, my main source of reading is Dickens and the other classical writers of the time, such as Jane Austen, the Bronte sisters and Thomas Hardy.

Where do you do most of your reading of Dickens? Is it in a favourite armchair, at a desk, in bed etc?

I do most of my reading in an armchair at home.

Do you have a preference for paperbacks or hardbacks?

Generally, I prefer paperbacks to hardbacks

Tell us something about yourself and your background?

I am a Londoner by birth and have always lived in the city. Born in 1946, my earliest memories are of the bombsites. In 1944 the family house was actually hit and destroyed although, fortunately, everyone escaped unhurt! I remember being fascinated by the bombsites and always asking to be taken around those streets. I attended a local C-of-E primary school that had been built in the 1850's (when Dickens was in his 40's) and celebrated a centenary when I was a pupil. The buildings had changed little since Dickens' times, although class-room coal fires had been replaced by radiators, but a fund had to be started when I was there to provide fuel to heat the pipes.

My late father was builder and decorator, but I've not inherited his abilities and to this day am absolutely no good at handiwork. I left school with few qualifications, having never been good at exams, and worked as a legal clerk for many years but eventually decided to become a mature student with a view to studying for a law degree. Unfortunately, my exam skills had not improved and I failed the first year. I did some voluntary work for St Thomas' Hospital in London before obtaining a permanent position. Only recently I was elected to the Member's Council that oversees the work of the Hospital Trust. I have four years until I retire, and see myself remaining here for that time.

I've always been interested in English and History, and particularly enjoy transport and railway history. I love to visit museums when on holiday, always holiday in the UK, with occasional visits to Ireland or the Channel Isles, and love the Yorkshire coast.

I've remained single and must confess I'm not well up on modern technology. I just about manage the computers at work, but probably would have been happier with the technology of Dickens' times.

In your opinion, what is it about Dickens that continues to make his books so relevant to the 21st Century?

I believe that Dickens continues to be relevant in the 21st Century because, although the stories themselves are products of their time, the characters are timeless. This was brought out in the group discussion on Pip in *Great Expectations* (looking at the minutes from the April meeting) when it was agreed that his behaviour, however selfish it may seem, was typical of any modern teenager.

Of the various and many attempts to render the books of Dickens in other ways - film, television, radio, readings, theatre - do you have any preferences?

I believe that television serialisations are the most successful method of showing his work. My own thoughts are that the reasons for this are the length of his works. Perhaps only *A Christmas Carol* is short enough to be fully encompassed in the average running time of a cinema film without any significant cuts. His other works are better suited to a serial format – it's worth bearing in mind that most were originally published in serial form.

The most successful cinema adaptations, I believe, are the David Lean versions of *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist* – both made in the 1940's. Both must be regarded as classics of the cinema. Of course, cuts had to be made from the original works but evidently David Lean held the view – possibly correct – that it was better to select essential elements rather than try to condense and seek to include the whole book.

I confess I have not seen any theatrical versions of the books, with the exception of the musical versions of *Oliver Twist* and *Mr Pickwick*. Both were good and enjoyable in themselves, but cannot be regarded as faithful versions of the original novels. The best theatrical presentation of Dickens himself is Simon Callow's excellent one-man show of Dickens and his works.

Which, if any, of his books are you currently reading?

I am not currently reading any of his works, although – like many people – it always my intention to increase my reading!

If you were asked to 'sell' Dickens to those who've not yet read any of his works, how would you go about it?

If I were asked to introduce Dickens to anyone who is still unfamiliar with his works, I would recommend them to watch some of the television serials and, of course, to try and see Simon Callow's virtuoso performance.

PART VII:

Like Gulliver in Lilliput, we see an attempt to bring our hero down to size .

The 'condensed' Charles Dickens?

A personal view by Susan Hudson

If you love Charles Dickens, it was an attention-grabbing headline in Australia's *The Sunday Age*, Melbourne, 10 June: *The Unkindest cut is Dickens minus 40%*'

Melbourne writer Chris Middendorp went on to explain that Britain's *Orion Publishing Group* has re-issued some classic novels with 40 per cent of the original text removed and manager Malcolm Edwards justified the decision with a trite: *'life is too short to read all the books you want to'*.

But Middendorp, who began reading Dickens on long tram journeys to and from jobs, claims that the author has become his 'friend' and he now savours every word, taking the classics at 'five pages a day'.

He claims the Orion premise that the classics are too long and people don't have the time is a fallacy, as readers continue to buy huge tomes of modern pulp fiction to wade through. In other words we can find time for anything we are truly interested in.

Middendorp concludes that 'Orion's pledge to give us a great reading in half the time panders to a simple fear of highbrow literature' and that cutting the great classics back is 'little more than a banal marketing stunt'.

Over to you dear fellow Dickensians. What do you think?

PART VIII:

Of his brother, and we see that not all heroic qualities are inherited .

Frederick Dickens, the younger brother of Charles, is buried in Darlington. One of our Branch members recently discovered his grave to be in a sad state of neglect, and – as a Branch – we have undertaken to support efforts to restore it to an acceptable condition. But who was Frederick Dickens, and why was it that he came to be buried in Darlington? Branch member, Ruth Crofton, has recently supplied some information that sheds some light on the matter.

Frederick Dickens was born in 1820, and was eight years younger than the older Charles. He was often described by Charles as his favourite when a child. At 14, Frederick moved in with Charles, Catherine and their young family and remained with them for a number of years. When Charles and Catherine made their first transatlantic trip in 1842, without the children, Frederick was left partly (with the Macready family) in charge of the Dickens' children. Dickens described Frederick as quick and steady, and helped secure him two fledgling employment posts, first with a publisher then with the Treasury.

Frederick visited his brother on one of the Dickens family's extended sojourns in Italy in 1843. The prospect of his visit excited both Charles and his children, although the visit almost ended in tragedy when Frederick had to be rescued by local fisherman after getting into difficulties swimming off the coast.

However, the relationship between the two brothers was put under strain when, in 1845, Frederick fell in love with the 15-year old Anna Weller, a girl that Charles both disliked and mistrusted. Charles' suspicions were confirmed in 1858 when, after the relationship had turned acrimonious, the couple applied for a judicial separation based on grounds of adultery. Frederick refused to pay the alimony and fled the country, only to be arrested and eventually imprisoned for debt in 1862.

Little is known of his life after this point, although on Frederick's death, Dickens seems to acknowledge that it was a life that had been wasted and ruined. In 1868, Frederick had been living in Darlington at the home of a retired innkeeper whom he'd known from London. Friends of Dickens reported that Frederick's diet, in the time leading up to his death, had been a breakfast of a penny bun and glass of ginger beer, with only gin to sustain him the rest of the day. An acquaintance of Dickens, George Sala, wrote in a letter to Yates, "I suppose you have heard that Fred Dickens is dead. I suppose he was a bad egg; but assuredly a most miserable life had he led since 1858" (the date of the separation).

Dickens was unable to attend the funeral in Darlington, but sent his eldest son to represent the family, contributed to the cost of the funeral and offered profuse thanks to the Doctor (James Howison) who had sought to treat Frederick in his last days.

(Thanks to Ruth Crofton for supplying much of this information)

PART IX:

All heroes have their humours, and in this closing section we seek to have our own.

Chatterbox..... We offer but a single tale on this occasion, but it is one that stoops to greatest depths of deception, confusion and chaos as we recount a recent Branch meeting that threatened to descend into scandalous chaos. It exposes, perhaps, the flimsy nature of the superficial bonds that hold us together. It need not have been this way. Indeed, to all intents and purposes, there seemed little to warn the innocent of the impending confusion when we gathered on a pleasant Monday evening in Low Fell library.

We were reading Great Expectations as a group, and having quickly skipped through the opening preliminaries of the meeting (minutes of last, correspondence, apologies for absence etc) we eagerly anticipated a vigorous discussion of the selected chapters of the book. Thus far, there'd been almost unanimous agreement of the great energy, pace and delight of the book, and our previous readings had regularly prompted lively discussions. All of us had read the appointed chapters, and it only remained for the Hon Secretary to read his synopsis and see where the discussion was to go.

Mr S, for it was he who had the honour to present the chapter summary, dug among his papers to select the comprehensive notes that he'd made in preparation for the meeting.

"Aye, whey, this'll have yuz laughing, by mind there's some champion stuff in these chapters," he said by way of an introduction, "Aa thowt about those bits when Pip gans tiv Lunnen and wu cud taak about them, what wu think."

Few of us understood him, but we nodded in good humour, although one or two members looked somewhat puzzled at the 'Lunnen' (London) reference -surely, in our preparatory reading we had found young Pip still in the Kent marshes?

"Y'knaa," continued our bilingual Secretary "aa wuz laffin away to mesell when aa wuz reading these chaptas, an even tho Bidy's deed, the stuff wi' Wemmick's geet funny! Aa'll get started then"

It was at this point that one of the members picked up the courage to halt the Secretary.

"Herbert? Exactly which chapters have you been reading?"

"Eh? Whey, sixteen tu twenny wun, like I wuz s'posed to."

"Yes, but what book? There's three books in the novel, Herbert, and Bidy doesn't die until Book two!"

Despite a shuffling of papers and a checking of notes, there was no hiding the fact that our Secretary had diligently read chapters 16-21, as he'd been asked to, and prepared some copious notes and comments, but had actually leapt ahead of the group to do those chapters in Book II.

Chatterbox feels sure that he doesn't have to describe the chaos into which the meeting descended. Fortunately, after many minutes, some order was restored. We leave you to make your own sad judgements about the case, but we ask if perhaps a replacement knee operation has both physical and psychological implications?

The Dickens Fellowship, North East England

Branch no: 198

The Branch officers are:

Hon. President:	Mr Edwin Shaw
Hon. Secretary:	Mr Herbert Savory
Hon Treasurer:	Revd Ruth Crofton
Public Relations Secretary:	Ms Lynn Hitchen

Membership subscriptions are:

Full membership:	£14.00 per annum
Associate membership:	£7.00 per annum

The branch meets at Low Fell Library, Gateshead, at 7.00pm on the first Monday of the month. New and prospective members are most welcome.

To contact the Branch secretary:

Mr Herbert Savory
'Dickens House'
51 Grange Estate
Kibblesworth
Gateshead
NE11 0TG
Tel: 0191 4104074
E-mail: Herbertpip@aol.com

Newsletter Editor:

Chris Robson
2, Lilac Road
Walkerville
Newcastle upon Tyne
NE6 4TL
Tel: 0191 2634921
E-mail: crobs@hotmail.co.uk

Next issue to be published September 2007. The editor would be grateful if any contributions for the next issue - and any material, however small, is welcome - could be received by August 31st 2007.

