

The Dickens Fellowship, North East England

The Occasional **BLEATER**

Volume 22

August 2011



Dickens – on tour !

Dear fellow Dickensians,

My first thoughts are in remembrance of our dear friend, Michela Yates, who sadly passed away in May. She was a very active member of our branch and will be sadly missed by all.

I know you will all join me in welcoming our newest member, Margaret Hall. Margaret was encouraged to join us by her sister Christine Bolton who has a love of Dickens and has been a branch member for many years. Margaret is slowly being converted to a Dickens enthusiast and indeed she attended the Canterbury Mini Conference where she was very impressed with the warm welcome she received and the wealth of knowledge of her fellow Dickensians which left her with a blossoming desire to know more. Christine has been prevailed upon by our erstwhile editor to provide a piece for the 'Bleater ' describing the Conference and the wonderful historic city of Canterbury.

July saw a visit by Brian Johnson to our branch meeting and his first opportunity to provide a synopsis. Before the meeting, branch members met at our local Victorian Inn for fortification on what was one of Newcastle's hottest days of the summer. Although initially nervous Brian soon settled into his stride and very eloquently talked us through the highlights of his chapters. I hope this is taken as encouragement for members who worry about providing a synopsis.

As the year unfolds so does Pickwick. I must admit, having provided the last synopsis, that I am a convert to this book. There are still mixed reviews within the branch as it is deemed, in places, as contrived and 'silly' by a couple of regular attendees. Given that he was so young and this was his first substantial piece of work, his humour is a tad childish at times - but most agree that it is enthusiastic and infectious humour and it would have played to his audience beautifully.

As I write this I am preparing to head to London with other branch members to meet up with Tony Williams for his East End Theatre Walk. As usual Tony has a full and very knowledgeable tour for us which this year ends at one of the last original London Music Halls where we are to take high tea.

As always my friends enjoy this edition of 'The Occasional Bleater' and please do not hesitate to contact my self or Chris if you have anything to be included in the next edition.

*Yours in Fellowship
Anne McLeod (Branch Secretary)*

Michela Yates

Michela joined us about two and half years ago and it was obvious from her first meeting that she was going to be a real asset to our branch. Within weeks she was reading 'The Story of the Goblins who stole a Sexton' at St Mary's and taking part in our Local History day. Her enthusiasm for Dickens was very infectious and indeed she persuaded her parents to join us at our Christmas show in Low Fell Library. The branch had often talked about the need for Victorian dress to add to the overall authenticity of our performances, and to her credit Michela decided to do something about it. She applied to the local council for a grant and having completed a very lengthy form explaining in great detail why we needed the money she eventually heard that her application was successful. A great achievement in these times of financial constraint.

Another of Michela's great loves was history and most of all her 'Henry'. On a branch weekend in London, off she went, determined to see his original suit of armour. She had stated categorically that we were to stop her buying any more books about Henry VIII but she couldn't stop herself as she added yet another to her collection. 'Just in case' she said, 'just in case there is something in there that I don't know, or a picture I don't have'. As if that were possible, as surely he would have been her specialist subject were she ever to have appeared on Mastermind. Michela's interests were wide and varied judging by the amount of magazines to which she subscribed. She enjoyed learning about new things, questioning the history behind decisions made in the past which still affect us now and indeed how history has shaped this country and its traditions. She loved nature and I can remember her marvelling at a lovely butterfly when we were out for lunch one day, just happy to watch the world go by and enjoy the simple things in life.

Michela was very family orientated and lived at home with her Mum and Dad. She loved family occasions whether it was a weekend in London or a family meal. The latest apple of her eye was her baby nephew, whose photograph she proudly carried on her phone. It was heartbreaking to see and hear, at the very moving mass held for her, how many lives she had touched in her short life.

Michela was a wonderful lady who will be greatly missed by all who knew her. It may be of small comfort to her family to know that Michela will always be remembered by her branch and a glass will be raised in her memory when ever two or more of us meet over a drink. Sleep well Michela and may God bless you.

Anne MacLeod, Branch Secretary

The 2011 Canterbury Conference

The 2011 Canterbury Conference

Branch member, Christine Bolton sends this report:

The setting for the mini-conference was unique. Set in the grounds of the Cathedral, it was tranquillity itself. The Lodge was exclusively for our use, and by now some of the faces we saw were becoming quite familiar. The welcome was warm and sincere- it feels as if you are meeting up with distant family.



Entertainment for the first night was a reading by Gerald Dickens. It was *Doctor Marigold*, a work with which we were not familiar, but it was well presented and enthusiastically received. The talks given throughout the week were by acclaimed professors whose enthusiasm was apparent.

We went on a city tour the following day, done by a recognised tour guide, and her knowledge was vast. We were given a brief history of the original Roman settlers, and how the city progressed to its present day importance. The tour included an external viewing of the Cathedral which is currently being refurbished. Those parts which were finished showed the stonework in its original grandness with its beautifully coloured stone that came from Caen. There is currently a masterpiece inside the Cathedral by Anthony Gormley (of the Angel of the North fame). It is suspended above the site of Thomas Becket's tomb, and shows the horizontal form of a man fashioned out of nails. The nails have been salvaged from the roof as it has been renovated.

The second night's entertainment ranked as my favourite. It was introduced by Lee Ault and named 'The Ghost in the Looking Glass'. The presentation highlighted the dreadful conditions endured by girls and young woman employed to produce fashion finery for the well to do. It was not uncommon for them to work more than twelve hours a day for a pittance, out of which they needed to provide their own candles, needles and thread. They worked in filthy conditions where disease was rife and life expectancy was very short. It was a very moving and telling history.

Margaret and I missed most of the following day's lectures, and went instead to visit the Roman Museum, the Canterbury Tales exhibition, and the St. Thomas' Hospital. The museum exhibited finds (many of them accidental) of the Roman period in Canterbury. There were fine examples of silverware, jewellery, pottery and building remains to enable scholars to build an impressive picture of life during Roman Times. The Canterbury Tales exhibit is run by the same people responsible for the Jorvick experience in York. In it the visitor is introduced to characters including the Wife of Bath, The Pardoner, and the Miller, each of whom tell their story as the visitor walks around the exhibit. The characters are shown as lifelike models, and there are mechanised 'props' which added to the humour and entertainment.



The 'Road to Canterbury' from the Exhibition

The hospital is not to be thought of as a hospital as we know them, but as a place offering rest to the pilgrims travelling to Canterbury. Pilgrims approaching the city would try to find refuge before nightfall and would therefore travel at the 'Canterbury Pace', which is where the word 'canter' originates. Our last evening offered a presentation by a gentleman from the Guildhall Museum, showing us articles belonging to Dickens that had been given to them since his death. All of these articles are currently on loan to a museum in France; therefore the presentation was in picture form. The conclusion of the evening was a performance by the Canterbury U3A choir, who sang songs that would have been familiar to Dickens, or have appeared in some of his works. It ended with Auld Lang Syne, and it generated a wonderful exhilaration for us all. Yet again

Miscellaneous items

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Branch member, Chris McLoughlin writes:

I have been watching the Fergal Keane documentary on the *The Story of Ireland* on BBC2, which is an outstanding production, and Dickens receives a mention. The programme traced the tragedy of the Famine of 1845 and the mass emigration from Ireland to New York, and Fergal spoke to camera from what is now Chinatown in New York. This was the area in which many of the immigrants lived from the 1840s onwards. To underline the conditions then in the area, he quoted Dickens as stating the area was 'reeking of filth'.

BBC 4 has also, again, ran the programme called *Between the Lines* - the story of railways in film and fiction by the author Andrew Martin. His stories are set in the era of the Edwardian Railways. Andrew opened with a piece from Euston Road and, as he called it, Dickens's 'Railway Novel', *Dombey and Son*, set in Camden and against the background of the London to Birmingham railway. Clips were shown of the 1969 version of *Dombey* and also clips from *The Signalmans* (made in 1976) starring Denholm Elliott, that ran as a standard ghost story for Christmas for several years on BBC. There was also a re-enactment of the Staplehurst crash. Incidentally, there were also clips showing John Betjeman, the former Poet Laureate and the man often credited as the saviour of St Pancras Station, and on one occasion we were shown a clip of Sir John and a porter talking on a station, Sir John's voice over stated that he was the 'Pickwickian' Figure on the right!

Darlington's newly-refurbished Head of Steam museum, based at the original 1830 North Road Station, is well worth a visit for any one interested in the early days of the railways, built as it is on the original 1825 rail route and just two minutes walk from the bridge featured on the back of a £5 note in recent years.



Visitors are self guided around the exhibits by a local and national timeline and of course, Dickens pops up in 1871 marking his death, interestingly just 13 years before an Act of Parliament was passed called the Cheap Rail Act, making provision by statute for cheap fares for working men, surely something of which Dickens would have approved?

Two other local visits have seen Dickens a Dickens connection. Chester le Street has a Mr Pickwick Café, next to the site of a coaching inn on the old A1, whilst in Sunderland there is almost a 'Havishams' Café, although it is in fact 'Havershams', in Fawcett Street!

And on the question of travels, deciding on a few days in Scarborough, we decided to call at Helmsley for lunch, on the way, and strolling around afterwards, I noticed the 'Pickwick' Bar, complete with an illustrated external sign of Mr Pickwick himself. This bar is attached to 'The Feathers' in the main square which may have also been a coaching Inn in it's time. The town of Scarborough also has a Dickens connection, as he appeared at the Assembly Rooms in 1857 (the rooms themselves date from 1840), and they still stand near the Railway Station. The building was later the Silver Grid and is now a Pizza Hut. It lies at the top of Huntriss Street so at the bottom I was not surprised to see the 'Pickwick Inn', which included the 'Copperfield' Restaurant, 'Twists' Bar and for the cocktail set 'Twisters' Bar!

In harness with reading Pickwick Papers, I am also reading *Crimea* by Orlando Figes, an excellent writer on Russian history. As the title suggests, this latest book gives the story of the background to the Crimean War in 1854/56. Dickens is given a mention as he helped influence British opinion on the eve of the War when he published an article by Florence Nightingale in *Household Words* in May 1854 on the subject of 'The True Story of the Nuns of Minsk'.

This was the story of a group of Greek Catholic Nuns in the Ukraine who were forced under torture to convert to Russian Orthodoxy in the 1840's. Their brutal mistreatment angered Catholic opinion in Europe and was just one of several religious strands that influenced the decision to fight the Russians

Dickens continues to appear in a variety of places. In one week, commencing 11th July, he appeared thusly:

The Sunday Times mentions, among the list of the 'beautiful people' who assembled in Los Angeles to meet and greet with royal family members William and Kate on their Canada and USA tour, was British actor Harry Lloyd, a rising star, apparently, who recently appeared in BBC's 'Robin Hood' and is the great, great, great grandson of Charles Dickens!

Michael Portillo's repeat series on BBC TV entitled *Great British Railway Journeys*, covered the run from Dereham to Cromer in Norfolk, in the course of which he visited a family-run turkey farm that specialises in production aimed for the Christmas Market. Portillo suggested that the popularity of turkey, although not native to these islands, is due in no small part to the publication of *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens.

The BBC television series *Heir Hunters*, shows the work done by a firm in tracking down the heirs to legacies left by people who die intestate. It often contains fascinating stories of people and their lives and one recent programme showed the case of a man who had died in a Croydon nursing home, a lovely Victorian building from the 1890's. The original title for the home was The British Home for Incurables and the voice-over advised that the home had been built originally in Streatam by a group of benefactors who had been inspired by Charles Dickens and his work.

The Times ran an obituary under the headline, 'Journalist who overcame his Dickensian upbringing'. The item reported on the death of Peter Paterson, a Fleet Street reporter and columnist with *The Spectator*, who had been abandoned as a baby by his mother and aged four in 1935, and was then taken, without ceremony, by his aunt to Stockwell in London to be placed in the Spurgeon Home for the care of Fatherless or Motherless Children, a walled Victorian Institution where thrashings, cold showers and bullying failed to dampen his spirits. Despite all this he went on to a life in journalism for sixty years, including a spell as both a Parliamentary and a Court Reporter – surely a life that echoes Dickens in many ways?

For any one fancying a night at the theatre in the months ahead, Dickens productions at local theatres include:

The Haunted Bride, staged by the Rumpus Theatre Company on a national tour. This is a new play by John Goodrum and based on the Dickens story *To be Read at Dusk*. It is in our area at Middlesbrough Little Theatre 15th October, Hartlepool Town Hall Mon 31st Oct and South Shields Customs House Wed 2nd November.

Nicholas Nickleby Parts 1 & 2: at The People's Theatre, Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Sat 15 Oct - Sat 22 October. David Edger's stage adaptation of Dickens' literary classic tells the story of the eponymous Nicholas and his conflict with his irascible Uncle Ralph. As the drama unfolds, we meet many of the most famous and favourite characters from the novel, including demon schoolmaster Wackford Squeers and his poor pupil Smike. Produced in the form of two plays shown on alternate nights, *Nicholas Nickleby* will have an extended run including two Saturdays.

Friday 18th November, **Charles Dickens** - a one-man show by Pip Utton at Darlington Arts Centre Vane Terrace.

A recent Branch discussion of *The Pickwick Papers* touched on the famous Christmas at Dingley Dell chapter. A rambling discussion then ensued about the shift in patterns of behaviour on Christmas Day, with reflections on how recent that it was common for people to work and be active on the day itself.

A recent *Times* obituary on author Stan Barstow, mentioned that his best known work *A Kind of Loving*, was sent as a manuscript to the publishers who took five months to reply, for Barstow to eventually receive a letter on Christmas Day 1959, that they were to publish it, together with an advance of £125.00. The General Post Office stopped delivering letters on Christmas Day in 1960 in England, Wales and Northern Ireland, and in 1965 in Scotland.

It was mentioned that professional football used to have a full programme of fixtures on Christmas Day. The last time the majority of League clubs played matches on Christmas Day was in 1957 when 38 League matches were played. After that the number of matches played declined dramatically and the last Football League fixture to be played on Christmas Day took place at Bloomfield Road, Blackpool, on December 25th 1965. The home side defeated Blackburn Rovers 4-2 in a First Division match in front of 20,851 spectators. Below is reproduced the recollections of a Sheffield United supporter who attended his first Christmas Day match in 1948 as a nine-year-old when Bolton Wanderers visited Bramall Lane in a First Division fixture. *"The match kicked off in the morning and, as there were no trams running, my dad and I made an early start and walked to Bramall Lane from Millhouses. Once inside the ground it was clear this was no ordinary occasion, for the atmosphere was something special - particularly to a nine-year-old. The band played Christmas carols and many of the crowd sported their presents. New scarves and gloves were much in evidence, whilst the aroma of cigar smoke hung everywhere. Spirit flasks were passed among groups of friends and swigged with a slightly furtive air."*

Crouch End – 91: The North East Branch goes to London (again!)

The North East Branch 2011 London Visit proved another success as we fitted a large amount into a busy 48 hours calling in on some familiar places but making some exciting discoveries to which we must return to in future years.

Deciding on coffee at Doughty Street after leaving our luggage at the hotel we came across a leaflet giving details of a large number of themed daily walks with a Dickens walk that very afternoon through the Inns of Court from Temple Inn to Chancery Lane ending at Furnivall's Inn where *Pickwick* was written.

Jean, our guide, was dressed in period costume and gave a very erudite talk on the rich Dickens connections in the area, all illuminated with marvellous recitations from Dickens work. This gave her an opportunity to show her skills as a former actress and dramas teacher! The tour ended in time to cross the Thames for the Salvador Dali exhibition at the old GLC Building but it was closed! Undaunted we made our way to Westminster Abbey which had just closed for tourists but we were able to attend Evensong which made a strong impression on us, and we passed within yards of where Dickens is buried.

A note has been made to ensure we visit the Abbey and the grave in future. We were blessed with glorious weather throughout the trip and ended our first day with an al fresco Dinner at 'Cagney's' just near the hotel. We had tried the 'White Swan' but it was busy...

In best Dickens tradition, we walked the City throughout all of day two, the Saturday, starting by a stroll to the Museum of London just behind St Pauls, - the 13th was a busy day for weddings at this Wren masterpiece – and the museum is well worth a visit as it concentrates on the London area's history with a special display on Victorian London. Thereafter our next destination was the Central Branch walk, starting from Tower Hill down to sites of East End Theatres in Shoreditch, Spitalfields and Hoxton.

This took us along Cable Street, the scene of the clash between Mosley's Fascists and eastend residents, seventy-five years ago this October. To get to Tower Hill we had walked the City along Cheapside and Eastcheap taking in street names mentioned in Dickens, to meet up with our friends for this theatrical walk. The area we visited is the traditional East End but with connections to Shakespeare, Wesker, Bart and even Dot Cotton! One site was believed to be the theatre immortalised in 'Gone Astray' whilst we were also treated to the history of the many theatres, music halls and penny gaffs that existed in Dickens time, and have largely disappeared. Efforts though are being made to save Wiltons at Tower Hamlets and the Empire at Hoxton, both on our itinerary.

Our literary theme continued when we attended the Garrick for a brilliant performance of Shaw's "Pygmalion" to round off the Saturday leg in fine style. We were staying just off the Euston Road which is very handy for quick visits to places of interest on day three, and although spoilt for choice we made a longer visit to Doughty Street to catch up on plans for the Dickens bicentenary. We rounded off with a call to the Museum of the Foundling Hospital at Corams Fields just a few minutes stroll from our base in Russell Square. The work of the hospital – which continues today at Berkhamstead – and its connections with the London Poor and GF Handel was a very moving and emotional experience and is also well worth a longer visit.

By the way, why the title of this piece 'Crouch End 91'? That is the terminus and route number of the handy bus that took us up and down to Holborn occasionally – we decided that, one day, we must sit on the bus all the way to the terminus!

Current Reading

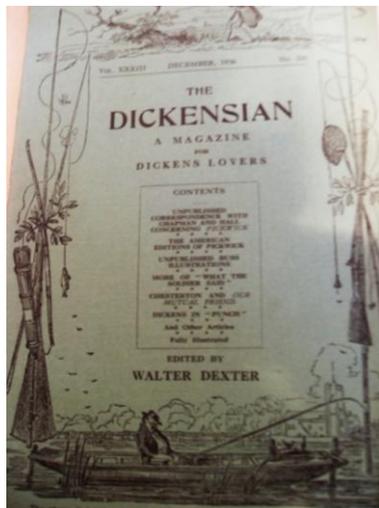
Current Reading

The Pickwick Papers: 1936 and the Centenary celebrations

The North East branch was in the fortunate position to be the recipients of a kind donation of some old editions of The Dickensian magazine, the publication of The Dickens Fellowship. Appropriately, given the current reading of the Branch, one of the magazines was the Summer edition from 1936 – the contents of which were almost wholly given over to a celebration of the Centenary anniversary of the publication of *The Pickwick Papers*.

The last edition of The Occasional Bleater carried a summary of the views of *Pickwick* as seen by some of his modern biographers, all of whom were determined to acknowledge the triumph of the book within the context of the development of Dickens as a popular writer. Much of the same spirit runs through the 1936 edition of The Dickensian, edited by Walter Dexter, who appears to share a similar enthusiasm for the book. He devotes page after page to records of national and international celebrations, to references to *Pickwick* in the national and local press of the day, and to literary and critical opinions of the novel.

Reproduced below is a variety of comment and excerpts from the 1936 Dickensian:



- A report is made of a Dickens exhibition to be held at 'The Pen and Palette' club in Newcastle upon Tyne.

- Darlington's *Northern Echo* newspaper is commended by *The Dickensian* for 'an excellent page of composite advertisements in their issue of April 2nd. The fat Boy eulogises Lemon Curd. Sam Weller recommends boots and shoes. Tony Weller recommends a capital bakery thus: 'I eats 'em reg'lar, and feels as a new man every time.'

- There is a lengthy piece on the 1936 venture to re-create the stage-coach ride from London to Rochester in Kent, written by SJ Rust. The culmination of the trip was a luncheon held at the destination, and the guest list makes interesting reading by modern standards of reporting: the affair 'was presided over by The Mayor, supported by The Mayoress, the Lord Bishop of Rochester and Mrs Linton Smith, the Dowager Countess of Darnley, the Dean of Rochester and Miss Underhill, Mrs Prall, Rear-Admiral CFS Darby (Admiral Superintendent of Chatham Dockyard) and Miss Danby, Sir Edward Willis JP, Alderman Charles Willis...' etc – with neither a footballer nor celebrity in sight...



- Walter Dexter, the editor of *The Dickensian*, has a lengthy contribution titled 'The Rise to Fame' in which he chronicles the progress made by Dickens through the course of 1836. He makes many references to the reaction of the contemporary press in 1836 to the appearance of *Sketches by Boz*, which, of course, immediately preceded *The Pickwick Papers*:

“13th February came a most discerning notice in The Literary Gazette. Then followed The Satirist whose critic had ‘seldom read two more agreeable volumes than these’ and The Sun which said ‘they evince great powers of observation and fidelity of description combined with a humour, which though pushed occasionally to the verge of caricature, is on the whole full of promise....the same week, February 20th, The Court Justice described the volumes as ‘the merriest of the season’”

These reviews are for *Sketches*, and Dexter speculates if they were in some way instrumental in encouraging Chapman and Hall to approach Dickens to provide the letterpress to ‘a new monthly periodical which had been proposed to them by the popular sporting artist, Robert Seymour.’

Dexter then goes on to reveal that *The Pickwick Papers* was well advertised *prior* to publication, with notices in *The Times* and monthly magazines of the day including *The Athenaeum*. Dexter then goes on to consider some of the early reviews of *The Pickwick Papers*. Dickens, he tells us, was on his honeymoon at Chalk, near Gravesend:

“There he probably read the first press criticisms of his new venture. They were but few. The Atlas was the first; it reviewed it at the end of the week of publication. It is quite clear from this and other early reviews that the new humour had not tickled the critic’s fancy ‘We have in vain endeavoured to discern the purpose of this publication...which ostensibly professes to be funny...The cuts (illustrations) are better than the letterpress, but the whole effect is excessively dull’

The Times, wrote Dexter, is more favourable, offering a verbatim copy of ‘A Cabmans Description of Horse’ and acknowledging the source. *The Bath Herald*, Dexter tells us, thought that the new work was ‘a squib directed against the British Association...if this be really not its drift, we must leave the solution of the enigma to some other Aedipus.’

Dexter informs readers that the death of the illustrator, Robert Seymour, occurred prior to the publication of the second monthly installment. Dexter writes that less than 500 copies of the first number had been sold ‘but the publishers doubtless took it for granted that as the publication progressed and became e more popular, there would be orders for the back numbers and they would recoup themselves.’

Dexter suggests that the death of Seymour had the unintended consequence of attracting more attention the second monthly installment. Dexter writes:

“The Morning Post gave the work a good notice, and the Metropolitan Magazine, edited by Captain Marryat, in its May issue did likewise; but it objected to the word ‘Posthumous’ in the title of the work, saying ‘We hope, however, that he is not quite dead-buried, in oblivion he will never be.’...‘Irrestibly Good’ was the opinion of John Bull – ‘There is much genuine humour, and as much real fun, in *The Pickwick Papers* as in these days generally fill the share of half a dozen books of the same size.’

Despite these favourable reviews, writes Dexter, sales failed to accelerate. The appearance of Sam Weller in the fourth monthly installment did not mark a sudden upsurge in the fortunes of *The Pickwick Papers*, but Dexter suggests that by installment number six there are encouraging signs, ‘people were beginning to talk about Mr Pickwick and his comical servant: orders for back numbers poured in, and the modest four or five hundred copies quickly grew to no less than forty thousand.’ This was his breakthrough, notes Dexter, Chapman and Hall increased their payments to the author and the literary world embraced the new talent.

‘Dickens rise to fame,’ writes Dexter, ‘is strikingly evidenced in the following passage in *The Quarterly Review* a most staid and reliable of contemporaries. It appeared in October 1837 as part of a review of the first seventeen numbers. “In less than six months from the appearance of the first number the whole reading public were talking about them and the names of Winkle, Wardle, Weller, Snodgrass, Dodson and Fogg, had become familiar in their mouths as household terms, and Mr Dickens was the grand object of interest in the whole tribe of Leo-hunters, male and female, of the metropolis. ...This is only to be accounted for on the whole supposition that a new and decidedly original genius had sprung up.”

Dickens on Tour

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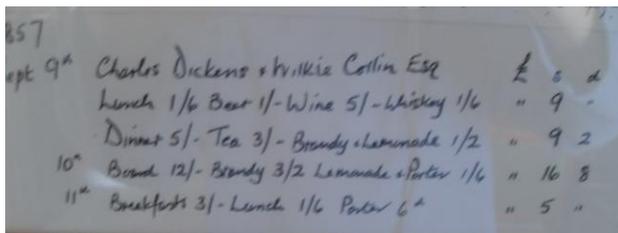
Dickens on Tour

The editor of *The Bleater* recently undertook a bicycle tour that commenced on the north-west coast of England in Ravenglass, in typical English summer weather that comprised ferocious winds, horizontal rain and leaden skies. Any concerns that the elements would contrive to ruin the trip were somewhat alleviated by the discovery that the route of the bicycle tour, fortuitously and accidentally, seemed to follow the path of a visit to the area by Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins in 1857.

Later research seems to indicate that this was the walking trip taken by the pair that was eventually published as *The Lazy Tour of two Idle Apprentices* but it is fair to say that even 154 years later, the locals are still keen to remind visitors of the Dickens connection with this part of England.

In Allonby, a small town separated from the sea by a large sward of wild grass, the editor was delighted to find himself staying at the very inn that Dickens and Collins had used, all that time ago. The Ship Hotel has a blue plaque on the outside, a dining room decorated with faded prints of Dickens's characters, a full set his works in hardback, dusty and unread, and a facsimile of the bill of fare presented to Dickens and Collins by the landlord of the time, a Mr Benjamin Partridge.

They stayed at the Ship Hotel in Allonby on Wednesday 9th, Thursday 10th and Friday 11th September 1857. Dickens, at the time, described the inn as 'a capital little homely inn looking out upon the sea...a clean nice place in a rough wild country'



The bill states:

	Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins Esq	£	s	d
	Lunch 1/6, Beer 1/-, Wine 5/-, Whisky 1/6	"	9	"
	Dinner 5/-, Tea 3/-, Brandy & lemonade 1/2	"	9	2
10 th	Board 12/-, Brandy 3/2, Lemonade & Porter 1/6	"	16	8
11 th	Breakfasts 3/-, Lunch 1/6, Porter 6d	"	5	"
		<u>£1.19/10</u>		

(It is expected that readers can understand the nomenclature of pre-decimal currency – any reader unable to decipher the commas and forward slashes is obviously too young to be reading this newsletter)

In current value, according to the excellent national archives website: <http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/currency/results.asp#mid>) this equates to **£85.96**. Out of interest, the cost for one night Bed & Breakfast in July 2011, including four pints of beer, one en-suite room and full cooked breakfast for two adults was **£70.00**.

There was also much evidence of Dickens in both Maryport and Whitehaven. In the former, the Golden Lion pub boasts of playing host to both Dickens and Collins on the same tour that took in Allonby. The town is proud of a restored Fleming Square, a former market place and site of a goose fair that is cobbled with a peculiarly-shaped stone that, it is reputed, Dickens said reminded him of fossilised kidneys.

Whitehaven also boasts a shop aimed at mothers and toddlers called 'Great Expectations' (<http://www.greatexpectationsonline.co.uk/>), whilst Cockerthorpe offers a giftware shop called 'Fagans'. Incidentally, the fine local church of St Mary proudly displays a headstone to local man, Joseph Peile, killed when fell from his startled horse at the fine age of 106!

The Dickens Fellowship, North East England

The Branch officers are:

Hon. Vice-President:	Herbert Savory
Hon. Secretary:	Anne McLeod
Hon. Treasurer:	Rev'd Ruth Crofton

Membership subscriptions are: £15.00 per annum

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

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