

The Dickens Fellowship, North East England

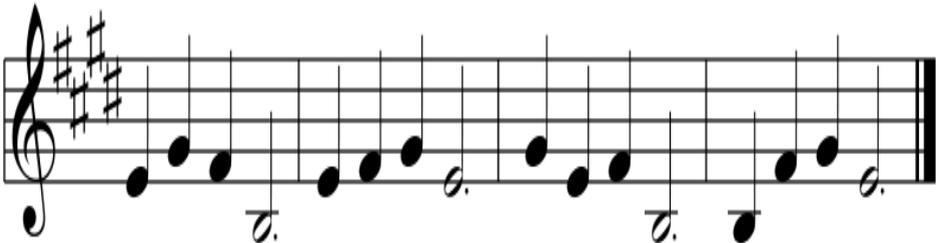
The Occasional **BLEATER**

Volume 24

September 2012



The design for the UK's first statue of Charles Dickens, which will be erected in Portsmouth, has been chosen. Four miniature versions were put forward for the 7ft (2.1m) monument of the writer, which will stand in the city's Guildhall Square. A panel decided on a statue by Oxford sculptor Martin Jennings which shows Dickens reading in a chair.



The Pompey Chimes* !

Dear fellow Dickensians,

Welcome to the latest edition of *The Occasional Bleater*, the newsletter of the North East branch of the Dickens Fellowship. You will see that this edition has some splendid contributions from a number of our Branch members, on subjects that range from the Annual Conference, to Dickens on stage, to questions of his lineage and even a report from Buckingham Palace. I am as ever hugely grateful for these contributions and would urge all members and friends to consider putting together some material for the next edition – there is always more life to newsletters such as these when the voices are varied and multiple!

We have been delighted to see some new faces at some of our monthly meetings in Low Fell library, Gateshead. Voluntary groups such as ours rely on an intake of new members, as each of them bring new approaches to Dickens and his life and works, and it has been lovely to welcome fresh faces.

The monthly meetings are the beating heart of our little Branch, and it is wonderful to see how our regular readings can quickly digress into unlikely directions as we discuss the content and context of the chapters under review. Our current book, *The Old Curiosity Shop*, has provoked a wide range of reactions among members, from delight and laughter, to questions about the times that are portrayed in the book, to some doubts about the treatment of the character of Nell. Whatever the opinions, it is wonderful to see the works of Dickens come alive in front of us, as it were, as we follow a journey undertaken by so many readers over the past 150 years.

There were also some interesting reflections on the recent Annual Conference in Portsmouth. A number of our members made the long journey down to the south coast and many were quick to heap praise on many aspects of the conference, but there were also some murmurings about unsatisfactory arrangements at one or two junctures over the course of three or four days. One thing that was not in doubt, however, was the joy in the fellowship that is encountered by those that attended – surely there is nothing in life so satisfying as to spend time with like-minded people united by a common purpose?

The Branch is about to consider what should be our next reading, as we come to the end of *Curiosity*. Branch Secretary Anne Mcleod provided a list of those books that the Branch have not yet read over the course of our eleven-year life, and it was both surprising and exciting to realise that we still have so much of his work still to be discovered or re-discovered! Truly, there seems no end to the pleasures of Dickens!

Yours in Fellowship
Chris Robson (Newsletter editor)

* *'The Pompey Chimes'* is a song traditionally associated with Portsmouth Football club, a reference to the host city for the 2012 Dickens Conference.

The Annual Dickens Fellowship Conference. Portsmouth 2012

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Christine Bolton sends this report:

We arrived at Rees Hall at about 3.00pm, by which time there was a steady stream of newcomers. Once again it was like a reunion, welcoming those we'd not seen for a year. Buses were laid on to travel to the Guildhall for a buffet reception with the Mayor, and Gerald and Ian Dickens were due to arrive at about 8 o'clock after their 'Nicholas Nickleby' walk from London.

There was a welcome speech followed by lively socialisation amongst all present, whilst little appetisers were passed around. However, these little appetisers turned out to be the buffet! Many of the group had travelled from overseas, some from as far as Tokyo and Australia, and knowing how hungry Margaret and I were, we really felt for these long distance passengers, and so those of us who felt they couldn't wait for the Dickens' brothers before procuring supper sloped off for a meal (some lovely fish and chips!)

Later in the evening we found out that the Guildhall had turned our members away and locked up, stating that they knew nothing about the extended opening. However the show went on, and Ian and Gerald recounted their exploits on the steps of the building.

The following morning, after being lulled to sleep by a wonderful foghorn, we left for lectures after breakfast. They were very entertaining, and two of them focussed on Barnaby Rudge in preparation of the play we were booked to see that evening. Sadly, although everyone was ready for coffee, coffee was not ready for us, so that was a dry morning.

The afternoon incorporated visits to Dickens' birthplace, his father's pay office, Dickens' baptismal font, and the cemetery where coincidentally his first and last loves were buried, i.e. Maria Beadnell, and Ellen Ternan. A good time was had by all. After dinner we arrived at the theatre for a good rendition of Barnaby Rudge, where the director did not stray from the original story.

The following day was the AGM followed by back to back lectures. There were eight speakers delivering a wide selection of subjects, and delegates were asked to indicate their choices. Margaret and I decided to avoid information overload, and spent the day at the docks.

After visiting The Spinnaker Tower which is an observation tower offering panoramic views around Portsmouth, we explored HMS Warrior, found out about the restoration of the Mary Rose, and took a harbour trip which showed us a variety of naval ships including HMS Ark Royal.

It appeared that there had also been unplanned entertainment at the lectures as some unfortunate double-bookings had instigated some heated exchanges among delegates. We were pleased to have missed what must have been an uncomfortable experience.



The Portsmouth Spinnaker

That evening was the Banquet - the first we had ever attended. It allowed us to meet some very interesting people whom we had not previously met, and we thoroughly enjoyed it. One young American was dressed as Nicholas Nickleby and really looked the part. His girlfriend had made his outfit, and the effort paid off - he was wonderful.

Sunday saw the group split into two for different visits. Our choice was the Jane Austen tour, and we visited her birthplace at Steventon as well as Chawton House. This wonderful property was inherited by Jane's brother, and Jane spent time there after her father's death. Jane's own house was very close to this-very picturesque though not nearly so grand. Sadly we did not have the time to go in and look around.

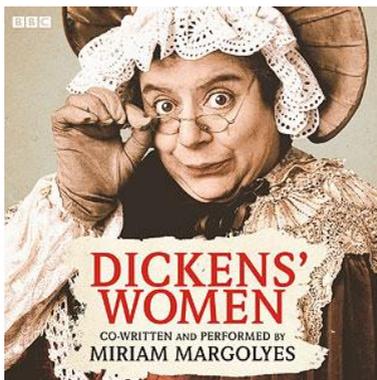
Lunch was at the grounds at Chawton, but there was only one packed lunch left for Margaret and me to fight over! It turned out however that it wasn't worth fighting over - one bottle of water, a biscuit, an apple and a bag of crisps. Sandwiches turned up later as we were leaving.

Evensong followed before dinner. That evening offered entertainment by Gerald Dickens. It proved to be fascinating. He recited excerpts from each of Dickens' works in chronological order, linking them 'without us seeing the join'. His acting ability was to be admired, and he delivered the hour-long show without a script - a truly talented performance.

Monday was an entire day of lectures again, so Margaret and I elected to take the hovercraft to The Isle of Wight where we visited Osborne House. We felt we'd made the right decision, and had a grand day. Victoria's private beach is now open to the public, and positioned there was her private changing carriage, totally restored. We watched a Punch and Judy show on the beach, and yelled out with the best of them. It was a real high to finish on, as we were leaving the following day.

Dickens and the Stage (in many guises!)

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Branch member Rita Ward sends this report

I have just arrived home from the matinee at the Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough, of 'Dickens' Women' performed by Miriam Margolyes. They were two wonderful hours. How on earth can I unpack and unpick the experience and try and do justice to the wonderful voices and physical comedy, the social comedy and tragedy, the uninhibited presentation of our deepest human feelings – of love, obsession, self interest, self delusion and self knowledge?

To set the scene: the stage set comprised a framed portrait of CD, a throne, a Victorian red plush chair, a plain wooden chair and a copy of the famous reading desk. Among the characters represented were Sarah Gamp, Mrs Pipchin (and Paul Dombey), Mrs Skewton, Mrs Lirriper (and the willing Sophie), Rosa Dartle (the 30 year old spinster), Miss Wade, Miss Havisham, Flora Finching, Miss Mowcher, Mrs Jarley (and the Wax Works), Miss Flite, Mrs Micawber, and the courtship of Mr Bumble and Mrs Corney (coals and candles).

Alongside these examples of girlhood (the importance of being little and seventeen), examples of spinsterhood, the married state, the lone woman and the sexually unattractive old woman who isn't prepared to give up gracefully on life.

There was also a narrative of the life of Dickens, giving key experiences (debt and being excluded from parental love and care) and important women in his life. These important elements of Dickens's life included his troubled relationship with his mother (who was so keen to send him back to earning money at the blacking factory, which clashed with CD'S early sense of what his life should be), but also his relationship with his grandmother and her stories of life in the big house.



*The Stephen Joseph Theatre, Scarborough,
Is now based in a former Odeon Cinema*

Miriam Margolyes also told of Dickens's early love of Maria Beadnell and his later self delusion in trying to recapture those feelings when he met her again in later life (sadly changed), and how Dickens used this experience to create the character Flora Finching. Then there was, of course, the Ellen Ternan episode and the separation from Catherine Dickens.

Anyone who came to this performance with a preconceived cosy, rosy view of Dickens came away with plenty of evidence for the man as a cruel manipulator whose great love affair was with his public. It really was two hours of love and hate and a roller coaster of emotions. At the end MM sent us out from the performance urging us to go back to the texts and read the books! A fantastic night!

Editor's note: Rita's excellent report was from the Scarborough performance on a recent tour by Miriam Margolyes. She also appeared in Alnwick, and a good number of branch members made the trip north to enjoy the performance. Without exception, each of them came back with a glowing endorsement of the show. There is a book to accompany the show, Dickens' Women by Miriam Margolyes and Sonia Fraser, which is published by Hesperus Press. These are the same publishers that have also produced a superb collection of the Christmas editions of Household Words and All the Year Round – the magazines that Dickens edited. The Christmas editions were hugely popular productions, often constructed around a theme suggested by Dickens, which contained contributions from other writers of the time, including, among others, Wilkie Collins and Elizabeth Gaskell. Go to www.hesperuspress.com for more information.

Chris McLoughlin writes:

Branch member and friends may be interested in the below:

Great Expectations at Darlington Civic Theatre:

**Dates: 16th – 20th October 2012. Performances: Evenings 7.30pm, Matinees
Thurs 2pm, Sat 2.30pm Prices: Tickets £17.50 - £26.50 Thu Matinee all seats £17.50**

This lavish, spectacular and unashamedly theatrical show brings some of the most memorable characters ever created to life. The beautiful, chilling Estella, the terrifying convict Magwitch, the manipulative lawyer Jaggers, the tragic, mysterious Miss Havisham and Pip with his 'great expectations'.

Adapted for the stage by Jo Clifford and directed and co-designed by Graham McLaren. Starring Jack Ellis (Coronation Street, Where the Heart Is, Bad Girls) as Jaggers, Chris Ellison (The Bill) as Magwitch, and Paula Wilcox (Emmerdale, The Smoking Room, Man About the House) as Miss Havisham.

As part of the bicentenary celebrations of Charles Dickens, we are delighted to welcome this new stage adaptation of *Great Expectations* prior to its West End transfer.

A **pre-show talk** will take place before the matinee on Thursday 18 October. The talk will take place between 11.30am and 12.30pm, with the matinee beginning at 2pm. This is a fantastic opportunity to hear about Charles Dickens' life from a relative of the great man himself! Lucinda Dickens Hawksley is Charles Dickens' great great great granddaughter. This 1 hour talk will covers all aspects of Charles Dickens' life with particular focus on *Great Expectations*. Booking is essential as capacity is limited.

Ruth Crofton writes:

The Mumbai Chuzzlewits

Among all the adaptations of Dickens' works that have appeared – and are still to appear – I want to pay tribute to this three-part radio drama by Ayesha Menon which was a setting of the Martin Chuzzlewit story in Mumbai. What struck me particularly was the sense that Menon had really immersed herself in Dickens' story and understood the characters with a real sympathy so that it was this that was true to the original, while practical details were changed – Mickey (Martin) goes to Dubai to work on a building site, rather than to America, for instance. The story was told by Thomas, the Tom Pinch character, and she achieved the very difficult task of making someone who is super-good in the original, emerge as a real person that you could believe in. Old Martin, played by Roshan Seth, who was perfect in the role of Pancks in the 1987 film of *Little Dorrit*, was a little disappointing but Joseph (Jonas Chuzzlewit) was every bit as menacing as you could wish.

In all, Ayesha Menon (who also played Charity Pecksniff) achieved something really special, and I admire her honesty in stating that this was a re-writing of Dickens' story and not an adaptation; perhaps some who bill their work as being "by Charles Dickens" when their adaptation is as far from the original as the moon from the earth, could take note!

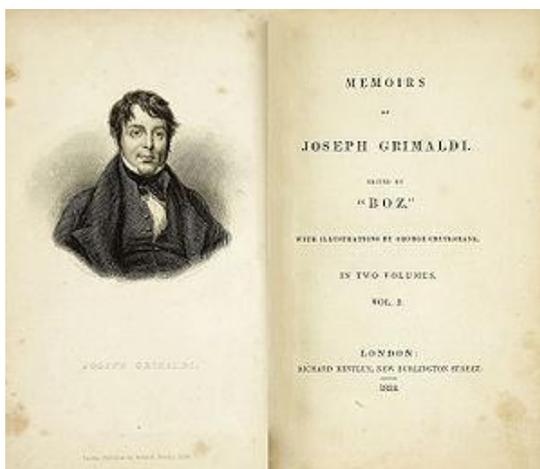


Herbert Savory writes:

MEMOIRS OF JOSEPH GRIMALDI by CHARLES DICKENS

I have recently acquired a copy of this book by Dickens, on one of the most famous clowns of the 19th century.

Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837), one of the greatest English clowns and pantomimes of all time, was born in London to an Italian ballet-master and a dancer in the theatre's corps-de-ballet. The death of Grimaldi's father when he was nine plunged the family into debt. He was introduced to the stage at the age of two and began performing at the Sadler's Well theatre at the age of three.



Grimaldi's fame as a pantomime clown was unequalled and he is credited as an innovator. He introduced the tradition of audience participation, of poking fun at spectators, and presented to the world in his performance as Joey, the modern clown as a central character. He was the original 'Clown Joey', the term 'Joey' being used to describe clowns since his day. Of his own name he punned 'I am grim all day - but I make you laugh at night'.

Yet he died a poor and physically crippled man. A memorial service is held every year in Hackney on the first Sunday in February attended by hundreds of clowns from all over the world and followed by a show for children.

Ruth Crofton writes:

An evening with Gerald Dickens



Gerald Dickens

It was very good to get notification of this event, arranged by the Newcastle branch of Save the Children; apparently Gerald himself had told them that there was a local branch of the Fellowship that it would be worth contacting. It was!

Like Dickens' own theatrical events, there was a full house, gathered, in this case, around tables in a large hall. The evening fell into two parts; in the first he spoke about his illustrious ancestor, giving extracts from the readings as he went. Gerald is a lively and persuasive speaker, but, on his own admission at the outset, neither a Dickens scholar nor historian, so to one who knew a bit about the (especially local) history bit, there were some errors that had me a-twitch – I suspect there is a difference between received history and family tradition! - but of course it was entertainment, and highly entertaining at that, and the readings quite excellent, as ever.

I first heard Gerald read at Gads Hill at the Rochester Conference, when he chose to read of Pip's visit to Wemmick's home and his meeting with the 'Aged Parent,' a reading so hilarious that my sides ached, and he has lost none of his ability to make the audience laugh; he is also very skilled at bringing out the pathos of a reading when necessary; what is gentle and tender.

For the second half, he gave a complete reading of *Dr. Marigold* which is not an easy piece to bring off, being in places, to modern ears at least, overly-sentimental, but he handled it well; bright and breezy as Dr. Marigold the market-trader, gentle as Marigold the foster-father of a deaf and dumb child. It is also quite a long piece – it was heading for midnight before I got home (I do live quite a way from Gosforth!!) – and he must have been exhausted, for he really throws himself into the characters he portrays, but it had been a sparkling night's entertainment to a well-pleased audience.

Dickensians at the Palace !

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Ruth Crofton writes:

Some time last year I was telephoned by Joan Dicks, one of the Fellowship's two General Secretaries: she'd been unable to reach our secretary Anne, who was ill, and urgently needed someone from our branch able to attend 'something' – she wasn't at liberty to say what – in London on 14th February. After a long conversation, and as she needed the name at once for security clearance, we decided it could be me.

Putting the phone down, I reflected that security clearance was generally only needed when royalty or government was involved . . . could it be something at 10 Downing Street (horror!) or a royal personage at Doughty Street (well, OK) . . . what I was *not* expecting was an envelope marked "Buckingham Palace" to appear among my Christmas cards, bearing an invitation to an evening reception held by the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh to celebrate Dickens' Bicentenary, for people involved in heritage (hence the Fellowship; each branch was represented along with people who had made a significant contribution to the fellowship), academia, stage and screen, and members of the Dickens family. There were about 400 in all.

I contacted Joan in advance to see if anyone was meeting up beforehand as, although the invitation contained detailed instructions, I was hesitant to turn up at the gates of Buckingham Palace all alone, so I was able to join with overseas members for tea (cup of!) at the Reform Club in Pall Mall, which was in itself interesting. Some of the American and Canadian folk had come across just for a couple of nights; I think their jet-lag had jet-lag! From there we walked the short distance to the Palace, presented our name card and passports for identification and entered the great gates to walk around to the main doors and up a quite magnificent staircase to leave our coats in a temporary cloak-room ('Look!' hissed someone, 'There're *thrones* there and they're using it for coats!'), then we were guiding into the Picture Gallery where the reception was held, and offered a glass of wine.



This is not Ruth Crofton's house

We were ushered into another room (the Blue Drawing Room!), where the Toronto rep, Terry Sleightholme, and I found ourselves in a really interesting conversation with a lady-in-waiting, until I remarked that it was becoming very crowded, to which she replied, 'Yes, you've all been herded in here to go through to shake hands with the Queen.' This was a shock. We had all assumed that it would be like the garden parties, and that a glimpse of the Queen and Duke across a crowded room would be all that would happen. Not so. We found ourselves edged towards a door, our drink removed from us with a 'Sorry!' then our name card surrendered so that we were each announced as we approached the queen.

Now, I am no monarchist: though I feel that the royal family, on balance, work very hard and well, I have some difficulty with the principle of monarchy, but I was fairly bowled over. The Queen has massive presence, as I imagine you would expect, but also *the* warmest and winning smile; to shake hands with the Duke of Edinburgh, whom I have always admired, was also really something. I have said that I emerged a born-again monarchist! (well, *nearly*).

Let loose to return to the Picture Gallery, which was relatively quiet then, I headed over to one of the displays of Dickens-related material from the Royal archives; apparently whenever there is a 'themed' reception, such displays of written and pictorial material are pulled together.

I fell into conversation with the archivist, who came originally from Durham (near my Durham church, no less!) and she talked with great enthusiasm about her work and the material on display, which included a volume of Queen Victoria's journal in which she wrote about reading *Oliver Twist*. Actually, talking with people like her, and the lady-in-waiting was something special and immensely interesting.

As the evening went on – a couple of hours or so – I had a wonderful time catching up with Dickensians I hadn't seen for ages and ages, and just appreciating where we were. Throughout, the Palace staff were absolutely brilliant in the way that they made you feel completely relaxed, and to be helped feel so at home in such bizarre surroundings as Buckingham Palace says a lot about their quiet skill. And the canapés were lovely!

A fun thing was star spotting. With so many stars of stage and screen around, it was fascinating noticing just who was there, and who was quiet and who massively extrovert!

Leaving the reception with Maggie de Vos of the Eastbourne branch, I enjoyed the luxury of walking down the magnificent –and now uncrowded – staircase; I suggested that it was the kind of staircase that really needed you to sweep down in a long, elegant dress and she agreed, adding “or be Ginger Rogers!” Begging a lift to the nearest tube station in a taxi hired by more provident Dickensians, we were amused at the interest we raised among the sightseers still around the gates; could they be wondering if we were anyone famous? Well, no, we weren't. Not famous, perhaps, but very, very happy. A special few hours, which I lived to the utmost!

I was also very impressed with the efficiency of everything – all the guests had shaken hands with the royal couple within twenty minutes! As a minister, used to standing at the church door shaking hands, I was really impressed with that!

Miscellaneous items

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Chris McLoughlin writes:

'They give you Bride cake every day after dinner.'

With 2012 full of celebrations for Charles Dickens's bi-centenary, I have not been reporting on where Dickens's pops up – he has appeared everywhere! - but I was reminded that I must return to the task when June and I travelled to Lancaster in mid-summer. Passing the Royal King's Arms in the City, I spotted the blue plaque with the above quote taken from *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*, and the hotel is immortalised in the book.

As if any more reminders were needed of how Dickens connections can be found all over the world, whilst in Canada on holiday, the film *Gone with the Wind* was running as part of America's 4th July celebrations and I managed to catch part of the second half of the film.

I was surprised to discover that Dickens has a sort of part in the film as Olivia de Havilland and the ladies are waiting for Leslie Howard to return from a lynching – she reads to the company and passes the time by reading the first eight chapters of *David Copperfield*. She is just starting on Chapter nine when Leslie Howard returns!

By the way, I have managed to fit in a visit to 'Dickens in Teesdale' during the summer to explore the *Nicholas Nickleby* connection and I used the standard route map and notes issued by the local tourist information. It is well worth a visit and although I arrived on a glorious hot Monday morning it is still possible to get a feel for a wintery arrival in Greta Bridge and Bowes.

And finally talking of Dickens and the North East, I have just stumbled across another connection that I would invite some assistance with. The village of Norton, now part of Stockton on Tees, stands on the route of the original A19. It has a self-guided village walk and reading the piece I came across this note concerning No 106 High Street. 'The Secretary's House' No 106 etc. has....etc. One famous resident was the first Secretary of Synthetic and Ammonia Products Mr Paul Dickens, grandson of the well-known Victorian author Charles Dickens.'

Synthetic and Ammonia Products was probably part of ICI which is just down the road at Billingham, so does anyone know which of Dickens's children is the father of Paul?

John Forster: A Newcastle man

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The Literary & Philosophical Society (Lit & Phil) in Newcastle is the largest independent subscription library outside London, housing over 150,000 books. It is based in a Grade II* listed building that was opened in 1825 and the magnificent reading rooms remain largely unchanged.

On Monday 29th October at 6.00pm, Tony Williams is presenting a lecture entitled 'My Dear and Trusty Friend' that covers the life of John Forster, the close confidant and biographer of Dickens. Tickets are £4/£2 and are available from the Lit & Phil.

There is a local connection, in that John Forster was born on 2nd April 1812 at Fenkle Street, Newcastle upon Tyne. Forster's father was not a successful businessman and an uncle, John Forster, paid for him to attend the Newcastle Royal Grammar School, where he became head boy. While at school he became very interested in the theatre. In 1828 he went to Jesus College, but left the University of Cambridge after he discovered that it did not grant degrees to Unitarians.

He moved to London where he studied law at University College. He was a talented student but he decided not to become a lawyer: According to his biographer, James A. Davies: "The abandoning of Cambridge and a legal career - the latter later regretted—reflected his youthful determination to make his way in the literary world."

Forster was a regular contributor to the New Monthly Magazine and Englishman's Magazine. In 1835 Forster became the drama and literary critic of The Examiner. The radical weekly magazine was edited by Leigh Hunt and gave support to reformists such as Henry Brougham, Francis Burdett, Robert Owen and Jeremy Bentham.

Forster met Charles Dickens for the first time in 1836. The two men immediately became close friends. James A. Davies, the author of John Forster: a Literary Life (1983) has argued: 'Forster's influence on the young Dickens was great, an important aspect being the widening of Dickens's social and literary circle through introductions to his friends... His hard-headed advice, generally concerned to prune excesses, remove impieties, and strengthen the moral force of narrative, reflected firm critical principles and an understanding of the mid-Victorian readership.'

Dickens greatly respected him as a literary critic and according to Forster, from October, 1837, 'There was nothing written by him... which I did not see before the world did, either in manuscript or proofs.'

Peter Ackroyd has pointed out in *Dickens* (1990): 'He (Forster) was the same age as Dickens and, when they met, they would have already known or at least soon discovered how much they had in common... So the two young men impressed each other. They were alike, too, in other ways. They were both very precise and very punctual but, perhaps most importantly, Forster shared Dickens's own high spirits. He was well known for his loud laugh, and his equally boisterous energy and, like Dickens, he liked to perform impromptu comic dances. He loved the theatre, clubs, excursions, dinners and was in these days a Radical... which, if nothing else, suggests the moral rigour and direction of the politics of these young men.'

Forster often negotiated with publishers on Dickens' behalf. The publisher, Richard Bentley, described Forster as a bully who encouraged Dickens to be difficult and demanding. Forster told Bentley that Dickens was "the greatest master of prose fiction in this or any other language. Forster's negotiations with Chapman & Hall resulted in him being given the post as their chief literary adviser.

In 1838 John Forster moved to 58 Lincoln's Inn Fields, where he remained for the next twenty years, where he gradually expanded into more rooms on the same floor and above, filling each one with his growing collection of books. James A. Davies has commented: "Though he had forthright opinions and was often difficult, rude, bad-tempered, bullying, and pompous... and so made enemies or disrupted friendships with fierce quarrels, Forster's friends knew that, essentially, he was tender-hearted, affectionate, loyal, convivial, and generous."



John Forster by Charles Edward Perugini

In January 1846, Charles Dickens became editor of *The Daily News* for a salary of £2,000 a year. Dickens hired Forster and Douglas Jerrold to write political leaders for the newspaper.

Dickens soon got bored with running a newspaper and in February, 1846, he managed to persuade Forster to take over the editorship of The Daily News.

In the early 1840s Charles Dickens began work on an autobiography. He sent the manuscript to Forster but changed his mind about the book and destroyed what he had done. In 1848 he decided that he wanted Forster to become his biographer and gave his old friend several long interviews about his life.

After the death of Charles Dickens he worked on his biography. The first volume of The Life of Charles Dickens was published in 1872. As Claire Tomalin has pointed out: 'The revelations about Dickens's childhood, Forster's memories of over thirty years and his quotations from intimate letters gave his work an authority no one else's could have matched.' John Forster, who suffered greatly from bronchitis and from rheumatism, died at Palace Gate House on 1st February 1876. He was buried at Kensal Green Cemetery five days later.

The Dickens Fellowship, North East England

Hon. Founder Member:

Herbert Savory

Hon. Secretary:

Anne McLeod

Hon. Chair and 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 (except Bank Holidays, when we meet on the second Monday of the month). New and prospective members are most welcome.

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