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**The murder of Laocoön and
his two sons**

A Message from the President Dennis Marriott

Dear Fellow Dickensians

Members may have seen this statement on our Fellowship website: 'Due to the coronavirus the monthly meetings will be cancelled until such time that it will be safe to recommence them. Depending upon that time we will have to do some juggling with the presentations in consultation with the speakers'. As you are aware the bond continues through our newsletter and you may want to reach out to some fellow members by a phone call as this self-quarantine imposition can be very lonely. Stay safe, there will be an end to this in due course.

Troy (also by Dennis Marriott)

The Iliad and *The Odyssey* were like a kind of bible to the Greeks and mostly known by heart by every man and learnt by every child. In looking at *The Iliad* in relation to the Trojan War, many are aware it tells but a part of the war, and what an exciting part. I am not attempting to write about this epic, rather, like a wayward electron bounce around the fringes and beyond, with points that may be of interest. I must point out that with Greek mythology there are several variants of the same theme.

Helen of Troy came from an interesting family. Her mother was Leda of Leda and the Swan. Leda, who was already pregnant by her husband Tyndareus, the king of Sparta, was further impregnated by Zeus in the guise of a swan. Leda bore two eggs, the first being Zeus' offspring containing Helen and Pollux; the second egg containing Castor and Clytemnestra. Castor and Pollux were twins and those who have been to Rome may recall seeing statues of them, each with a horse, at the top of the stairs on the Capitoline Hill. Castor was a great horseman and Pollux a great boxer. They both had many adventures one with Jason and the Argonauts on their quest to find the Golden Fleece. When Castor was killed, Pollux who was immortal asked Zeus not to separate them and either let him die too or make Castor immortal. Zeus granted his request and made them the constellation in the sky we know as Gemini. Helen, the most beautiful woman of her age married Menelaus, the king of Sparta. Her sister Clytemnestra in turn married his brother Agamemnon, king of Mycenae.

When one mentions the Trojan War the story of the Trojan Horse usually springs to mind. In both *The Iliad* and *The Odyssey* there is but scant mention of the tale. Further references can be found in Virgil's *The Aeneid*, completed in 19BC, as well as Smyrnaeusés' *Posthomerica*, 4th Century AD. There have been more ancient links to the story in, for example, the Greek poet Euripides' play *The Trojan Women* in 415BC. As we know, the Greeks, pretending to have left, only hid their ships behind a nearby island. They left behind the carved horse which cunningly concealed a number of Greek warriors. As the Trojans debated what to do with the horse, the priest Laocöon protested and wanted it set on fire. His lack of success was further enhanced when Poseidon, who had a grudge against Laocöon, sent two giant sea snakes to bite and strangle Laocöon and his two sons (see front cover - Ed). The outcome of this was that the horse was taken inside Troy. There was a magnificent Greek statue carved of this group from as early as the 1st Century BC. In the

early 16th Century, Pope Julius was excavating much of Rome to build roads and magnificent buildings. At the site of Nero's Palace was unearthed this wonderful statue. Michelangelo was in attendance when it was raised. The central figure of Laocöon in particular is truly remarkable, with the straining and twisting of the contracted abdomen in particular. Michelangelo would have taken inspiration from this form and one can see similar twisted torsos in some of his work. In closing this tale I will add two minor points; firstly that it was from *The Aeneid* that we get the quote 'I fear the Greeks, even bearing gifts', and secondly, in Dickens's *A Christmas Carol*. At one point Scrooge, in a hurry to get dressed, gets tangled up, and he notes he was 'making a perfect Laocöon of himself with his stockings'.

When the Greeks, under the command of Agamemnon, sailed to Troy to retrieve Helen, they were frustrated by the lack of wind. The seer Calchas advised Agamemnon that he had angered the goddess Artemis by slaying one of her sacred deer and that to appease her he was required to sacrifice his daughter Iphigeneia. Although reluctant at first he was pressured to do so. To get Iphigeneia and her mother Clytemnestra to come to the port he said it was in order that she marry Achilles. Achilles was not aware of this and when he found out he unsuccessfully tried to stop the sacrifice. Moving forward ten years Agamemnon returns from Troy to be publicly greeted graciously by Clytemnestra who, when they entered their private apartments, suggested he bathe. Once he was in the bath she throws a net over him and stabs him to death. The reason for the murder was because of the sacrifice of their daughter and also that she had taken a lover, Aegisthus, and she was desirous of sharing the throne with him. Clytemnestra was eventually killed by her son. Clytemnestra has not been treated kindly by adherents of Greek mythology, being referred to as a duplicitous murderer and compared to Lady Macbeth. Personally, I feel Agamemnon got all he deserved; why should she not take a lover following his filicide of Iphigeneia?

The hero of *The Iliad* is often thought of as Achilles, but I am certainly not alone in believing the real hero was the noble Hector. Hector was a loving and faithful husband and father as well as a dutiful son. He had many successes throughout the war and was a good leader and a valuable friend. He often railed at Paris for the misfortunes he had brought to Troy, albeit that as well as King Priam, he was one of the few who was always polite to Helen, despite the woes she brought to Troy.

So, what happened to the central players in *The Iliad*?

Achilles died after being struck in the heel by an arrow fired by Paris.

Paris in turn was killed by an arrow fired by Philoctetes, who had inherited from Hercules the bow and poisoned arrow he used.

Helen returned to Sparta with Menelaus and they lived together. When he died, she was driven out of Sparta and eventually went to Rhodes, where Polyxo, a widowed Trojan, who lost her husband in the war recognised Helen, and had her servants tie her to a tree and strangle her.

King Priam of Troy was killed by Neoptolemus, the son of Achilles.



Andromache

Andromache, wife of Hector, was taken as a concubine by Neoptolemus (after throwing her baby son headfirst from the walls of Troy). After Neoptolemus died she moved away and married Helenus, a son of Priam, and had a peaceful life.

Aeneas, although he was not a major figure in *The Iliad*, was a Trojan nobleman, a cousin of Hector and his main lieutenant. He escaped, saving his family and carrying his elderly father on his back as Troy was burning down. Virgil in *The Aeneid* tells of his subsequent wanderings before landing in Italy and founding the city of Rome thus giving Rome a link to ancient history.



Uriah's Utterings

I am so proud of our members and their indomitable spirit. To use their time to entertain and educate us is above and beyond the call of duty. I asked them to describe their experiences of isolation. I know it has become clichéd to do that, but their responses, as you will see, are better written than most. I hope that they will become regular contributors.

The usual suspects like Lyndsey, Barbara, Alan, Dennis and Patricia have also responded with vigour and talent, writing longer pieces about a wide variety of subjects that, I hope, will interest our readers.

A Facebook friend recently sent me this, about the reaction of pets to the increased presence of family in the home:

Our dogs think that we have given up work so we can spend more time with them.

Our cats seem to understand that it confirms what they have always believed:

that we are losers!



Miss Nipper's Notes

Miss Nipper loves to go snooping through history. She likes trawling through old documents and telling people about them.

How have pandemics affected the Melbourne Fellowship? Not very much it seems. In 1919, the Spanish flu arrived in Australia. Quarantine measures limited the deaths to 10,00 people. We do not know for certain if this pandemic had any effect on the meetings of the Melbourne Dickens Fellowship, but the Fellowship

definitely met in August and November. 1957 brought the Asian flu and in 1968, the Hong Kong flu became Australia's third pandemic of the century.

The pandemics had no impact on the birthday dinners of 1957 and 1968. Both were at The Victoria Hotel, formerly The Victoria Coffee Palace. Although The Victoria had a liquor licence, (granted in 1967), the drinks in 1968 were, as always, jugs of cordial. In 1957, 145 guests paid 10/6 to attend. In 1968, 103 guests paid \$2.00 each for the program of music, recitations and a guest speaker.

1957 was a significant year for the Melbourne Fellowship; Mrs Alexander Hay Hedley became the first female president. At the first meeting of the year, members enjoyed a slide show of her recent trip to 'England and the Continent'. She provided the running commentary while her husband operated the projector. Home-made lollies were provided.

Before we smile and perhaps groan, we need to remember that in 1957 the colour slide was still something of a novelty. Cameras were not ubiquitous; point and click had not arrived. Photography, not a cheap hobby, took skill. There were few bad photographs taken in this era and Kodachrome produced beautiful slides. It was not unusual to be invited to visit people to show slides of weddings and other events.

Fellowship meetings in both years followed the usual pattern of the time: songs, recitations and a speaker upon a topic or aspect of a novel. The minutes show that then, as now, people clearing estates offered us collections of Dickens. Few seem to realise that we are the one organisation with no shortage of Dickens's works.

In August, 1957, at 8.00pm, the committee met at the president's home. The house still stands in Bowen Crescent opposite Princes Park. At the end of business there was a supper and, of course, a slide show.

Throughout 1957 there are frequent references to people returning after a long illness and perhaps a few more apologies than usual. We cannot know the cause, but the pandemic had no impact on the business of the branch.

Eleven years later in 1968, the year of the Hong Kong flu, Mrs Alexander Hay Hedley was again president. She was absent for several months visiting Kenya; her letters were read out at meetings.

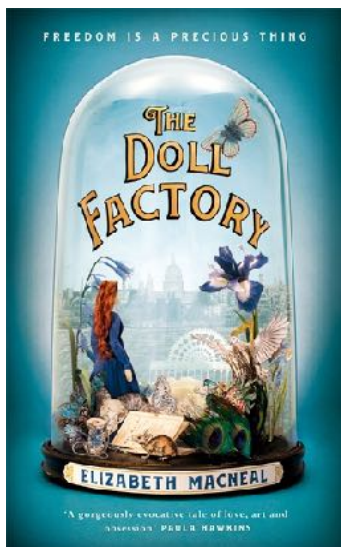
In 1968, there was continuity and change. Each meeting still began with the singing of the national anthem, but we had to quit the Assembly Hall after meeting there for nearly 30 years. The idea of meeting on a Saturday afternoon during winter was suggested and rejected.

There is always something to amuse. The Adelaide branch suggested an interstate conference. Melbourne thought this a very good idea, but too hard and too ambitious. 2004 rolled around and organising an international conference was to be no problem at all. The previous year, a cushion had failed to sell at a Bring and Buy night. So in June 1968, a sub-committee met to decide what to do with it. They were still grappling with the cushion problem in September. Tact, diplomacy and consideration for a donor's feelings were probably at work.

The minutes record several people with long illnesses in 1968. In November, the Branch's patron, Councillor Robert Henry Solly died. At the end of his term as mayor, the committee made a deliberate decision to ask him to continue as patron. He can be seen about one minute into this video:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3V062bPAag>

In December 1968 a former president of the branch, Frederick Charles Sides also died. Both men were in their 80s and Mr Sides had suffered several episodes of illness the previous year.

In the new century, 2009 brought a fourth Australian pandemic; this time it was Swine flu. The Commonwealth Department of Health reported 191 deaths. The current pandemic, unlike the others, has prompted the lockdown and stopped meetings. It is the first pandemic in the era of the social media rumour mill and global electronic media with their apocalyptic coverage. COVID19 practically has its own Facebook page. What we are seeing today may well be the pattern for the future.



Elizabeth Macneal's THE DOLL FACTORY

London: Pan Macmillan, 2019. 377 pp.

A review by Barbara Sharpe

Victorian London. Guttering candlelight. Laudanum. Twins, once identical. Deformity. Obsession. Taxidermy. A red-haired lower-class heroine feeling her way to creative freedom (and love). A scurrying street urchin for touches of filth, humour and pathos. And dolls, of course, that favourite motif of Lucy Sussex and other period-mystery authors. Add descriptions such as 'the

locomotive grunt and whistle' of snoring, and the use throughout of the breathless, suspenseful present tense.

What more could you want in a literary romantic historical thriller?

Enter the Pre-Raphaelites and their women, a Landseer type in need of artfully posed dead animals as subjects for his paintings; a wealth of detail about the art world c. 1850 – a dash of emerald to emphasise ruby-redness; a resinous gloss to give a stained-glass effect; and Dickens, art critic in his own periodical, seeing ugliness where these brash younger men see Truth.



**Mariana by Millais:
Image from Creative
Commons**

The writer is herself a working potter. Her heroine Iris Whittle channels Rossetti's (eventual) wife Lizzie Siddal: artist's model, painter and poet, who nearly died after long hours in a bathtub as the drowned *Ophelia*. Fictional and real artists and artworks mingle. Lizzie appears, but here it is Iris who poses endlessly as Queen in a grand ambitious painting. When two men visit the Curiosities shop, 'Louis Frost' tells the other: 'And Millais, you must have a mouse for the corner of your *Mariana*. To add movement to that bare patch of canvas'.

It's 1850. Confined in a wooden palisade, week by week the edifice of the Great Exhibition rises, 'cranes and pulleys silhouetted like vultures against the sky' – 'It is magnificent. To capture and display so many products ... all under one huge glass roof ... It is little surprise that *Punch* has nicknamed it the Crystal Palace'.

Glass is a central motif in this novel. There's the roof finally winched into place over that soaring skeletal cage; the glass-fronted cases and glass domes which display and

protect a collector's specimens or parlour baubles; and, in the mind of the writer and her modern reader, the glass ceiling above the aspiring female within the Brotherhood.

The Great Exhibition 'will be dismantled from Hyde Park after a year' – and Silas from the Curiosities shop wonders: 'What is the point of a museum if not to preserve its objects forever?' You can't miss the novel's debt to John Fowles's *The Collector* (1963; film 1965). This is the age of the great collectors (Forster included), of the founding of museums and zoos – and the desire to keep, pin down and categorise is counterpoint to a young woman's desire to free herself and her talent from restraints.

Which brings us to the necessary 'sexual element' (to borrow Peter Cook's term from *Beyond the Fringe*) – and this romantic thriller obliges. At a base level, if you've ever wondered how those Victorians managed to do it, encumbered as they were by layers of clothing and propriety, you may learn something. More finely, Macneal plays with the possibly conflicted sensibility of readers who have been sexually liberated but then Me-Too'd. Her heroine may have to 'encourage and discourage, so as not to lead to doubts of her purity and goodness but not make the men feel snubbed'.

The Doll Factory also indulges our rosy dream of a past time while rudely needling it. The single-toothed excrement-smearing urchin Albie is no pretty airbrushed waif from *Oliver!*

Macneal has light-fingered her characters, incidents and phrases from a mass of research into the PRB and the social and cultural history of London. Some slips are to be expected. She suggests that the famed anatomical collectors John Hunter (d. 1793) and Astley Cooper (d. 1841) are still alive in 1850. The 'flower names' of the twins, Iris and Rose, are



improbable for girls aged 20 in 1850, and so born in 1830 (to unimaginative parents); that naming fashion began later, and Iris is certainly a post-1850 name.

More seriously, has Macneal taken at face value the many internet images of 'creepy' Victoriana photographs of supposedly dead children? When Iris paints the blank china face of a doll's head so that it resembles a child in a daguerreotype, she looks for signs that tell if the doll is to be a plaything or funerary art for a dead child, in which case – "There might be a clear prop behind the infant, even a person holding them who is hidden to look like upholstery ... "Alive", Iris decides. "Her eyes are blurred."".

Yes, there was a trade in *memento mori*. But adults shrouded as chairs or hidden behind curtains were there to hold a living child still for the exposure time, which by the 1850s wasn't so long as to mean live eyes would necessarily blur. And there is a proliferation of bogus or wrongly

captioned images on Pinterest and other websites.

See: <https://www.atlasobscura.com>

Iris leaves behind that drudgery in the dank cellar of the Dolls Emporium. Will she also escape the collector? Can she free herself from being captured on canvas by male artists?

This is a readable, well-crafted, popular first novel, with TV series rights sold before publication, promoted by booksellers to those who like art and history, those who enjoyed Tracy Chevalier's *Girl with a Pearl Earring* or Jessie Burton's *The Miniaturist*.

A final curiosity. Australian readers will feel for Rossetti's wombat which, guised as Louis Frost's Guinevere, waddle-roisters through the pages to a tragicomic end.

Notes

Dickens found Millais's *Christ in the House of His Parents* (1849-50) to be ugly and irreverent – 'Old Lamps for New Ones', *Household Words* 12, 15 June 1850.

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-christ-in-the-house-of-his-parents-the-carpenters-shop-n03584>

Millais, *Ophelia* (1851-2)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-ophelia-n01506>

Millais, *Mariana* (1851)

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/millais-mariana-t07553>

If you have trouble with these links, copy each URL into your browser and they should work. I think the Tate may have some kind of funny business going on - Ed

READING THE DICKENSIAN IN THE TIME OF THE CORONAVIRUS

by Patricia Wiltshire

Two issues of *The Dickensian*, kindly forwarded at my request by Lyndsey Burton, kept me up-to-date with some recent developments in the Central Branch of The Dickens Fellowship in London. 'Staying home', as recommended by Coronavirus Guidelines, allowed some extra time to find out what members of the Dickens Fellowship in the UK had been sharing before the virus took hold.

This passage of time was marked for me by the observation that between Winter and Spring Issues of 2019, yet another President had taken over the reins of the Dickens Fellowship. Reminders of former Presidents were still to be found in the list of contributors, and obituaries, though sad to note, provided a picture of lives spent in fellowship with other lovers of Charles Dickens.

It was no surprise to read that Ian David Charles Dickens, the new President, is 'massively proud of his surname'. He is a great-great-grandson of Charles John Huffam Dickens and Catherine Thompson Hogarth and it is the awareness of the role of childhood in Dickens's life that he wishes to emphasise as the central premise of his term in office.

I would recommend *The Dickensian* to all members of the MDF for its ability to bring us closer to Dickens by means of its wide membership, informed articles, book and theatre reviews and tantalising advertisements of events one could attend if one was in England before the advent of the Coronavirus. Some of us, and I'm one of them, may have to be content with the memories we have of Charles Dickens Walks from Tube Stations and other delights available only in the place of his birth.

Amongst the many excellent articles and reviews of wide interest, 'The Influence of Dickens on Algerian Literature' stood out for me as an example of what is so rewarding about exploring the influences that unite writers, and not the tabloid-style gossip that divides and distracts from literature's real purpose. Dickens's wider influence is rarely explored in this way, and this article brought new insights about the spread of his influence beyond those observed in European literature, and in the work of French/Algerian writer, Albert Camus.

By contrast, it was disappointing to note the spread of that other 'virus' whittling away at Dickens's good name in an article 'Madness and the Dickens Marriage - A New Source' by John Bowen, brought to my notice originally in an article written by Lyndsey Burton in the MDF newsletter. In this article, we have John Bowen's word and summation of it, as well as an illegible longhand extract from a letter from Edward Dutton Cook to William Thomas, 'that proof' of Dickens's bad behaviour, which 'critics and biographers have known for years', has now turned up at Harvard University.

This revelation had an effect on me of warranting 'a sigh' containing as it did a repetitive message seemingly orchestrated and seemingly intent on discrediting Dickens in some

way. This portrayal of Dickens as a pretty ordinary and nasty sort of man, does appear to have taken the form of a virus for which there is no vaccine. Those whose understanding of Dickens comes through a love of his work, and a knowledge about him gained through reputable sources, are likely to feel sorely the omission of the missing text from ‘the violated letter’ in this article, as well as the omission of so much evidence available to disprove the charges made.

Less vitriolic, but having as much literary value as the current interest in the rift between the Royal Family and Harry and Megan, is the article examining ‘the rift’ between Mamie Dickens and Georgina Hogarth with the passing of time. However, the spread of this ‘virus’ attacking the fundamental value of Dickens’s contribution to humanity by this whittling away of his good name, has become as wide-reaching as the virus which is now preventing lovers of Dickens from gathering together in familiar places.

As a way of showing both understanding and respect for different beliefs, as well as acknowledging influences, this last paragraph from the article by ABDERREZAQ GHAFSI is a good example:

In contrast to Dickens who believed in the power of human sympathy and love to change society, Minnah trusted the socio-economic patterns of society as solutions to inequality and injustice. Despite these differences, Minnah considered Dickens as a mentor who influenced his imagination and writings.

Elsewhere in this article is a reference to Dickens’s ‘exemplary integrity’. It is time those hell-bent on portraying and labelling Dickens as *a liar, seducer, adulterer, bad father, bad husband* and so on, put their fetid imaginations to rest, and let those of us who love Dickens, as Dostoevsky once said his fellow-Russians did, continue to be influenced by the many examples of his compassion and love for humanity, as well as by his unsparing attacks on hypocrisy, cruelty, snobbery and malicious gossip of any kind.

David’s Epic Journey

by Alan Dilnot

Probably every Dickensian knows that before Dickens began *David Copperfield* he had written an ‘autobiographical fragment’, which concerned his time in the Blacking Factory at Hungerford Stairs in London. Some parts of this account were transferred almost verbatim into *David Copperfield* and they form the basis for David’s labours in the wine vaults of Murdstone and Grimby’s. Dickens’s preface to the edition of the novel in 1869 makes it clear that he thought, and wished his readers to think, that he had been telling his own story in the early parts of *David Copperfield*, and there are several non-fictional essays by him which amplify the picture. For those who wish to read a coherent compendium of Dickens’s own memories of his youth, try *My Early Times*, compiled and edited by Peter Rowland, London: the Folio Society, 1988. Almost every word of that personal narrative comes from Dickens himself.

However, the early chapters of *David Copperfield* seem to involve a kind of distancing between Dickens and his young hero David. Dickens was born at Landport, Portsmouth, and within four years his family moved to another base for the Royal Navy, Chatham in

Kent. By contrast, David is born at Blunderstone Rookery in Suffolk, a few miles away from the coast. The nearest port is Yarmouth, not a base for the Navy, but for fishing smacks and merchant vessels. David plays with Little Em'ly on the beach there, whereas the young Charles played with Lucy Strughell in Chatham. David was 'home-schooled' at first in Blunderstone and then at Mr. Creakle's, whereas young Charles went to William Giles's school in Rochester. David's father had died six months before David was born and David's mother died when he was about ten years old; Charles's parents were still alive when he was already well launched into his writing career.

The two narratives come together, of course, when Charles goes into the Blacking Factory and David goes into Murdstone and Grimby's, but they separate again when David resolves to go in search of his aunt, Betsey Trotwood:

'I had resolved to run away. – To go, by some means or other, down into the country, to the only relation I had in the world, and tell my story to my aunt, Miss Betsey.'¹

David's journey begins in London, and he soon loses his box and his money, which are stolen by a lanky young man with a cart. Thus David sets out destitute on what he takes to be the Dover Road on his way to Greenwich. He adapts words from the burial service: he is 'taking very little more out of the world, towards the retreat of my aunt, Miss Betsey, than I had brought into it, on that night when my arrival gave her so much umbrage.' At Greenwich he sells his waistcoat to a pawn-broker for nine-pence, and he foresees that he is likely to lose more of his clothing in the same way. That night he sleeps outside the walls of his old school, Creakles', at Blackheath. He is now fairly in Kent.

The next morning he starts out for Rochester, a walk of twenty-three miles. In Rochester he sees houses that offer 'Lodgings for Travellers', but afraid of spending what little money he has left he walks on to Chatham, where he sleeps by a cannon, with the city wall above him

In the morning he goes to a slop-shop intending to sell his jacket. He wants half-a-crown for it but after an exhaustingly long bartering he is beaten down to four-pence. Of that he spends threepence on something to eat, walks another seven miles, and once more goes to bed on a haystack under the stars.

The next day his road takes him through the hop-gardens and orchards of Kent, where some hop-pickers are already at work. There are tramps too, and after a fearful encounter with one, David suffers the loss of his silk scarf.

It is remarkable that David keeps going, but he is sustained by the image of his mother, which he associates especially with the sunny street of Canterbury: 'dozing as it were in the hot light; and with the sight of its old houses and gateways, and the stately, grey Cathedral, with the rooks sailing round the towers'.

It is of interest, I think, that Dickens originally planned to have David see the face of Agnes at an upstairs window, seeming to beam on him and encourage him. Dickens dispensed with that touch, giving to David instead the memory of his mother; but he did not forget to make David remark on the rooks circling the Cathedral towers – a contrast with the rookery at Blunderstone which had no rooks.

¹ All quotations from *David Copperfield* in the Norton Critical Edition, 1990.

Finally another dozen miles on from Canterbury David arrives in Dover, and after further difficulties, including being told that Betsey Trotwood lives at various places in the vicinity – the South Foreland Light, a buoy outside the harbour, Maidstone Jail, and even Calais – he gets to Aunt Betsey's house high on the Downs overlooking the Channel, a spot remarkably like Fort House (now Bleak House) in Broadstairs.

David's epic journey has seen him gradually cast off his associations with Suffolk and replace them with ones from Kent. When he gets to Aunt Betsey's and is given a bath, it is like a baptism: his Suffolk identity is washed off and he is given a new name, Trotwood, with new godparents, Aunt Betsey and Mr. Dick.

David's progress from London to Dover takes us right through the region where Dickens lived for most of his life and with which almost all his novels are associated. Of course, every novel of Dickens, except for *Hard Times*, has some of its action set in London, but many also feature scenes in Kent. His first and last, the *Pickwick Papers* and *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* (with 'Cloisterham') give Rochester prominence; *A Tale of Two Cities* highlights Dover; *Bleak House* includes Deal; *The Tuggses at Ramsgate* speaks for itself; *Oliver Twist* has Mudfog, another name for Rochester; *Our Mutual Friend* has the paper factory in north-west Kent; Carker the Manager meets his end as he waits for his train to London after he has come off the packet boat at Dover; in *Little Dorrit* Arthur Clennam more than once travels between Calais and Dover before going on to London; and as we have seen, above all, we have *David Copperfield*. So, when David is travelling up to London, William the coach driver asks 'Is Suffolk your county, sir?', and David replies with some importance, 'Suffolk's my county', he actually has to pretend that he knows something about the main features of Suffolk life, and his mind soon takes him back to Kent and his epic journey:

'I had abundant occupation for my thoughts, in every conspicuous landmark on the road. When I looked down at the trampers whom we passed, and saw that well-remembered style of face turned up, I felt as if the tinker's blackened hand were in the bosom of my shirt again. When we clattered through the narrow street of Chatham, and I caught a glimpse, in passing, of the lane where the old monster lived who had bought my jacket, I stretched my neck eagerly to look for the place where I had sat, in the sun and in the shade, waiting of my money. When we came, at last, within a stage of London, and passed the veritable Salam House where Mr. Creakle had laid about him with a heavy hand, I would have given all I had, for lawful permission to get down and thrash him, and let all the boys out like so many caged sparrows.'

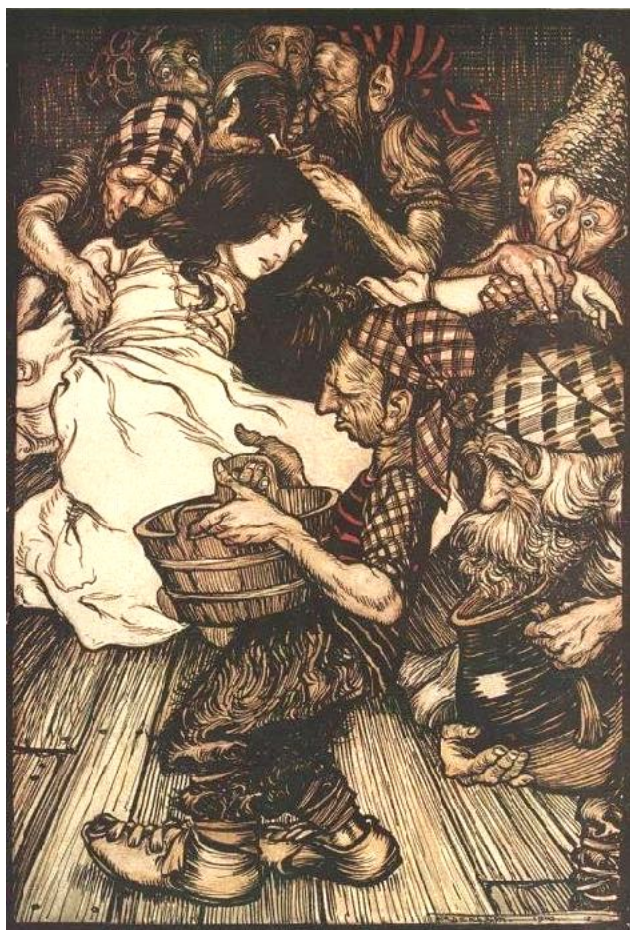
But now David is well-dressed, well-educated, on his way to becoming an articled clerk in Doctors Commons, and soon to emerge as a writer like his creator Charles Dickens. Certainly David had as part of his formation Suffolk as Dickens had Portsmouth. But the more important shaping for both David and Charles came from Kent, Dickens himself would end his days in the grand house he had bought at Gad's Hill in Kent – 'my little Kentish freehold'.

Traumatic Illustration by Lyndsey Burton

In the last issue of this newsletter our president, Dennis Marriott, commented on the Victorian tendency of some book illustration 'towards uncomfortable images and basically creepy children and weird-looking adults'. I can only agree. I was untroubled by the *Coles Funny Picture Book*; I had been traumatised by worse.

As a toddler, I knew all about boiling water. Food was cooked in it, clothes in a copper were washed in it and there was a lethal apparatus in the bathroom delivering it to the bath. I was warned about and kept away from boiling water.

When adult visitors arrived for an evening meal, I was put to bed early, but not until someone had been inveigled into reading me a story. They got me to bed faster that way. Unbeknownst to me, my parents vigorously signalled that the visitor could read me anything, except *The Three Little Pigs*; it gave me nightmares. Dropping the wolf into boiling water was an illustrated, terrifying and excessive punishment.



Snow White and the dwarves by Arthur Rackham. What is going on?

We frequently visited my grandfather's spinster sisters. My great grandparents had been teachers so the spinster sisters had custody of the family library. When they realised I was an independent reader, they started giving books to me, books sometimes inscribed to another child in another century. I am not sure they quite knew what they were doing. I acquired several editions of the Grimm fairy tales, unexpurgated! The tales are gruesome, often with grotesque illustrations. It was years before I realised that Grimm was the name of the authors; I thought it was a deliberate mis-spelling, an intensifier to reflect the character of the stories.

The versions of Snow White differed, but all had an evil stepmother wanting to eat the murdered child's heart and lungs. Cannibalism is way over the odds. Then there is the version in which the prince is so enamoured of the beautiful girl in the glass coffin that he wants to take her away with him. In moving the coffin, the poisoned apple dislodges and Snow White revives. 'Why,' I wondered, 'did he want to own a girl in a glass coffin?' I don't know what an adult would have answered had I thought

to ask. Government primary schools gave a good, liberal education, but necrophilia was not part of it and reading Edgar Allan Poe was way in the future. Then we have the dwarves. Snow White really sings for her supper, but not in the Disney sense. She was a drudge. One

edition was illustrated by Arthur Rackham. What exactly is going on in Rackham's illustration from 1909? Even as an adult, I am not sure I can answer that.

In one edition of the Grimm tales, the cover illustration was from 'The Little Goose Girl.' This book had to be taken from the shelf very carefully. It had to be laid flat, face down and opened from the back. The cover illustration showed the head of the talking horse nailed to an arch. Like every other little girl, I

had read Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* and the cruelty of nailing the head of a living horse to an arch was too terrible. The story's punishment of the villainess was for her to be dragged through the streets in a barrel lined with nails. No illustration of that, thankfully.



My copy of *Alice In Wonderland*, another gift from the aunts, was illustrated by John Tenniel. I did not like the illustrations at all. They really are full of 'creepy children and weird looking adults' and sometimes, even Alice looks creepy.

There was, however, one killer illustration in a collection of short

stories. It contained a brutal, monochrome woodcut of the Mouse King. I hated it. It revolted me and whenever I tried to read a story, the confounded book fell open at precisely that page. Aged 9 or 10 years, I solved the problem. Our house had tall ceilings and the built-in wardrobes went right up to that ceiling. The top section stored sheets, quilts, anything not in current use. Standing on a chair, I hurled the book up into the robe; hitting the back wall, it fell behind pillows and there it stayed for the next several decades.

When I entered my teens, the adult books came my way. I received works by Henry Lawson, C.J.Dennis and Dickens. I found many Dickens illustrations little better than those that gave me the childhood horrors.



Maurice Sendak published *Where The Wild Things Are* in 1963. Children had nightmares and there was some controversy about this. When the book became a film, some parents objected. Sendak said the parents 'could go to hell'.

He said if children can't handle the story they should go home or wet their pants. Perhaps that is the child's choice; stop reading or wet your pants. I suppose the achievement is to keep reading and stay dry.

Isolation: What, Me Worry?



Elisabeth: It is a strange world that we are living in!

When the pandemic began, my family were all adamant that I would be safer at our little beach house at Blairgowrie, which some of you have visited in the past. In 1964, Tom and I beggared ourselves to buy an unfinished fibroshack with three blocks of land near the back beach. It has proved to be the best thing we ever did. Over the years we have extended the house, added bathrooms and made it very comfortable. This is where I am spending my isolation and I must admit I am thoroughly enjoying it! My family

make sure that I am well supplied with food and my son and his wife stayed with me over Easter. I go for walks to the beach, I tend the bush garden and vegetable patch, I play online bridge, I read by beautiful log fires as we have plenty of wood, and I am certainly well stocked with wine! All in all, I consider myself very lucky to be spending this strange time in such beautiful surroundings.

Shirley: Things that I miss are easy to list. They are all the things for which I hold now donated back tickets. The Melbourne Symphony Orchestra and Australian Ballet seasons. The intimate little performances at the Primrose Potter Salon. Melbourne Theatre Company plays, morning coffee and recitals at the Elizabeth Murdoch Centre. Exhibitions and talks at the National Gallery Victoria and Ian Potter Centre. Very much missed are all the dinners and lunches I would have had at restaurants or at homes of my friends and family. Perhaps most of all is human contact. The last person who touched me was the GP giving me my flu injection about a month ago. I have been in solo isolation since, so I miss the hugs and kisses.

I have found out how very happy I am working in my garden and at my numerous leisure pursuits. I plunge into my unheated swimming pool most days and I found out that I can actually stand the cold and enjoy it. Email, text and phone calls are no longer an interruption but a pleasure. I found out how to have my piano lessons over the phone. I found out there are many people I care for deeply.



Peter & Sue: Like everyone I know we, in this household, are getting rather lazy, eating and drinking more than usual, missing friends and activities. Whenever anyone asks how we are coping with the isolation Peter (my husband) sings a song which he remembers from an old Bing Crosby film.

We're busy doing nothing
Working the whole day through
Trying to find lots of things not to do
We're busy going nowhere
Isn't it just a crime We'd like to be unhappy ... but
We never do have the time'

On the other hand I've discovered a most enjoyable book by Janice Hadlow *The Other Bennet Sister*. It could be called a sequel to *Pride and Prejudice* with v.g witty dialogue ... recommended



Andrew: When I appear in my street people ask me if I am OK, and do I need anything from the shops. I say no I am fine and thank them, but I am the kind of person who can easily mistake kindness for pity, so I seethe inwardly. I miss going into town on the tram, with the lame excuse of returning a library book to the City Library in Flinders Lane, but what I really want to do is to sit in Fed. Square and chat with strangers, foreign and local, or just watch the passing parade. I also miss writing reviews for the Drama League,

but the theatres are dark. As the photo shows I can always watch the birds (New Holland Honeyeaters, in this case). My backyard has just had a tidying-up and you will hopefully see the results when we meet again on Cup Day.

Frances: I'm actually quite enjoying the lockdown, specially with the weather so gorgeous for walking and gardening. I've also been trying to finish the huge number of UFOs (unfinished objects) in my sewing room - half-knitted and almost-sewn items, bits of embroidery started years ago etc. I find myself laughing out loud, another discovery for keeping the blues at bay. At 11am on weekdays, Martin Buzacott on ABC Classic (105.8FM) runs what he calls a dance class. Fear not. It's really a fun Movement to Music segment, where you can do whatever you like; no-one can see you. I'm enjoying it very much.

I've also been catching up on my reading, and have found a Dickens gem. I think I may have picked it up from Margaret and John Leonard, when they so kindly allowed us to take some of their no-longer-needed books. It's *The Dickens Theatrical Reader*, edited by Edgar and Eleanor Johnson, published by Gollancz in 1964, so the only way you'd get it is second-hand. It prints everything Dickens ever wrote about the theatre and show biz. Not just the expected pieces, like Mrs Joseph Porter, the Crummies etc, but also letters to cast and crew when Dickens was producing amateur performances, and benefit shows. The book is a marvellous source of material for readings, but also a delight to read alone.



Rosemary: I am learning magical realism at home with the cat. The M on his forehead is ancestral, as all tabbies have that mark. The cat tells me this is ever since a tabby curled up in the straw with baby Jesus in the manger, to keep the baby warm and stop him crying. M is for manger and Mary made happy. In Islamic tradition it was a tabby who saved Mohammed from being bitten by a snake. Another reason for that M, as a cat saved The Prophet's life. So, now we are in lockdown I need to give him, as a cat with a remarkable history, all the attention he deserves.

I am also discovering the wonderful books of Charmian Clift.

How lucky we are in Australia! My school teacher friend in Lesotho (mountain kingdom surrounded by South Africa) Whatsapps about how many of the school children are starving in lockdown.

Missing most of all: my actor role-plays, the theatre, movies at the Nova, meeting my friends for coffee and having the freedom to go wherever we want.

Pat: Sunday I listened to a podcast, Margaret Throsby with Ralph Fiennes, the director also acting as Charles Dickens in *The Invisible Woman*. Music he chose: Bach, Patty Smith, Rolling Stones, Paul Robeson.



Then I cleaned the oven and prepared the kumquats for making jam tomorrow
Later I did my exercises, followed by the Cryptic & Quick crosswords in *The Age*
Listened to a church service on You Tube and Zoom
Self - administered Pedicure
Half-hour nap
Made Risotto for dinner
Netflix at night (*Burning Destination*)

Other days I go for 20min (sometimes as much as an hour) walks.

I have reorganised my bookshelves, categorised and affixed labels with Blu-tak and set aside those I MUST read this year (including *War & Peace*)! Phoned & Face-timed family and friends. Learned to order groceries online as well as clothes shopping. Intend to declutter with uncompromising ruthlessness, ah well...

I miss going to the Cinema, theatre and concerts; seeing family and friends, U3A classes, Dickens Fellowship meetings, coffee, lunches in cafes and occasional dining out in restaurants. Basically I'm quite enjoying being a home body, although don't know how long that will last! I am grateful I'm healthy and free of COVID-19.

Ann & Brian: We are fortunate in having a reasonably sized detached house on a reasonably sized block, with a decent garden. With these assets, during the really lovely autumn weather that we had in mid-late April, we spent a lot of time out of doors. We were relaxed and comfortable in our isolation, and took the necessary precautions of so-called 'social isolation' when going to the shops for our few supplies. During the less pleasant weather, we had plenty of room to spread the two of us out a bit, doing our 'own thing'. I think it would have been a lot less comfortable had we been living in a small apartment in a multi-storey block. In terms of activities, we continue much as usual, with reading, writing, house-work etc., and a daily walk, which might or might not include a call at the shops. Whilst I am on my walk, Ann pedals away on her exercise bike in the car-port! We always eat well at home, so not going to a restaurant is not a problem for us---but we are truly missing the great coffee we get at our regular café!

Learn, Laugh and Live!



THE UNIVERSITY OF THE THIRD AGE

U3A classes have resumed, with the very major change that Ann is now delivering her French classes on-line from home, using Zoom. Now this was a challenge! Old dogs and new tricks come to mind! But by perseverance, as Ann's proficiency in the use of the technology increased along with that of her class members, the lessons have become easier to deliver. The new-found skills have also helped with keeping us in touch with family and friends. We have a weekly "trivia" quiz night with about 12 of our family spread around the globe; and since Brian's golf has been off the agenda, the golfing friends have caught up with a drink or two at our own 'on-line pub quiz' night. But perhaps the best out-come is

that Brian has been pre-recording sessions on 'poetry and song', which are being broadcast on community radio. It has been a nice project, deciding what to read, and what to play from CDs in our collection, and then recording and editing the material before up-loading it to the radio station for eventual broadcasting. Maybe it will continue even after we regain our freedoms!

Lyndsey: What to do during a lockdown? Well, all my hems, trousers and skirts, are repaired; all buttons are securely attached to all garments. I have learned to Zoom. My home office, that I was had to revive 18 months ago is now properly organised. The lovely little storage boxes from Ikea are all accurately labelled.



Cranesbill

We are very lucky to have a garden. It is exactly the time of year to cut back, shape and prune to stop perennials, becoming straggly. The true geranium, the lovely little cranesbill is trimmed back from the lawn. The bulbs' shoots are already showing and some are in bloom. I discovered a packet of onion seeds, perfectly spaced, embedded in tape. Sowing the tape should avoid the tedious thinning process. Happily, the loppers of trees and hedges are an essential service; so even the big plants are trimmed.

A major event of the lockdown has been our connection to the National Broadband Network, getting a service that that failed

to cover the space at the speed of the old ADSL connection; a dual radio long access point, installed privately, solved that problem. Lockdown without Nordic Noir and Netflix is not an option.

I have done some reading too. *Pachinko* by Min Jin Lee, *The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead and *True Grit* by Charles Portis are all highly recommended.

Visits to the Queen Victoria market, the ability to purchase paint and picture hooks from Bunnings and daily walks up to a busy shopping centre are pleasures people living under more stringent lockdowns would envy. Nonetheless, this has gone on long enough; I want to start going out for lunches again.

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.
- 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. (www.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 No. 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.

A final word from one of our lockdown survivors

**Nita:
I love the time afforded me to
reflect and to paint. Hence, this
painting. I called it *Ghosts*.**

