

NEWSLETTER

SEPTEMBER 2010

CONFERENCE 2010...



Maggie de Vos, the Conference organiser (left), and Joan Dicks, the Fellowship's Joint Honorary General Secretary



No prizes for guessing who this distinguished looking couple are! The person standing is Carol Walsh (see below)

This year's Conference was different from what has become the norm in that it was held in seafront hotels at Eastbourne instead of in university accommodation. This meant that we were waited on at mealtimes, and every evening meal was like a banquet.

Perhaps the saddest moment was on the first night, during our welcome by the Mayor of Eastbourne, when Maggie de Vos announced that one of our delegates, Edna, Lady Healey, an ex-president of The Dickens Fellowship, would be unable to attend the conference because she had died that morning, aged 92. I remember Lady Healey's talk at the Nottingham Conference in 1995; and I remember being present in Westminster Abbey on June 9th one year, when she (accompanied by her husband, Denis), did the Wreath Laying for Dickens. She was an impressive and erudite figure.

Excellent lectures this year were provided by Dr Tony Williams, Dr Joanne Eysell, Professor Jenny Hartley and others. Our time was also taken up by outings to Dickens World (Chatham) and Gads Hill; to Pevensey and to Beachey Head. There were also some splendid evening entertainments (including Gerald Dickens).

The five days flew past. Thank you, Maggie de Vos, and your team for all your hard work.



Fellowship President, Graham Smith



Malcolm Andrews, a frequent conference lecturer

... and meeting people

Conferences are always enjoyable, not only for the extremely high quality lectures, but for the social side. You meet up with old friends and invariably make new ones. When I was walking along the Eastbourne Esplanade on the Thursday afternoon before the Conference, I bumped into Jim and Carol Walsh from Chicago. I first really got to know Jim and Carol in Melbourne in 2004, although they had been here in Bristol in 2003.

Jim told me that he was a physicist and had an interest in a famous Bristolian (famous, anyway, in scientific and academic circles), Paul Dirac. Dirac won the Nobel Prize for Physics in 1933. He was brought up in Monk Road (and later Julius Road), Bishopston - so I knew about him from the Blue Plaque in Monk Road: the plaque unveiled, incidentally, by the physicist ex-husband of one of our members. Dirac attended Bishop Road School - indeed, overlapped there with Cary Grant.

In 2009 an excellent biography of Dirac was published. I managed to get some copies cheap from Amazon, and was able to send one to Jim Walsh. He enjoyed it so much that it interrupted his reading of Michael Slater's new biography of Dickens!

My personal interest in Dirac is not only the local one, but the fact that he was a man of extremely few words, and is thought to have had an autistic condition - as has my son - so I am able to relate to some of the strange behaviour Dirac displayed. Indeed, the biography is called 'The Strangest Man'.

FS

NEWS OF THE BOOK GROUP

Since Frankie Sahni started the book group at the beginning of the 1994-5 session it has flourished and is valued by all who take part. New members are always welcome. The formula is simple. Read the allotted chapters beforehand and discuss them with friends - or just listen to the varying opinions - at the meetings.

Over the years we have delved into all of Dickens's novels and the desirability of looking at his other writings has been considered but, quite understandably, rejected in favour of re-visiting the novels. Our Mutual Friend has been chosen as our next Book of the Year.

Most members welcome the summer break but a few this year expressed a wish to keep going, so a trial run of monthly meetings was arranged looking at sections of Sketches by Boz. These gatherings dispensed with a leader, were totally informal, and very much enjoyed. As you will see from the programme more are planned for next season.

The March and April meetings will complete Sketches by Boz, but the material for the other three gatherings may not be so familiar. As you know, Dickens 'conducted' a weekly journal and for many years issued a Christmas Number. These appear in collected additions of Dickens's works as Christmas Stories, but whereas the originals contained chapters by other writers, such as Amelia Edwards, Elizabeth Gaskell and Wilkie Collins, the collections include only the chapters written by Dickens. The chosen stories we will look at in May to July are not Christmas tales as such, and the missing chapters will be available beforehand, at a small charge, to those wishing to attend. If you wish to join in you will be very welcome to do so.

Lionel Reeves



The Boffin Progress

OUR MUTUAL FRIEND

Book Group Book for 2010 - 2011

In Tuesday Book Group meetings, at 2.30 in the afternoon and repeated at 7.30 in the evening, 'The Book of the Year' is read, studied, and dissected. From September 2010 to February 2011 that book will be 'Our Mutual Friend'. If you want to read, study, dissect, or simply observe, the progress of these hugely relaxed but objective get-togethers, just turn up. Talk to Lionel on 0117 973 8388 to help you decide to attend.

If you are 'into Dickens' in any way, you will enjoy attending!

EDWARD JENNER - 1749-1823



The mention of a trip to the Jenner Museum in Berkeley, took me back over thirty years. Jenner was born at the Vicarage in Marybrook Street in Berkeley and later practised as a doctor in the town. Jenner, of course, established vaccination as a prevention against smallpox, but he also did significant research on diseases of the heart and rheumatism as well as being a naturalist of national reputation. His balloon experiments made him a pioneer of air travel.

Deirdre and I had taken part in three films for the Bristol Cine Society, amongst them was one on the life of Jenner. I played the part of a colleague of Jenner.

I remember riding a horse through Hambrook, and also driving a horse and cart in Doddington. Deirdre was part of the crowd.

The film received its premiere in Berkeley Church in 1973, to a packed audience, to mark the 150th anniversary of Jenner's death.

Walter Browning

GETTING TO KNOW YOU



The following 'GETTING TO KNOW YOU' piece came as a result of a delightful card I received from John and Cynthia Palsler after the postponed Dinner in Clifton Hill House:

" Dear Frankie,

By a happy coincidence the occasion of the Society's last Dinner on 29th March coincided precisely with our 52nd wedding anniversary. In common with all those present we thoroughly enjoyed the talk, the meal and the company, and we particularly appreciated the splendid Bouquet with which we were presented to make it our own special day. Many thanks to all concerned for the thought and work which went into making the event such a success.

While counting the years, I have realised that my original membership of the Society dates back something in excess of 55 years and I am grateful to all concerned over the years for the many happy times I have enjoyed."

John and Cynthia do not manage to attend a lot of meetings now, partly because of the difficulty of driving into Bristol from Keynsham at night, but they always pay their subscriptions and keep up their membership; and anyone who has met them will be aware both of their lively interest in Dickens and their enjoyment of our Society.

John Palsler

My interest in Charles Dickens, his life and novels, dates back to my early teens, when I invested virtually all my savings in a complete set of the works of Charles Dickens, which was advertised for sale in the Bristol Evening Post. It has proved invaluable over the years, and still occupies pride of place in a glass fronted book case.

My introduction to the Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society was rather more coincidental and oblique. On completing National Service, I found myself pressed into service with the local amateur dramatic society. No audition was required. As always, they were desperate for an able bodied young man who was prepared to learn the lines and attend rehearsals. As an impecunious law student and articled clerk, it provided me with an additional interest and an inexpensive social life. Our producer was Christabel Cooksley, who had been a member of the Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society since the nineteen thirties, and was producing for it a new play, 'The Blue Cockade' based on Barnaby Rudge. It was a play with a very large cast, and a 'sitting duck', I was volunteered to swell the numbers. Rehearsals were protracted and at times verging on the chaotic. Memories fade, and I have no recollection of what part I played. Some years ago I was told that the Central Library in Bristol still has a copy with all the relevant details of that first production, which I have little doubt was also the last.

Time went on, and I continued to be an active member of the Society and enjoying taking part in numerous productions over a period of years; and costumed out-readings, which took us to a variety of locations in and around the district. One such out-reading which stays in my mind for fairly obvious reasons, took place in 'The Hop Pole' at Tewkesbury and, predictably, featured 'Pickwick Papers'. The reading took place in a comfortable lounge and was attended by a receptive audience. Since we were in 'The Hop Pole Inn' the 'interval for refreshments' was not the usual 'coffee and biscuits'. Our audience moved en masse into the saloon bar. We were gratified, and not a little surprised, that they chose not to remain there, but to return for the second half of the programme.

Another out-reading which I recall, took place in Bristol in a convent/care home operated and staffed by nuns. It was politely received, and when it ended, a few of us stayed to socialise with the residents, who welcomed some fresh faces. I was the last to leave, but on going to do so I was horrified to find that for security reasons the door to the only entrance and exit was firmly locked. By now, most of the staff had disappeared. And I had visions of becoming that mythical figure - the man who was locked in the nunnery overnight. However, I finally found a sister who was able to produce a key and enable me to make my escape.

One of the more interesting and enjoyable aspects of the out-readings was the opportunity to play several parts in the course of one evening, without the chore of learning the lines. I always particularly enjoyed playing Dickens's more colourful characters, from Mr Bumble, Mr Dick and Scrooge, to the villainous Wackford Squeers.

It comes of something of a shock to find that my association with the Society goes back to nearer sixty than fifty years; but I recall them as very pleasant for Cynthia and myself, together, with very good friends.

John Palsler

MY JOURNEY OF DISCOVERY

Charles Dickens and William Hogarth

Nine members of the Bristol and Clifton Dickens Society Book Group met for our first Open Forum on 23 March 2010. My special thanks to Lionel, our very own 'Mr Inimitable' for his generosity in providing such a warm, cosy atmosphere for our various Book Group gatherings - so much appreciated!



William Hogarth self portrait - 1745

May I now attempt share with you a particular 'highlight' of my 'journey of discovery', as I meandered along the literary pathways, to prepare for the Open Forum. I was surprised by the sheer number of references to William Hogarth (1697-1764), who was considered by many, to be the most significant and popular painter of his age.

Although probably better known as an engraver of social and political caricature, Hogarth's name became a recurring theme in my research. I had not realised the extent of Dickens's admiration for Hogarth and his work. He even hung engravings of Hogarth in his homes. Peter Ackroyd, in his magnificent biography of Dickens, refers to his greatest visual debt as coming from Hogarth. For like reasons, he was also greatly taken by Holbein's 'Dance of Death' engravings - part of that affection for the grotesque - which was so powerfully emphasised by his experiences in Italy. However, Ackroyd notes that some of Dickens's contemporaries had difficulties with the melodrama and grotesquerie that Dickens imported into his fiction from art and the stage.

Dickens's visual imagination developed early. Even before his later fascination with the work of William Hogarth, the early prints from the picture books, he described as his 'first companions' during his infant

years, (giants, genii, fairies, beanstalks, 'Red Riding Hood' (his first love) and Jack the Giant-Killer etc), were to affect his own fiction - fiction which itself was largely illustrated.

Dickens could not but be influenced by Hogarth: Jenny Hartley in 'Charles Dickens and the House of Fallen Women' reminds the reader that thinking has not changed much since Hogarth's graphic series 'The Harlot's Progress', in the eighteenth century, with its inevitable descent via prison and disease to early death.

Hogarth's work achieved wide circulation by being distributed as engravings - captivating the minds of many people. These modern moralities show London fraught with temptation, indulgence, violence, murder, disease and the consequences of selfishness; and chart declines, not only from prosperity to destitution, but also from innocence to depravity.



The third image of six from 'A Harlot's Progress' - around which the others were developed to make the series

The visual quality of Dickens's prose led certain critics to compare him with painters of the past. The most obvious comparison was with Hogarth, who had paraded the middle class customs of his century in a similar satirical way. In 1837 Sydney Smith was proclaiming that "the soul of Hogarth has migrated into the body of Mr Dickens", and was soon to become an obligatory "motif" of Dickensian criticism.

Peter Ackroyd suggests, that when considering the nature of Dickensian caricature and dialogue, it is wise to remember the rich tumult of voices from which it sprang, and which encircled Dickens as he walked through the crowded thoroughfares. Sometimes, illustrations that had been torn out of books were sold in the streets, inside upturned umbrellas. Crowds gathered to look at the latest offerings in booksellers' windows, whether pictures of prize fights, or caricatures of the famous murders, or the finer work of Cruikshank (one of Dickens's illustrators), Gillray and Hogarth. There is no doubt that Dickens possessed a remarkable memory, both verbal and visual.

Painter and engraver of modern moral subjects, Hogarth lived in an age when artwork became increasingly commercialised, was viewed in shop windows, taverns and public buildings, and sold in print shops. Old hierarchies broke down, and new forms began to flourish: the ballad opera, the bourgeois tragedy and especially, a new form of fiction called the novel with which authors such as Henry Fielding had great success. Therefore, by that time, Hogarth hit on a new idea: "painting and engraving modern moral subjects... to treat my subjects as a dramatic writer my picture was my stage", as he himself marked in his manuscript notes.

Hogarth drew from the highly moralising Protestant tradition of Dutch genre painting and the very vigorous satirical traditions of the English broadsheet and other types of popular print. In England, the fine arts had little comedy in them before Hogarth. His prints were expensive, and remained so until early nineteenth century reprints brought them to a wider audience.

Another interesting 'discovery' during my 'journey' relates to the corrupt - yet



The Election at Eatanswill - Phiz

ludicrous, electoral process in the fictional borough of 'Eatanswill', described in Chapter 13 of 'Pickwick Papers', to which Professor Andrew Sanders refers in his critical interpretation: he "suggests a continuity with the noisy, violent, and corrupt parliamentary politics of the pre Reform era. Little had evidently changed since Dickens's beloved Hogarth had painted his celebrated 'Election' series in the early 1750s." Professor Sanders draws the reader's attention to the fact that "the novelist's play with the words 'eat' and 'swill' in the name of his fictional constituency might even be taken as a shorthand description of Hogarth's tavern scene." In his commentary,

Professor Sanders also mentions that "Dickens, who prominently hung engravings of Hogarth's work in his homes, would have despairingly recognised that bribery, disorder, and mindless inebriation continued to pose a challenge to the proper exercise of representative government in the new century."



The 3rd of 4 - 'The Polling' - in Hogarth's 'The Humours of an Election' series, 1755

Remembering Dickens's reaction to his personal experience as a youth in the blacking factory, during the period of his father's incarceration at the Marshalsea Debtors' Prison, one cannot overemphasise the importance of Richard Hogarth's collapse and confinement on his son, William Hogarth, who never mentions, in any surviving writing that his father went to prison, although his account of those early years does suggest something of the hardships his family endured.

In conclusion, I was fascinated to discover that Hogarth's mind (like that of his father's) worked verbally rather than, visually, and that this facility may have contributed to the visual mnemonics he developed in art school to replace sketching from nature; he would record his impressions by a visual shorthand, return to his studio, and translate them into images.

Leila Gilmore

THE BROADSTAIRS FESTIVAL



On the Kent coast, as far east as you can go in a straight line from Bristol lies Broadstairs. It is a charming and character seaside resort, that does not seem to have changed much since Victorian times. Kent provided Charles Dickens with great inspiration for a lot of his work. He spent his early childhood in Chatham, where his father worked for the Royal Navy. Kent scenes appear in "Pickwick Papers", "Great Expectations" and "David Copperfield", as well as the "Un Commercial Traveller" and "The Mystery of Edwin Drood". Broadstairs was Dickens favourite holiday resort, and he stayed there for at least a month every year from 1837 to 1852, working most notably on "The Old Curiosity Shop" and "Nicholas Nickleby", which he finished there. He stayed in several different houses

over the years, having a special fondness for Fort House, an imposing looking building on the edge of the cliff overlooking the town and beach. Fort House was later renamed Bleak House by the current owners, causing some confusion as the Bleak House of the novel was in Hertfordshire.

Dickens House in Victoria Parade is now the Dickens Museum. It is well worth a visit, displaying many artefacts and interesting documents. Its original owner was Mary Pearson Strong, who served as the model for Betsy Trotwood. She used to chase the beach donkeys away from her property to the edge of the cliffs. It is said that Dickens would pay the boy in charge of the donkeys to drive the animals near to Miss Strong's house, just to see her chase them away.



The original Bleak House, where David Copperfield was written.

The Dickens links have led to a festival each June: with a costumed parade through the town, finishing up in Victoria Gardens. After the opening by local M.P., Laura Sandys, the 2010 festival co-ordinator, Peter Shaw, welcomed every body and gave a description of forthcoming events. There was a Victorian Fair throughout the week in Victoria Gardens, performances of "The Old Curiosity Shop", Victorian bathing, in some very colourful costumes, a cricket match and walks around the town led by Peter Shaw.

There were jolly coffee mornings held in different venues throughout the week, where you would be sure to see lots of people in Victorian costume.



Broadstairs inspired Dickens to write some very lyrical descriptions of the place: "And since I have been idling at the window here, the tide has risen. The boats are dancing on the bubbling water; the colliers are afloat again; the white bordered waves rush in; the radiant sails are gliding past the shore, and shining on the bright horizon; all the sea sparkling, heaving, swelling up with life and beauty, this bright morning ... "

Broadstairs, with its wonderful sandy beach, its cliffs, its Victorian architecture and its gardens is a splendid place to visit at any time, but especially so when the annual Dickens festival is in full swing. I can't wait for 2012!

EF

DICKENS WORD SEARCH

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1	A	X	S	H	I	R	A	M	G	R	E	W	G	I	O	U	S	B	J	G
2	D	B	T	O	O	T	S	P	A	O	R	W	R	H	A	I	R	U	Z	H
3	A	A	E	F	K	B	Q	P	A	R	I	S	I	U	C	Y	S	L	F	O
4	T	S	E	L	P	I	K	M	R	S	L	U	P	I	N	Z	L	L	L	S
5	R	S	R	D	M	A	D	A	M	E	D	E	F	A	R	G	E	S	O	T
6	R	A	F	F	E	A	A	E	S	P	A	S	Y	N	L	A	O	E	R	O
7	E	R	O	A	R	R	G	P	L	O	R	N	I	S	H	J	R	Y	A	F
8	L	G	R	N	R	W	A	W	Y	C	S	E	O	P	U	A	X	E	F	C
9	L	D	T	N	Y	I	Q	H	I	S	A	T	L	E	U	O	S	T	I	H
10	E	O	H	Y	L	N	D	A	A	T	T	R	D	Q	U	E	I	P	N	R
11	V	N	P	S	E	K	V	R	W	U	C	O	S	I	E	S	S	X	C	I
12	I	S	C	Q	G	L	B	M	O	B	T	H	O	W	R	M	S	J	H	S
13	W	S	O	U	S	E	R	O	Z	F	S	I	L	A	R	E	Y	L	I	T
14	S	U	M	E	Q	I	N	N	M	I	H	W	P	G	V	M	J	K	N	M
15	K	T	P	E	G	S	L	I	D	E	R	S	K	E	W	O	U	Y	G	A
16	C	S	Z	R	O	U	P	N	F	A	S	Z	A	L	L	R	P	J	R	S
17	I	Y	B	S	G	F	E	O	O	R	N	H	S	G	E	Y	E	Z	Y	P
18	D	G	O	J	D	V	W	K	M	M	F	P	D	E	G	A	E	H	T	A
19	L	U	N	O	A	H	C	L	A	Y	P	O	L	E	D	I	U	R	N	S
20	U	A	C	C	L	E	P	R	L	U	C	R	E	T	I	A	T	O	X	T

1. Pip's convict	13. Pickwickian aspiring poet	25. Legal siblings of Bevis Marks
2. Killed by Miss Pross	14. Mr Bounderby's housekeeper	26. Taken in by Thomas Gradgrind
3. Silas Wagg has his pitch near...	15. Guardian of Rosa Bud	27. Auctioneer and Mayor of Colsterham
4. Bill Sykes' dog	16. Once loved by Arthur Clennam	28. Performing dog in Sleary's circus
5. Arthur Gride's housekeeper	17. Barnaby's raven	29. Stryver's nickname for Sydney Carton
6. Lord George Gordon's secretary	18. First name of Mr Wickfield's hypocritical clerk	30. Hawdon's only mourner
7. Montague...	19. Wemmick's father	31. Pickwickian - Nathaniel...
8. Murderer of Talkinghome	20. Sister of Wackford Junior	32. John Rokesmith/John...
9. First of Scrooge's 3 spectral visitors - but not his erstwhile partner	21. Scrooge and...	33. Walter Gay's uncle (nickname)
10. Seducer of Emily	22. Landlady of The Blue Dragon	34. Thomas... plasterer of Bleeding Heart Yard
11. Mrs Chick's close spinster friend	23. Sowerby's apprentice	35. Dr Blimber's senior pupil
12. Friend of Fred Trent, later husband of Marchioness	24. One of the Two Cities	

Answers to this Word Search will be found vertically, horizontally, or diagonally, in any direction.

The puzzle above occupied those who attended my July Garden Party. Here it is for those unable to be there. Answers on page 8.

2010-2011 Meetings at the Westmoreland Hall - Thursdays at 7.30 pm

The season's Westmoreland Hall meetings are listed below. Don't forget the Book, Video and Holiday Reading Group Meetings, and the parties and lunch detailed in your Programme. Contact Frankie if you have mislaid your Programme.

OCTOBER 14 ONE MILLION EIGHT HUNDRED THOUSAND POUNDS
PRESENTERS: FRANKIE SAHNI AND LORNA HUGHES

NOVEMBER 11 THE DARK FOREST
A PLAY BY EDWARD PURCHASE, DIRECTED BY SALLY DRAPER-FRY

DECEMBER 9 A DICKENSIAN CHRISTMAS; Seasonal Readings
ORGANISED SALLY DRAPER-FRY Collection for Julian Trust, Punch, Coffee, Mince Pie £1

MARCH 10TH DICKENSIAN WIVES AND WIDOWS
PRESENTED BY LIZ CROUCHER, PAT CEMLYN-JONES AND EVE FITT

APRIL 14TH DICKENS'S JOURNALISM
A TALK BY BRITTA MARTENS (LECTURER IN ENGLISH, UWE)

MAY 12TH THE GOOD OLD DAYS - OR WERE THEY?
PRESENTED BY PAT CEMLYN-JONES

JUNE 9TH ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING
KILL ME SOONER AND TAKE ME THERE
PRESENTED BY SHARON COOK

David Copperfield by Charles Dickens

Adapted for the stage by Alistair Cording
and Directed by Christopher Scott

This production was performed at the Redgrave Theatre from Wednesday the 5th to Saturday the 8th of May by the students of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

"This timeless classic is the story of struggle and intrigue, of deceit and enduring love. It tells of a young life fashioned on the anvil of Victorian society, written from the heart of one of our greatest ever story-tellers."

This was the writing in the brochure of the Bristol Old Vic Theatre School.

I went to see the Friday performance, which I thoroughly enjoyed. Unfortunately the theatre was not full and I thought that the actors deserved a better appreciation.

The scene was set at Yarmouth and huge screens representing sails decked the stage. The furniture was simple - slatted chairs of varying sizes which were constantly moved about by the cast to represent all the places visited by David.

As David reads his Arabian Nights stories the shadows of the characters appear on the screen bathed in various coloured lighting effects.

The students played many parts and had to show great ingenuity and acting ability. They had to change character - sometimes playing roles of their own age but more often than not someone much younger or very much older.

Whilst most of the cast did extremely well, I have to pick out the wonderful portrayal of Uriah Heep. It was a very fine performance.

I really enjoyed the evening and I wish that there had been a bigger audience to appreciate the skills of all the actors who had worked so hard to entertain us.

Sally Draper-Fry

REVIEWS

The Black Veil *By John Goodrum*

a chilling thriller: at the Playhouse Theatre, Weston-super-Mare

This intriguing play is based on a short story by Charles Dickens. I had not read the story but the flyer synopsis interested me. A young doctor alone at night visited by a distressed woman dressed in deep mourning and a black veil was to become involved in a terrifying, tragic, adventure in the poorest, crime-ridden area of London.

The set was simple - the Doctor's sitting room, his armchair, table, chair, wine and glasses - with the doctor's-bag at the ready. A raised area with a closed curtain, suggesting a bed. Lighting and sound effects transported one to that dark, miserable night and later to the streets and buildings of the Lime House of the 1830's.

The doctor was having a bad dream as he slept in his chair by the fire. His mysterious veiled visitor seeking his help for her sick grandson, Billy, was certainly agitated and upset but why was she so mysterious?

The cleverly written dialogue between the two characters enabled us to piece together the significant happenings in the young man's life. The woman encouraged him to talk of his past love for Clara and his present fiancée, Rose. Gaining his confidence and trust she persuades him to visit her next morning to tend her grandson. The doctor locates his patient only to find him dead! Amongst lots of weeping the plot thickens. Has Billy been murdered?

Luke, a seemingly hard and aggressive character bursts in. With his grievances. More lies and deceit - or may be the truth? So, the truth comes out even for the doctor as his life flashes before him. The end for some is not happy. We see the doctor alone at home again as at the beginning.

It was a great thriller well written, it was only then I heard someone near me say... "Oh it was all in his dream". I am still puzzling over this!

Susan Ham

... Puzzling... Yes, me too!

Though it doesn't really matter. Fantasy is fantasy be it dream or daydream.

Susan and I went to this play together and I found myself fascinated by how much of it was true to the Charles Dickens story and where the adaptation started. I hunted through my books of Dickens's short stories and occasional works and nowhere could I find "The Black Veil". The following Friday I found myself in a bookshop in Walthamstow High Street... "Short Stories of the Nineteenth Century"... Could "The Black Veil" be in there? I opened the book to find it was the first story in the selection. Of course, I bought the book. (Later I found it in my copy of "Sketches by Boz"!).

The first act of John Goodrum's play, and the early part of the second, were true to Dickens's story. Dickens knew what he was doing in choosing the short story form. His text includes a good deal of description - of the doctor's flat, the streets of Walworth through which he walks to find the house(hovel) of the veiled lady, and the hovel itself. There is dialogue, but not a great deal of action. It is a fine short story - described by Edgar Allan Poe as "one of the most forcible things ever written".

John Goodrum's "twist" to the Dickens story was what held our attention in the second half - and what provided the drama, much of it through the language. This became a really 21st century spine-chiller. Unfortunately, it appears through my internet searches that the text of this play has not been published. Gerry Parker, of the Evening Post's "Crackerjack" described the play as uneven, holding the audience's attention only in short bursts. He rated it 6/10 - I felt a little more kindly towards it with a 7/10.

FS

Andersen's English *By Sebastian Barry*

The Hampstead Theatre, London

Exactly a week after seeing 'The Black Veil' I found myself at the Hampstead Theatre, seeing "Andersen's English".

After my disappointment the week before in not being able to access a text of "The Black Veil", I asked straight away at the box office if "Andersen's English" was in print, expecting to be told the name of the publisher and maybe even the ISBN number. The charming young woman assured me that it was available and went off to find me a copy - which she sold me at an advantageous Amazonian sort of price. My friend and I were lunching at the theatre, so I was able to browse through the text and sort out what was going on before the play started, and to read the text in full in the coach on my way home. For the benefit of anyone interested, this is a Faber publication - ISBN 978-057124228-3 (£5.94 via Amazon as I write).

The play tells of the time when Hans Andersen turned up unannounced at Gads Hill Place - and stayed for five weeks. The atmosphere in the Dickens household was fraught, to say the least. Dickens had already met Ellen Ternan. Catherine was extremely unhappy - her misery poignantly and hauntingly captured in the acting of Niamh Cusack. Walter Dickens, aged 16, was being forced, against his will, to leave home and go to India. The awkwardness of Georgina's situation was evident, with Dickens himself as restless as ever; and with his fiery daughter Kate, the only one with the courage to stand up to him.

Hans Andersen, with his limited English (hence the title), was a lost soul, but the individual members of the Dickens family were as lost, as unable to communicate. It was a very moving drama.

FS

DICKENS WORD SEARCH - THE ANSWERS

There are 35 answers; each one has a code of two numbers to the left of it. If you read these numbers as you would a mathematical grid, with the 1st number representing the horizontal axis and the 2nd number the vertical axis, you will find the initial letter, and the answer could be in any direction from there.

			Utah	18-2	18
Toots	3-2	35	Gnp	13-1	17
Flornish	8-7	34	Flora Finching	19-3	16
Sol	13-11	33	Hiram Grewgious	4-1	15
Harron	8-9	32	Mrs Sparsal	9-18	14
Winkle	6-8	31	Augustus Snodgrass	2-20	13
Jo	4-18	30	Dick Swiveller	1-18	12
Memory	16-12	29	Lucretia Tox	9-20	11
Merrylegs	5-5	28	Steerforth	3-1	10
Sapsa	12-6	27	Ghost of Christmas Past	20-1	9
Sissy Jupa	17-9	26	Hortense	12-12	8
Brass	7-12	25	Tigg	17-20	7
Paris	8-3	24	Gashford	14-17	6
Noah Claypole	3-19	23	Peg Siderskew	3-15	5
Mrs Lupin	8-4	22	Bulseye	18-1	4
Marley	8-1	21	Cavendish Square	4-20	3
Fanny Squeers	4-6	20	Madame Defarge	5-5	2
Aged P	16-18	19	Abel Magwitch	1-1	1
Answer	Code	?	Answer	Code	?

FROM THE PAPERS

The Guardian - Simon Hoggart describing Parliament on the day of The Queen's Speech after the election:

An old lady, stooped now, entered the chamber and was guided gently to her seat. All eyes swivelled.

Yes, the arrival of Margaret Thatcher brings the level of hubbub down as people marvel that she is still there - and mobile! It was a slow progress to her seat, steered from one attendant to another, like a child being evacuated during the war. Her face is deathly white, and she looks like Miss Havisham on an unexpected day out.

FUTURE CONFERENCES

The Annual Conference has an important role to play in the organisation of the Dickens Fellowship. However, official business, the AGM, usually takes only half a day and the rest of the time is devoted to lectures, outings and entertainment.

The 2011 Conference will be in Christchurch, New Zealand from the 14th-19th of April - for climate reasons, earlier than northern hemisphere conferences. In 2012, amidst celebrations commemorating the 200th anniversary of Dickens's birth, the Conference will be in Portsmouth - where Dickens was born, at Landport, on February 7th 1812.

It has become customary to hold a 'mini-conference' somewhere in the UK during those years when the International Conference is held abroad. This provides a meeting focus for those unable to make the often quite extensive commitment of time and expense involved in long distance travel. In 2011, such a conference will be held at Canterbury Cathedral Lodge, within the precincts of the Cathedral, from the 28th to 31st of July. The theme will be 'Dickens and Kent', and key speakers will include: Gerald Dickens, and Professors Michael Slater, Malcolm Andrews, Louis James and Tony Williams.

If you want to attend this event, you should book soon, as numbers are limited to 50. Most rooms are twin or double - shared occupancy at £350, and single at £450. Delegates will be welcomed by the Dean, the Very Reverend Robert Willis, one of the Vice Presidents of the Canterbury Branch. Booking details should be sent to the Treasurer, Mrs Gwen Adams, 4 Jacob Close, Margate, Kent CT9 4NB.

FS

Bristol & Clifton Dickens Society

(www.dickens-society.org)

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

COPY DATE FOR THE NEXT NEWSLETTER - 25TH FEBRUARY 2011

Contact Frankie or Eve with your news

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