

A Twist of Dickens



Newsletter of the Cleveland Branch,
International Dickens Fellowship

www.clevelanddickensfellowship.org

Find us on Facebook.

May 2021

In this issue...

- Dickens children by 1841...below
- Bill Owen on lighting in 1780 ...2
- Chiaroscuro in *Barnaby Rudge*...2
- Plorn Dickens downunder...3
- Zoom annual conference...3
- Dinner, no; picnic, yes...4
- Dickens and the railroads...4

Meeting Schedule

2020-2021 Book of the Year:

Barnaby Rudge

Meetings, free and open to all admirers of Charles Dickens, begin at 7:00 pm.

We will meet via Zoom until the library allows meetings. Please watch your email for the link to a specific meeting, or the good news that we can meet at the library.

Thurs. May 13. Zoom. We'll take a final look at *Barnaby Rudge*. Bring open-ended discussion questions.

Wed. June 9, 12 pm. A picnic! Metroparks Euclid Creek Reservation, Rear Quarry picnic pavilion. Watch for map in June issue of *etwist*.

Book of the Year for 2020-2021:

Barnaby Rudge.

Next year's book: *American Notes*

Charles and Catherine travel to America.

What do they think of us?

(For a change of pace, *American Notes* is non-fiction, and a preparation for *Martin Chuzzlewit* the year after.)



1841: two boys, two girls

Above: Charles, Mamie, Kate and Walter (infant) in a portrait by Maclise that proud parents Charles and Catherine carried with them to the U.S.A.

Louisa Price, Curator of the Dickens Museum, describes the painting:

The children hold books, suggestive of education and the significance of literature to the family. The pet raven Grip stands father-like on the chaise lounge behind them (this was the second 'Grip'; the first had died that year, but not before greatly delighting Dickens and inspiring the fictional raven featured in Barnaby Rudge)

Maclise's gift eased Catherine's decision to leave them in another's care for six months while she toured America.

Light after dark in *Barnaby Rudge* —Bill Owen

Bill kindly agreed to take on this research into lighting in the era of Dickens's first historical novel. If many scenes are set in darkness, here's why.



Barnaby in prison. "That's how the light gets in."

During the Georgian period, domestic lighting was provided by the central fireplace, candles, rushlights and oil lamps. Due to the limited luminescence of each of these light sources, shadows and dark corners were the norm when compared to today's electric lighting.

Candles were a source of area lighting. They provided light for reading, crafting and socializing. Candles were made from tallow (animal fat) and beeswax. The cheapest candles were made from tallow which emitted a foul odor. Candle wicks were made from paper, flax, hemp and cotton. Candles had to be lit, wicks trimmed, flames extinguished and for each of these chores special tools were made.

Because of their cost, candles were used sparingly and were positioned close to where the light was most needed. Candlesticks and chambersticks (candlesticks with handles) were carried to provide safe passage from room to room. Candle lanterns (candles in an enclosure made from metal with holes or from glass panes) provided a portable light source along with draft resistance. Wall sconces improved the usefulness of candles as a light source. Polished metal, faceted glass and mirrors were used to enhance light dispersion.

A cheaper alternative to candles were rushlights made from dried piths of rush plants which were soaked in animal fat. They were mounted horizontally in special holders and often times both ends were lit.

Rushlights were less bright and with a shorter burning time than candles but were a cheaper alternative and therefore more readily available to poor people. In 1709, the UK government introduced the candle tax. The tax was payable on each candle made by chandlers (candle makers).

Since the tax added to the cost of candles and because it did not apply to rushlights, many people made rushlights domestically.

During the early Victorian period, candles and lamps were still the primary sources of domestic lighting, but improvements were made to candles and lamps which enhanced the light quality of each. As the whaling industry grew after 1800, spermaceti (a waxy substance derived

from the sperm whale) became a popular candle material because it produced a brighter light, was available in large quantities and it did not produce a bad odor. Paraffin wax (a coal distillation product) was used as candle wax after 1850 because it burned clearly, did not have a bad odor and as it became readily available, its cost went down. Newly developed flat braided wicks coiled when burned and did not require trimming. Lamp light improved in the mid 1850's, when coal and petroleum-based fuels became readily available. In the conclusion to *Pickwick Papers*, Dickens points out this truth: "There are dark shadows on the earth, but its lights are stronger in the contrast."



You know me, Barnaby? (p.12)

Chiaroscuro in *Barnaby Rudge*: Dickens uses his words.

Chiaroscuro paintings employ contrast, dark backgrounds, and selective highlights to create emotion and high drama. In BR, Dickens often painted in prose.

C 2. 21. Varden meets Rudge senior in the woods at night: *In handing up the lantern, the man necessarily cast its rays full on the speaker's face. Their eyes met at the instant. He suddenly dropped it and crushed it with his foot.*

C 17. 146. Rudge senior sees his son for the first time: *...bending down over the prostrate form, [he] softly turned back the head and looked into the face. The light of the fire was upon it, and its every lineament was revealed distinctly.*

C 55. 452. Rioters burn The Warren: *The burning pile, revealing rooms and passages red hot, through gaps made in the crumbling walls; the tributary fires that licked the outer brick and stones with their long-forked tongues, and ran up to meet the glowing mass within; the shining of the flames upon the villains who looked on and fed them....* —K. S.

***The Dickens Boy*, a novel by Thomas Keneally (2020)**

Plorn (Edward Bulwar Lytton Dickens, the youngest Dickens, nicknamed by his father) was shipped off to Australia in 1868 when he was just sixteen, an adolescent and a poor student. In England Plorn had watched the other boys leave for the Army, the Navy and, in the case of his older brother Alfred, to Australia. Plorn is determined to “apply himself,” to prove himself to his father, “the governor.”

Keneally chose to write these two years of Plorn’s story in the first person. Plorn’s development is played out against early days in Australia. For US readers, the



novel is a lesson in the history of that country, its various factions, problems, preoccupations. As the reader roots for him, Plorn does well. He does indeed apply himself. Albert, not so well. He drinks too much and feeds his resentment at being sent off by “the guvnor.”

Alan Dilnot, Australian pundit (Adjunct Research Fellow at Monash University, Australia), reviewed this new novel in the Winter Issue of *The Dickensian*.

He began by nitpicking Keneally’s historical detail. Kate was not the eldest Dickens daughter; the children didn’t refer to Ellen Ternan as “the Irish girl,” etc. He ended his review on an upbeat note, though. This is a novel, meant to be a good read, and, as such, he recommends it. “Keneally’s genius ... is unmistakable.” Dilnot calls the memorial service for Dickens in Sydney, attended by Plorn, Alfred and Anthony Trollope’s son Fred, “entirely fictional and entirely credible.... a fitting conclusion to a thoroughly absorbing narrative.” I agree.

But, alas, a little research reveals that poor Plorn didn’t do so well after the first two years. —K. S.

Attend Fellowship Conference by Zoom. Email: dickensfellowshiptalks@gmail.com Zoom Friday, July 16 (General Meeting), Saturday, July 17 and Sunday July 18.

No plane fares, no dorm fees! Visit this year’s annual conference for free! All you need are Zoom links. Email the address above, tell them you’re from the Cleveland Fellowship, and for which segments you want links. Note the General Meeting is for members only, but you and your guests can join the rest of the program the next two days. What a list of speakers! Check out the entire program on the International Fellowship website or use the link below.
www.dickensfellowship.org/sites/default/files/events/prog_final.pdf



Saturday morning Lucinda Dickens Hawksley (great, great, great) talks about CD’s daughter Katey. (Lucinda wrote the book!)



Gerald Dickens (above) reads “The Mantalinis” from *Nicholas Nickleby*. Tony Williams (left) speaks on seeing Dickens televised.



Malcolm Andrews (above), editor of *The Dickensian* for many years, calls his talk “Windows into Dickens’s world.” Emily Bell, new editor, speaks also.

A Twist of Dickens is published three times yearly by the Cleveland Dickens Fellowship. Coeditors: Beth Bliss, Kathleen Schuerger. For mail changes call Beth at 216-533-0813, email her at ebliss1967@gmail.com, or write to her address on page 4. Articles may be emailed to k.schuerger@outlook.com

Picnic Wed. June 9, noon, Euclid Creek Reservation, Rear Quarry Pavilion



Instead of our annual Memorial Dinner this June we'll have a picnic. Find Metroparks Euclid Creek Reservation off Green Rd. (1/2 way around War Memorial) or off Highland Rd. about 500 feet south of Euclid Ave.

We'll gather at Rear Quarry Picnic area at 12:00. (Check out the view from the rear quarry at left). Bring something to complement a meat, cheese and bread platter if you like—or not. No liquor allowed.

Skip the rain check. We'll be under a roof. Lavs and parking nearby. Better bring your mask.

Watch the *etwist* near the end of May for a map.

Questions? Beth: (216) 533 0813 or email her:

eb bliss1967@gmail.com



Dickens Fellowship
Beth Bliss, Newsletter Editor
1131 East Blvd.
Aurora, OH 44202

Dickens on Railways: A Great Novelist's Travels by Train. Ed. Tony Williams

Railroads were invented and came on the scene in the early 1830's. They developed over Dickens's lifetime and he used them especially near the end of his life for his tours in both Great Britain and the United States. As Tony Williams states –It was impossible for Charles Dickens to avoid railways. Tony has presented an excellent group of articles and illustrations from the novels, journals, and letters written by Dickens. He (Tony) has included interesting introductions to each section, to clarify the background of what Dickens has written. It is very informative to read. Included in this collection: "An American Railroad: Lowell and its Factory System," from *American Notes*. "Railway Strikes" from *Mrs. Lirriper's Legacy*, and "Travel in Britain" from *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices*.

To tell the truth, I only associated Dickens with the Staplehurst accident, but this collection shows how connected he was to the railway. I highly recommend this book. I've learned many things about Dickens and trains through his writing. —**Beth Bliss**



The Railway Mañon.

A satirical cartoon by Cruikshank. Imagine how the cuts and the trains disrupted the English landscape. The train says, "I come to eat you up."