

THE DICKENS NEWSLETTER

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**Our new President
Frances Hutson**

A Message from the President Frances Hutson

What an honour to be elected President of the Melbourne Dickens Fellowship. Firstly, I must pay tribute to our retiring President Dennis Marriott, who, under very trying circumstances, has guided us and stimulated our interest, not only in Dickens, but in other fields, particularly art. I feel quite overwhelmed, stepping into his shoes. Thank you so much, Dennis, for inspiring and educating us, and for being such a nice guy. Perhaps, in my first piece in 'The Dickens Newsletter', I might tell you a little about myself, and how I came to the Fellowship.

I was born in Sydney, the eldest of six children, the descendent of English, Irish and German convicts, soldiers and free settlers. My father's forbears, being given their tickets of leave, and release from the army, were granted plots of land in what are now the northern suburbs of Sydney, where they established orchards. My mother's ancestors were German and Irish settlers, who also farmed, buying property in and around Sydney.

Both my parents were fortunate in receiving a good education, for the time. My mother became an infants teacher, and my father an accountant in the Taxation Department. They both loved literature, tennis and music. They read us lots of stories, and discussed books and films with us. I clearly remember them telling us about the 1940s film of *Great Expectations*, describing the early scene in the churchyard till we had shivers up and down our spines. Dad also knew several Shakespeare soliloquies by heart, and made Henry V's Agincourt speech, and Hamlet's soliloquies hilariously funny. I learned more about Dickens at school, though we never formally studied him. On Friday afternoons, during a quiet needlework period, Sister would read to us. *Treasure Island*, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Oliver Twist* are three I remember. Then I was given *Oliver Twist* as a prize, so I devoured that. Strangely, I didn't then go on to read more Dickens until much later. I tried *Pickwick Papers*, but was not thrilled by it. I liked *David Copperfield* but not *Hard Times*. Needless to say, I've grown up a bit since then, and now like them all, some better than others.

Music also played a large part in my childhood. My mother played the piano and Dad loved to sing. During the war, my father, who had been rejected by the forces because he was almost blind in one eye, organised home entertainment for friends, neighbours and relatives whenever someone was home on leave. Our lounge room was packed, while remnants of the church tennis club performed versions of *The Mikado*, *Ruddigore* and *Patience*. My brother and I, greatly excited, were allowed to stay up and watch. No wonder I wanted to go on the stage.

My parents were determined that their daughters, as well as their sons, would have a good education and also learn music. We kids took this for granted, though most of our schoolmates, living in a working class area, didn't have these advantages. We realised only later how fortunate we'd been. I was also fortunate in my secondary education. I went to Domremy, a small Catholic Girls College, run by the Presentation sisters, who, incidentally, also educated Germaine Greer. Though sadly lacking science facilities, we had excellent education in the humanities. Domremy was named after the village where Joan of Arc was born and there was a statue of Joan in the garden. So I like to think there was an element of feminism, though not labelled that, in my education and I'm grateful for that.

If NIDA had existed when I left school, I would have begged my parents to let me train there, but alas, it was not to be. I trained as an infants teacher at Sydney Teachers' College. At this time, I joined the Gilbert and Sullivan Society, of which my father was now President. I took singing lessons, and was cast in principal roles for a couple of years, until I was transferred to Bomaderry Primary School, on the NSW South Coast.

Marriage, children, a move to Melbourne with my husband's job, and divorce, took up the next twenty years. After the divorce, I retrained as a teacher-librarian, thanks to the Whitlam Government's Married Women's Retraining Scheme. For several years, I was a teacher-librarian. I then moved to the country, where I drove a MARC (Mobile Area Resource Centre) van for the Education Department, to 13 small one-and-two-teacher schools. What a fabulous job; bringing books, stories and films to these little schools.

After a few years of this, when my children had all left school, I moved back to Melbourne. I volunteered as a newsreader on Radio 3RPH (now Vision Australia Radio). I met Richard Hutson, who accepted me into his Radio Drama group. We performed radio plays, and also recorded talking books for the Association for the Blind. Richard and I married in 1987. He was one of the founding members of the Adelphi Players, who, for some years, gave performances for the Dickens Fellowship. Ask Barb Barrett. But this was before my time. Richard was also a professional actor, so he introduced me to his agent, who accepted me. We were lucky enough to do bit parts in films and TV shows. Later, I acted on stage at La Mama, Chapel Off Chapel, St Martin's, 45 Downstairs, Gasworks, and the Malthouse.

It was Shirley Fitch, now living in Castlemaine, but still a keen Dickensian, who kindled my interest in the Dickens Fellowship. After Richard died, I attended a day at the Dickens International meeting at Melbourne University, and I was hooked. The rest is history.

My daughter now lives in London, so until this year's lockdown, I travelled over there annually. I attended the Dickens International Meeting in Bristol a few years ago. Marvellous! My son-in-law David is very keen on exploring Old London and has introduced me to some wonderful places described by Dickens. I've visited the Doughty Street home, and visited Rochester, the nearest town to Dickens's home at Gads Hill. I hope the closed borders open up soon, so that I can do some more Dickens related exploration.

I look forward to getting to know you all, and to getting to know Charles Dickens better during my time as president.



On the Grapevine

In this issue we welcome our new President Frances Hutson and look forward to her many submissions in the next few years.

There have been further restrictions lifted from our lives and Melburnians' reputation for getting out and enjoying life seems to have suffered little from the lockdowns. Paul will update you on events, in his occasional column *What's On*, below.

Lyndsey is busy preparing her appearance on Zoom, reprising a talk she gave to us last year on the sex

industry in the time of Dickens. This was organised through the resources of the inexhaustible Tim Clark of the Riverside CA branch. Lyndsey has also had time to write a report of the last meeting, do a bit of archive trawling and write pieces on canine matters and, also from the archives, a story about our 1941 Birthday dinner.

My friend Bob Brown (not that one) is a guest writer for this number. His topic is the French Revolution. I attempt to dissect some examples of older couples in Dickens and elsewhere, with regard to their successes and failures and try to update what they teach to those of us in that situation today. We also hear of a new play by member Rosemary Johns.

A Tale of Two Cities will no doubt provide a lot of interesting copy in the months ahead.

Bonne chance a toutes.

What's On

Hi I'm Paul Haydn.

Welcome back after a long break, hope you are all well and looking forward to getting out and about. Here are a few suggestions:

The NGV Triennial Exhibition National Gallery of Victoria

Every level of the NGV features artists, designers and collections from more than 30 countries that are visually stimulating and thought-provoking.

19 Dec to 18 April

Bookings are online at:

<https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/exhibition/triennial-2020/>

Live at the Bowl

Sydney Myer Music Bowl

An open-air season of a range of free musical acts and comedy including the Melbourne Symphony Orchestra (MSO) throughout February and March.

To view the range of acts and book online, go to:

<https://premier.ticketek.com.au/shows/show.aspx?sh=LATBSMMB21>

Me and UooUoo: The RCH 150 Anniversary Art Trail

A series of sculptures from Australian artists that form walking trails throughout Melbourne and Geelong. Mythical creatures that will delight adults and children alike.

To view walking tracks go to:

<https://uooouoo.org.au/>

Becoming You: An incomplete guide Immigration Museum

400 Flinders Street

Melbourne, Victoria, 3000

<https://museums victoria.com.au/immigrationmuseum>

Macbeth Under The Stars

Royal Botanic Gardens

Jan 30 2021-Mar 6 2021

Book online at:

<https://asc.sproutix.com.au/event/?e=27607>

Report: the Christmas meeting, December 9th, 2020 From the Secretary

All delighted to be able to at last meet again live, President Dennis Marriott welcomed 21 members, including one new member, to this deferred Annual General Meeting and the Christmas party.

Dennis reminded members that the next meeting will be in March when Elisabeth Neales will re-introduce us to *A Tale of Two Cities*. Since COVID rules mean we are unable to have our usual birthday dinner at Toorak Uniting Church, he assured members that another venue was being sought.

At the annual general meeting, the annual report was presented, and the committee and officeholders were elected. Having concluded his third consecutive year as president, Dennis was ineligible to stand again and Frances Hutson is our president for 2021.

The committee and officers for next year are:

President:	Frances Hutson
Vice President:	Alan Dilnot
Secretary:	Lyndsey Burton
Treasurer:	Karen Brkic
Committee:	Veronica Delafosse Elna Estcourt Andrew Gemmell Nita Jawary Elisabeth Neales Brian Ruck Deborah Rhodes Peter Spriggins

Immediate past president, Dennis Marriott, is an *ex officio* member of the committee.

The new president, Frances Hutson, took the chair and after a few remarks, declared the AGM closed and announced the main business of the evening: the traditional Christmas Celebration — a little different in this COVID year. Dispensing with the hamper raffles and gift giving, everyone made a donation to Kids Under Cover raising \$94.25 for the charity, in addition to its annual gift of \$300.00 and donations in lieu of payment for the newsletter.

The entertainment began with a reading by president, Frances Hutson, *A Christmas Tree*, written by Dickens in 1850. After the reading, Elna Estcourt ran the first of her 3 quizzes. The questions were brilliantly chosen to maximise the enjoyment of everyone. All levels of knowledge and expertise were catered for and we had great fun.

Alan Dilnot read from 'A Christmas Dinner' from *Sketches by Boz*, and Rosemary Johns, assisted by Frances Hutson, read from *A Christmas Carol*.
Supper followed with all food and equipment managed in a COVID-safe manner as we had the greatest enjoyment in meeting.

Trawling the Archives 1

No Internet, but they did have Dickens.

By Lyndsey Burton

The Dickens Letters Project has uncovered another letter by Dickens. In the [newly discovered letter](#), Dickens thanks Sir Joseph Olliffe, a doctor to the British embassy, for warning him of an outbreak of diphtheria stressing its danger to children. In the summer of 1856, Dickens and his family were holidaying in Boulogne and Dickens sent the children home immediately.

Ultimately about 366 people would die. The doctor's warning caused Dickens to act. In the letter, he notes two of his children's acquaintances had died of the illness but that it was difficult to get the truth of the situation locally. He noted that the townspeople were 'particularly afraid of my knowing it, as having so many means of making it better known.'

Coincidentally, in the same newspaper, *The Australian* 29/12/2020, it was reported that Chinese citizen journalist Zhang Zhan has been jailed for four years for 'picking quarrels and provoking trouble.' She reported the early stages of the COVID-19 outbreak on social media platforms. Her posts were picked up and spread online.

Bulwer-Lytton may well say that the pen is mightier than the sword, but all Dickens had to worry about was the disease; unlike a keyboard a quill cannot be tracked to an IP address.

The French Revolution

by Bob Brown

Bob grew up within a few cricket pitches' length of me in suburban Melbourne. We went to the same school. He now lives mainly in Thailand but, if anything, we have become closer, despite the distance. Bob had a successful career as a comedian, musician and songwriter. He wrote, amongst others, that pervasive Australian anthem [Give Me A Home Among The Gumtrees](#). He has since developed somewhat of a career as a web designer. He helped us immensely in the redesign of our website a few years back. This piece reflects his abiding interest in the French Revolution and [Kenneth Williams](#) - Ed

My interest in the French Revolution started when I was about 10. My father was working as a printer in a government department that had a set of 1929 encyclopaedias they were throwing out. He brought them home and over the next few years I read them constantly, even though there was a couple of them missing. Consequently, my general knowledge of things starting with the letters J, K and L was not as strong as it would otherwise have been. I remember one day being intrigued by this device called a guillotine which I was to find out was used to cut off people's heads in a period of time known as the French Revolution.

I knew very little at the time about France, although I had seen pictures of the Eiffel Tower and I knew the tune to the French National Anthem, the Marseillaise, only because it was the music to the Fitzroy Football Club theme song.

In the ensuing years, I read *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, which I really enjoyed, and *A Tale of Two Cities*, although I was put off by this book a bit because I knew it was historically inaccurate and I found it at the time a bit heavy-going. I did, however catch the 1935 film version of the book starring Ronald Colman, which I quite enjoyed once I got over the historical inaccuracy thing.

‘They seek him here, they seek him there, those Frenchies seek him everywhere.

Is he in heaven, is he in hell, that damned elusive Pimpernel?’

and ‘It is a far, far better thing that I do, than I have ever done;

it is a far, far better rest that I go to than I have ever known.’

For some reason, I still remember the two famous quotes from those books to this very day.

I left school after 5th form and worked for a year. During this time the Carry On movie, *Don't Lose Your Head* was released starring the brilliant comedian Kenneth Williams as Citizen Camembert the Chief of Secret Police for the infamous Robespierre, head of the Committee of Public Safety during the Reign of Terror. One day after work I caught the 6.30 session. It was totally over the top but extremely enjoyable just the same, even though they had the Reign of Terror in 1789 instead of 1794.

The following year I went back to High School to do my Matriculation. One of my subjects, European History, concentrated on the French Revolution. For the first time, I really got a good idea of what the French Revolution was all about. During the second term I joined a Rock and Roll band and did very little school work for the rest of the year. Fortunately, my Term One diligence was enough to enable me to scrape through and get my Matriculation.

Back to work, and after two years of saving and some extra night school study, I was able to afford to do first-year university. There I studied history, politics, and philosophy. Being much older and wiser I did well, won a Commonwealth Scholarship and was able to continue with my course. One day, while leafing through the books at the university bookshop, I came across a book on the French Revolution with a picture of a young man who reminded me of the guitarist from The Who, Pete Townsend. The picture was of Louis Antoine de Saint-Just, who, despite his almost saintly name, was appropriately known at the time as the Angel of Death.

While Robespierre got the headlines, Saint-Just was in some ways the ideological spirit of the Reign of Terror. He was greatly inspired by Robespierre and wrote him a letter praising his stand ‘against the torrent of despotism’. Robespierre took a shine to him, to the point where he was eventually to become Robespierre’s close friend and right-hand man.



www.historytoday.com/archive/antoine-de-saint-just-fashionable-revolutionary

Artist: Pierre-Paul Prud



Pete Townshend at a similar age.

Photobucket.com

The young Saint-Just was a prolific writer and initially abhorred the early violence of the French Revolution, expressing the ideals of a constitutional monarchy and a peoples Legislative Assembly. Following King Louis XVI's attempt to flee the country, things changed dramatically. The Legislative Assembly was disbanded and a National Convention created, to which Saint-Just was elected as a deputy for his local department of Aisne as the Convention's youngest member at the age of 25.

His moment came when he gave an electrifying speech to the Convention condemning the King as a traitor, who must die as an enemy of the people. Robespierre was extremely impressed by the young Saint-Just's speech and totally endorsed everything he said. After a trial before the Convention, the King was found guilty and summarily executed by guillotine.

In the short time that followed Saint-Just drafted a new Constitution, in 1793, expressing the right to vote, and the basic principles of equality. It wasn't implemented due to the worsening situation in the capital, because of the discontent of the [sans-culottes](#) with the moderate Girondin faction of the Convention. Saint-Just lead the attack on the Girondins whose leaders were also executed.

In late 1793 Saint-Just took control of the worsening situation of the army, to bring things under control and avoid defeat on the German frontier. He was then elected on his return to Paris as the leader of the Convention. He was also a member of the all-powerful

Committee of Public Safety and the Convention implemented the Law of Suspects, giving the Committee, and other regional groups, the right to arrest and punish, at their will, anyone who was, rightly or wrongly, accused of being an enemy of the people.

In the following months, the Girondins were executed and Robespierre, Saint-Just, and wheelchair-bound George Couthan controlled the Committee of Public Safety and the government. Saint-Just's views by this time were abundantly clear. The truth was that it was not Citizen Camembert who was the head of Robespierre's secret police, it was Saint-Just.

Later in the year Saint-Just was held responsible for the French Army's defeat of the Austrians at the Battle of Fleurus after he imposed harsh discipline, including the execution of deserters.

Upon his return to Paris things had become worse for Robespierre. Saint-Just supported him to the end. Eventually, the Law of Suspects was seen as a threat to anyone who opposed the regime. Finally, Robespierre, Saint-Just, and many of their Jacobin supporters were arrested and executed after too many Convention members feared they were to be next in line for the guillotine at Robespierre's or Saint-Just's whim.

History presents some fascinating characters and Saint-Just in his very short time in the spotlight was one of them.

Probably his two most famous quotes are:

'The vessel of revolution can arrive at a port only on a sea reddened by torrents of blood.'

'A nation regenerates itself only upon heaps of corpses.'

Saint-Just went from being a moderate constitutional monarchist to a ruthless ideologically-driven tyrant. And all in such a short time. The French Revolution is full of interesting characters but they don't come much more so than Louis Antoine de Saint-Just.

Purebred by Lyndsey Burton

'I think his greatest love, among animals, was for dogs.' : Mamie Dickens

'...with his notched pendant ears, his heavy paws, his ignoble countenance, and servile smile of conciliation, snuffing hither and thither, running to and fro, undecided, uncared for, not wanted, timid, supplicatory — there he was, the embodiment of everything that is pitiful, the same pattering wretch who follows you through the deserted streets at night whose eyes haunt you as you lie in your bed after you have locked him out of your house.'

'Two Dog Shows' *All The Year Round* August 1862

Dickens wrote of two dog shows. One of them, like Crofts was a best-of-breed competition. The other was a shelter for stray dogs. Dickens of course, was for the underdog, soliciting donations for the Holloway Temporary Home for Lost and Starving Dogs. Dickens's article is credited with helping the shelter to grow into The Battersea Dogs Home.

One result of the COVID virus has been an explosion in dog numbers, at least in some suburbs. Clearly, once people had a room full of toilet paper, they bought a dog. Perhaps walking with a dog clearly states, 'This is my exercise time, I won't take more than an hour,' a quite understandable decision given the energetic enforcement of the new regulatory regime. Perhaps many people living alone decided to buy some companionship. One thing is clear, few have adopted a dog from a neighbour or relative needing to get rid of some puppies. Not a Bitzer to be seen.

People living in a street with a park have always had dogs around being taken for walks, but now they are everywhere. Suddenly, dogs are a legion and they are pedigreed. Every variety of terrier is to be seen; Cavalier crosses are extremely popular; the very expensive, very decorative, blue French bulldog, once a rarity, has become almost common. There are more ever-popular dachshunds. Dachshunds are a family dog, loyal, smart and bred to hunt small animals down into their burrows. A dachshund may be old, a dachshund may be fat, but if a neighbour's chook flies over the fence, the hunting instinct stirs, paws pound the turf and the chook is a goner. It was a bit sad when the adopted stray cat had kittens. Two were saved.

Dickens owned a number of animals. Mamie said that the [dogs](#) were his favourites. He certainly owned some small dogs but preferred the big ones. He took his big dogs for walks and was unembarrassed if they terrorised the neighbourhood. It is thought that an auctioned dog collar, bearing Dickens's name and address had belonged to Turk, his big Shepherd cross.

Upon Turk's death, Percy Fitzgerald gave Dickens a giant of a dog he named Sultan. Said to be a breed used to hunt escaped slaves, he was probably a Cuban mastiff. Upon arrival, Sultan ate a kitten.

Sultan was chained up during the day when not actually walking with Dickens; it is no way to treat any dog let alone a giant. At night, unchained, but wearing a steel muzzle, the dog prowled the neighbourhood, returning in the morning tired, smeared with blood and followed by letters of protest from neighbours whose grounds had been invaded. This cost Dickens money. Dickens said that between he and the dog there existed a perfect understanding; the rest of the world was less lucky. After attacking the younger sister of a maid, Sultan was put down.

Albert Payson Terhune, author of *A Book of Famous Dogs* (1937), observed that Sultan was 'a dog that had no more place in a peaceful English country home than has a mailed Visigoth at a village prayer meeting.' Thankfully the breed has died out so there is no possibility of some clown keeping one in a Melbourne suburb.

How to be a successful older couple **by Andrew Gemmell**

Most older couples are coping with problems, usually minor, that seldom assist their ability to get on. Without a lot of experience, I offer the following advice:

A. Don't separate too soon.

You will never be an old couple if you pull the plug too early.



**Charles and Catherine Dickens.
A somewhat successful older couple.
Photographers unknown**

In June 1858 Catherine and Charles Dickens were legally separated. Days later Dickens published a notice in the *London Times* and *Household Words* that tried to explain the separation to the public.

In the notice he stated,

Some domestic trouble of mine, of long-standing, on which I will make no further remark than that it claims to be respected, as being of a sacredly private nature, has lately been brought to an arrangement, which involves no anger or ill-will of any kind, and the whole origin, progress, and surrounding circumstances of which have been, throughout, within the knowledge of my children. It is amicably composed, and its details have now to be forgotten by those concerned in it...

By some means, arising out of wickedness, or out of folly, or out of inconceivable wild chance, or out of all three, this trouble has been the occasion of misrepresentations, mostly grossly false, most monstrous, and most cruel – involving, not only me, but innocent persons dear to my heart... I most solemnly declare, then – and this I do both in my own name and in my wife's name – that all the lately whispered rumours touching the trouble, at which I have glanced, are abominably false. And whosoever repeats one of them after this denial, will lie as wilfully and as foully as it is possible for any false witness to lie, before heaven and earth.

They met in 1834, became engaged in 1835 and were married in April of 1836. In January of 1837 the first of their ten children was born.

The early years of their marriage were apparently quite happy. Dickens was in love with his young wife and she was very proud of her famous husband. In 1841 the couple travelled to Scotland. In 1842 they travelled to America together.

Dickens grew unhappy with Catherine and his marriage. He resented the fact that he had so many children to support. Somehow he saw this as Catherine's fault. He did not approve of Catherine's lack of energy. He began to indicate that she was not, nor had ever been, his intellectual equal - and that she had gained weight.

Now is it possible that if Catherine had lost some weight and done a few adult education courses, or if Charles had begun to recognise again her significant other attributes, that there might have been a different outcome? Charles was surrounded by close and close-mouthed male friends, who may or may not have assisted him in his decision.

I have no intention of mentioning Ellen Ternan or Mary Hogarth in relation to this matter. Oh, Blazes, I just did, but I promise it will not happen again!

B. Show your devotion

In *David Copperfield*, Emma and Wilkins Micawber are true exemplars of this dictum.

Like the Dickens family, the Micawbers have many children. Mr Micawber is a bit of a dill with money, but is always positive concerning his prospects. Many believe his character is based on John Dickens, the father of Charles, but I doubt if Mrs Micawber is reminiscent of his mother.

Throughout their long relationship the devotion seldom falters, even one suspects in Australia where, like almost everyone else in the book, they end up.

They are, in this excerpt, trying to convince the intelligent and compassionate, but new chum, Traddles to contribute some money. David provides what help he can, but to me this extract shows how the apparently weaker partner, in an older couple, sometimes prevails.

Punch has been prepared:

Mr. Micawber, at the then present moment, took a pull at his punch. So we all did: Traddles evidently lost in wondering at what distant time Mr. Micawber and I could have been comrades in the battle of the world.

'Ahem!' said Mr. Micawber, clearing his throat, and warming with the punch and with the fire. 'My dear, another glass?'

Mrs. Micawber said it must be very little; but we couldn't allow that, so it was a glassful.

'As we are quite confidential here, Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, sipping her punch, 'Mr. Traddles being a part of our domesticity, I should much like to have your opinion on Mr. Micawber's prospects. For corn,' said Mrs. Micawber argumentatively, 'as I have repeatedly said to Mr. Micawber, may be gentlemanly, but it is not remunerative. Commission to the extent of two and ninepence in a fortnight cannot, however limited our ideas, be considered remunerative.'

We were all agreed upon that.

'Then,' said Mrs. Micawber, who prided herself on taking a clear view of things, and keeping Mr. Micawber straight by her woman's wisdom, when he might otherwise go a little crooked, 'then I ask myself this question. If corn is not to be relied upon, what

is? Are coals to be relied upon? Not at all. We have turned our attention to that experiment, on the suggestion of my family, and we find it fallacious.'

Mr. Micawber, leaning back in his chair with his hands in his pockets, eyed us aside, and nodded his head, as much as to say that the case was very clearly put.

'The articles of corn and coals,' said Mrs. Micawber, still more argumentatively, 'being equally out of the question, Mr. Copperfield, I naturally look round the world, and say, "What is there in which a person of Mr. Micawber's talent is likely to succeed?" And I exclude the doing anything on commission, because commission is not a certainty. What is best suited to a person of Mr. Micawber's peculiar temperament is, I am convinced, a certainty.'

Traddles and I both expressed, by a feeling murmur, that this great discovery was no doubt true of Mr. Micawber, and that it did him much credit.

'I will not conceal from you, my dear Mr. Copperfield,' said Mrs. Micawber, 'that I have long felt the Brewing business to be particularly adapted to Mr. Micawber. Look at Barclay and Perkins! Look at Truman, Hanbury, and Buxton! It is on that extensive footing that Mr. Micawber, I know from my own knowledge of him, is calculated to shine; and the profits, I am told, are e-NOR-MOUS! But if Mr. Micawber cannot get into those firms — which decline to answer his letters, when he offers his services even in an inferior capacity — what is the use of dwelling upon that idea? None. I may have a conviction that Mr. Micawber's manners — '

'Hem! Really, my dear,' interposed Mr. Micawber.

'My love, be silent,' said Mrs. Micawber, laying her brown glove on his hand. 'I may have a conviction, Mr. Copperfield, that Mr. Micawber's manners peculiarly qualify him for the Banking business. I may argue within myself, that if I had a deposit at a banking-house, the manners of Mr. Micawber, as representing that banking-house, would inspire confidence, and must extend the connexion. But if the various banking-houses refuse to avail themselves of Mr. Micawber's abilities, or receive the offer of them with contumely, what is the use of dwelling upon THAT idea? None. As to originating a banking-business, I may know that there are members of my family who, if they chose to place their money in Mr. Micawber's hands, might found an establishment of that description. But if they do NOT choose to place their money in Mr. Micawber's hands—which they don't—what is the use of that? Again I contend that we are no farther advanced than we were before.'

C. Maintain some independence

Our book of the year in 2021 is *A Tale Of Two Cities* and it was the first Dickens book I ever read, in Form Three in a suburban High School in Melbourne. It is dear to me for lots of reasons. I was a proficient student of the French language and suffered a bit of misunderstanding from fellow students because of that fact. The tale burned itself on my young mind and re-reading it now brings back mixed memories.

In particular, though I had no idea at the time, Dickens seems to have plotted the book completely before writing it. He provides so many allusions to the events that are to occur; echoes, coming storms, footsteps etc. His presentation of Sydney Carton as an incurable reprobate, for example, deliberately, yet subtly reveals the greatness Sydney will show at the end.

Madame Guillotine

by Elisabeth Neales

This is an article published in our newsletter in 2005, the last time we studied *A Tale Of Two Cities*. It is republished here. Elisabeth is still a frequent contributor. - Ed

‘Above all, one hideous figure grew as familiar as if it had been before the general gaze from the foundations of the world—the figure of the sharp female called La Guillotine.

‘It was the popular theme for jests; it was the best cure for headache, it infallibly prevented the hair from turning grey, it imparted a peculiar delicacy to the complexion, it was the National Razor which shaved close: ...’

‘Crash! —A head is held up, and the knitting-women who scarcely lifted their eyes to look at it a moment ago when it could think and speak, count “One”.’

Such passages as these from our book of the year, *A Tale of Two Cities*, inspired me to want to know more about the history of the guillotine. The first evidence of a guillotine-like machine is found in a picture in the British Museum showing execution in Ireland in 1307. In 1400, the Halifax Gibbet was constructed and used at executions on market days in Halifax, England. In this mechanical apparatus, a type of sword was used to decapitate rather than the more usual rope for hanging.

But it is with the French Revolution that that the guillotine is primarily associated. On 10th October 1789, the Paris Assembly debated the Penal Code. Dr Guillotin submitted a proposition in six articles which included a recommendation that death, without the accompaniment of torture and by means of decapitation, should become the sole and standard form of capital punishment in France. It is indeed ironic that the most hated instrument of Terror and Symbol of Tyranny in France is called after Dr Guillotin, a kindly man who wanted to make execution more humane.

It was not until June 3rd, 1791 that the assembly approve a text providing that ‘every person condemned to the death penalty shall have his head severed’. After 1792, several prototypes of guillotine were made. Tobias Schmidt (a German harpsichord plater) was paid 960 francs to cover the cost of making the machine, the sum providing for a leather bag in which to dispose of the severed head. This version of the guillotine was tried out on April 11th, 1792 on sheep and calves, and the first tests on human corpses took place four days later. An oblique blade was then substituted, and the first real execution took place on April 25th, 1792. King Louis XVI was guillotined in the Place de la Revolution (now Place de la Concorde) on January 21st, 1793 and the Queen, Marie Antoinette on October 16th in the same year. The Reign of Terror then began in earnest.

The use of the guillotine in France continued until surprisingly recently. All through the nineteenth century, the guillotine was in regular use and in 1872 Nicholas Roch, the chief executioner in Paris, had no fewer than five assistants. The last public execution took place in 1939 when, on June 17th, a man called Weidmann was guillotined outside the Prison St Pierre in Versailles. After that, a law was passed that no executions were to be held in public but should take place in the yard of the Sante Prison in Paris. The last official use of the guillotine in France was on September 10th, 1977 when Hamida Djandoubi was executed. The death penalty was finally abolished in France in 1981.

Dickens does give a historically accurate account of the use of the guillotine. He is correct in describing executions in the early days of the Revolution taking place in the streets when ropes were hoisted on street lamps and the victims hung, like the dreadful death of old Foulon in Chapter 22. Dickens knows that the use of the guillotine did not begin until mid-1792. He also seems to be accurate in his estimate of the numbers sent to the guillotine — he suggests 52 on one day and 62 ('in the time taken to smoke two pipes' according to the wood-sawyer) on another and so on. This fits fairly well with Fisher's account (in his *History of Europe*) that between 1793 and 1794, 2,800 victims in Paris travelled in the tumbrels to the guillotine. This seems to me to be a far likely estimate than the unsubstantiated estimate from the Internet of 40,000 in Paris alone. Once again, I am impressed that Dickens through his careful reading of Carlyle's *History of the French Revolution*, and his perusal of the 'cartload' of books from the London Library sent to him by Carlyle, got his history right.



From Snipsmedia

Trawling the Archives 2
By War Undaunted
from Lyndsey Burton

We know nothing of the Dickens birthday dinners before 1935, but we do know of the one held 80 years ago this month. On the evening of February 7th, 1941, seventeen months into the Second World War, over 140 guests celebrated Dickens's birthday at Mantons in Bourke Street.



Mantons 236 Bourke Street, the handsome department store that hosted the Birthday dinner in 1941. (State Library of Victoria)

For the last months of 1939 and throughout 1940, the war had little impact on Fellowship meetings. We still met in the evening at 8.00pm, there was no blackout yet. The October meeting of 1939, just weeks after the declaration of war was conducted entirely by children, exactly as planned. Mr V. L. Trotman was probably responsible for the troupe of children. A noted judge and teacher of elocution and drama, he might have taught privately, but given the ease with which he could provide young performers for fellowship meetings, he probably taught in a school.

The planned Christmas pageant of 1939 was cancelled and replaced by a parade of Dickens characters in costume. Mr Trotman was Dan Peggoty. Later, performing as Madam Van Dette, he gave an exhibition of Spanish dancing. Meetings continued to be the usual mixture of songs, recitations, performance and informative papers throughout 1940. The only indication of the war was that in July 1940, Mr Mostyn Wright could not fulfil his part in the evening's activities; he had to report to camp for his compulsory military training in the C.M.F. There was a visitor from the Adelaide branch and there were a couple of international visitors. One was a member returned from London who reported on conditions in the city and there was a visitor from Vancouver, so international travel was still possible. Patriotism grew with a paper on *Our England* in October 1940 and a patriotic fundraising concert in November of that year.

The war was remote and in the northern hemisphere. Australian ships were in the Mediterranean while the German navy was in the North Atlantic; the German-Soviet Non-aggression Pact was intact. The Australian 6th division was in Libya and detachments of

Rommel's Afrika Korps would enter Libya exactly one week after the dinner. In April, Australia would hear about the Desert Rats. It was all still a long way away.

A new play by one of our newer members:

Fire in the Head is a new play by Rosemary Johns exploring the life of the forgotten Kelly, Kate - Ned Kelly's sister.

SAT 27 AND SUN 28 FEBRUARY 2021

The Garden Amphitheatre - 1 View Street Alphington Victoria

Music:

Featuring Thomas Fitzgerald, eminent fiddle player

Directed by Rodney Hall, twice Miles Franklin Award winner, opera and theatre director, the play will have its first public rehearsed readings presented at the garden amphitheatre in Alphington. Actors are Adam May, Emily Paddon-Brown, Melodie Reynolds-Diarra, Gregory J. Fryer, Alex Andreas and Harry Borland.

This project examines violence against women in the volatile and intriguing story of Kate Kelly. The work, set deep in the landscape of Australia, shows Kate investigating her own and her family's lives, in a haunting and lyrical style.

Supported by:

Yarra City Arts. @cityofyarra #yarracityarts

Auspicious Arts

July 2020 script critique - from Abbey Theatre, Dublin:

'The play is written with real passion and this lends emotional and dramatic energy to it. Setting the action to take place "in Kate's head" was clear and imaginative, and it imbued the piece with a good sense of theatricality; there's a real love for the medium on display in the script. The figure of Death was also handled well, as were the complex emotional lives of your characters, dark though they were. The feel of Australia as a land also comes through very strongly, and for us the links to Ireland in the play were predominantly historical ones.'

Jesse Weaver, New Work Associate

You may purchase tickets [here](#)

Submission Guidelines

People are encouraged to submit material for our newsletter with the following in mind:

- Articles should be less than 1500 words, exclusive of notes. This is negotiable, dependent upon space and quality. Do not format the text, your words are all we need.
- Illustrations are welcome for articles and other fellowship matters. If illustrations are to be included they should be sent as separate files and the author should indicate where they would like them to be placed. Please give them full captions indicating the artist especially. Photos or scanned pictures should be supplied at a minimum 300 dpi resolution. Contributors should ensure they have permission to reproduce any such illustrations for publication.
- We use Pages on a Mac to produce the newsletter. Our chosen font is Georgia 12 but you may submit anything comprehensible by Microsoft Word or Apple.
- Paragraphs should be separated by a line space, do not indent.
- Single quotation marks should be used, with double for quotations within quotations.
- At the end of a sentence the full stop should be followed by a single space. No full stop should follow abbreviations such as 'Mr' or 'Dr'.
- The possessive 's' is added to 'Dickens' (i.e. Dickens's) and to similar proper names ending with an 's'.
- Dates should give Day followed by Month followed by Year (e.g. 7 February 1812).

We will produce the newsletter for distribution at our meeting on the third Wednesday of each month. If you would like something published that month, please send it by the first Wednesday of that month. Of course, we will hold your piece over until the next month, if that is warranted.

***The Dickens Newsletter, Melbourne*, founded in October 1982, is published by the Melbourne Dickens Fellowship, monthly except in January.**

The editor is Andrew Gemmell. Contact him by email: editor@dickens.asn.au
He is glad to receive contributions and other emissions.

The newsletter is now completely funded by the bequest of Ormond Butler. We encourage subscribers to request an online version which we will provide without charge. If you require a hard copy we ask you to donate to our chosen charity:

Kids Under Cover: kuc.org.au

The Dickens Fellowship, Melbourne, was formed in August 1904, as Branch No. 24. It is now the oldest Branch of the Fellowship outside England. The Melbourne Dickens Fellowship is incorporated, with the reference A00287 19W.

Its website address is www.dickens.asn.au We warmly welcome new members to our meetings, which are normally held on the 3rd Wednesday of each month at 7.30 pm in the Faichney Room, Toorak Uniting Church, Toorak Rd.



Dickens with Turk
from: *Literary Dogs*