Household Words

Issue 91 April 2025

Charles Dickens - 213 years young!

NSW Dickens Society.

e: dickenssydney.com.au I e: nswdickens@gmail.com

HOUSEHOLD WORDS

ISSUE No. 91 April 2025

Dickens' Birthday 2025. - *Syd Cole*

Happy 213!

It's a fine Autumn morning in Centennial Park on 7th February, and, if my maths is correct, it would be Dickens 213th birthday today. We're here at his statue to celebrate the event. He's obviously still being read widely, although I was sorry to see that Great Expectations is being removed from the HSC syllabus in 2027. However, back to the statue; It was sculpted around 1891, probably by Job Hanson, a well-respected stonemason, at his premises in Sydney. We're paying homage to the great man even as we speak. Sadly, we had to climb over some railings to see him; it's all fenced off because of the Rock Concert this weekend. Word must have got around about his inaccessibility, because only five of us made the journey this year: Malvina, Mel, Susan, Geoff and Syd, and we're heading over for a coffee to toast our hero.

When Premier, Henry Parkes, opened Centennial Park on 26th January, 1888, he commissioned the creation of eleven statues to enhance the parkland. This style of adornment was customary at that period of time. There was some controversy, notably in the NSW parliament, about his selection of a statue of Dickens. The author had stated in his will that, 'No monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever' should be erected. He went on say that his funeral should be 'inexpensive, unostentatious, and private. Any claims to remembrance should rest on my published works, and remembrance of my friends upon their experience of me.'

Despite this, Parkes, who had long admired Dickens' work, elected to have a statue made to commemorate his life. Over the years he had corresponded with the writer on numerous occasions, and struck up a friendship with Dickens' son, Plorn, soon after the latter came to live in Australia. The memorial was first erected in Hamilton Drive, and relocated in 1897 to its present position, when a statue of Parkes himself, was placed on the original site.

In 1972, most of the statuary in the park had deteriorated and was put into storage, awaiting refurbishment, and this is where the mystery begins. Dickens disappeared, and remained lost for 40 years. When Gaenor Vallack, a volunteer at Sydney Library, saw a photograph of the lost statue, in a book there, she wondered what had become of it;

approached Sandra Faulkner, president of the NSW Dickens Society; and posed the question. Sandra wrote to Column Eight in the Sydney Morning Herald and asked them to request any information from their readers; there was no response. In the meanwhile, the Melbourne branch of the Society had been doing some digging and established that the statue was in a basement at the Rozelle premises of T.A. Taylor and Sons in Sydney. How and why this could be remains a mystery.

In February of 2007, after another mention in Column 8, an employee at the Royal Botanic Gardens thought they might have it; she couldn't be sure, the statue they had in storage was headless! In fact, it was the one they sought; it had been taken into protective custody, they said, and was, doubtless, helping police with their enquiries, into its vandalism. The Botanic Gardens offered to return the item to Centennial Park in 2008.

Sculptor, Ruben Vasti from NSW Public Works, was charged with the reconstruction of the reclaimed statue, and marble was sourced from Carrara, in Italy, for the task. Besides the missing head, there was also damage to the right hand. It took 12 months for a matching block of marble to be found, and Vasti used old photographs and portraits, and human models to, successfully, achieve his aim.

In 2011, the statue was unveiled by Marie Bashir, the popular Governor of NSW. She expressed her love for Dickens and remembered admiring the statue as a child. Several dignitaries spoke, including Sandra Faulkner, and our own Susannah Fullerton. Charles Dickens was returned, on his 199th birthday, to the place where he'd stood from 1897 to 1971.

Interestingly, Dickens, in the writings he left, exhorted that children should receive the 'teaching of the New Testament in its broad spirit, and put no faith in any man's narrow construction of its letter here or there.' Dickens had his shortcomings, certainly, but his balanced view of religion, I think, does him much credit.

From the Committee: A big THANK YOU to **Ron Withington**, outgoing Editor of *Household Words* and *Boz in Oz*, for his contribution in recent years.

Newsletter of the
NSW DICKENS SOCIETY

Patron
Miriam Margolyes OBE

President
Sydney Cole
0432 020 670

Treasurer
Rev Geoffrey Usher
02 9357 4336

Editor, design, features
Anne Burns + Committee

Secretary
Graham Harman
0405 154 361
nswdickens@gmail.com

Events Co-ordinator
Lynn Clayton
0425 396 736

ANNUAL SUBSCRIPTIONS
$45.00 Individual
$60.00 Couple or Family
$40.00 Student /Pensioner
Subscriptions are due on
31 December each year.

HOUSEHOLD WORDS
is free with membership
if emailed.

ADDRESS OF MEETINGS
Unitarian Church
15 Francis St
Darlinghurst
Meeting attendance is
$5.00 cash at door per meeting

Report on NSW Dickens Society Annual General Meeting, 1 February 2025

Contents

Cover: Dickens Statue, Centennial Park + Society members

2. Dickens Birthday
4. AGM and Limerick
5. Coming up
6. "Book of the Year"
8. Book Review
9. Round and About
10. Website update
11. Dickens and Shakespeare
14. "Book of Last Year"
15. Ranking the Novels
15. Focus on "Bleak House"

31 people gathered at the Unitarian Church, Francis Street, East Sydney, for our first meeting of the year, on Saturday 1 February 2025, which was our Annual General Meeting. As usual, Thang Ngo had set up the Hall for refreshments, which provided an opportunity for people to chat and socialise before the formal meeting in the Sanctuary. President Sydney Cole opened the proceedings by welcoming everyone, before presenting his report on the previous year's events and activities.

Geoff Usher presented a brief report on Membership, before the Publications report was presented. In his absence, **Ron Withington** was warmly thanked for his two years as Publications Officer, and for his production of the regular issues of *Household Words* and two issues of *Boz in Oz*. His decision not to continue as Publications Officer was noted with considerable regret.

Treasurer Geoff Usher presented the financial report for the year ended 31 December 2024, which showed a balance of $8,418-03 in the Current Account and $45,000-00 in the Term Deposit which had been set up during the year. The Society is in a healthy financial position.

Appointed as Returning Officer, Mark Burns declared all Committee positions vacant, before the following people were elected: **Sydney Cole** (President), **Graham Harman** (Secretary), **Geoff Usher** (Treasurer), **Lynn Clayton** (Committee Member). Despite Mark's exhortation, the positions of Vice-President and Publications Officer were not filled, along with a couple of other vacancies as Committee Member. **Margaret Greathead** indicated that she might be willing to serve (and she was co-opted as a Committee Member at the first meeting of the new Committee on 12 February).

After some general discussion (future programme, website, possible change of venue), the formal AGM was closed. **Malvina Yock** read an extract from Chapter 2 of David Copperfield, the Book of the Year, before Graham Harman gave a lively and entertaining Introduction to the Book. Geoff Usher provided a Limerick to thank Graham, and the meeting closed. GRU

We've gathered today here to hear
"David Copperfield", Book of the Year,
Summarised by Graham
We're all glad we came
And had this great story made clear!

Coming Saturday Morning Events

April 5th: **Jarndyce and other Dickens Lawyers** – *David White*

June 7th : **Dickens and Art** – *Anne Cherry and Daniela Heckel*

Aug 2nd : **Browsing in the Old Curiosity Shop** – *Ron Withington*

Oct 4th *; To be advised*

Mid-year excursion (26 July)

Dickensian Sydney Walking Tour

We are taking bookings now for the mid-year excursion, which will be a **Dickensian Sydney Walking Tour** on **Saturday 26 July**. Led by NSW Dickens Society member and guided tour doyen **Jo Henwood** (Jo is an accredited Professional Tour Guide with the Institute of Australian Tour Guides) this will be leaving Hyde Park Barracks [near St James station] at 10.00 a.m., returning 3.30pm Maritime Museum [near Pyrmont Bay Light Rail; Pyrmont Bay Wharf]. $25 p.p., with Pay-As-You-Go own food (at scheduled cafés) and transport (own Opal).

Dickens created a world full of secrets, scandals, and drama – and on this tour we can find that world here in many of Sydney's stories from the past. This is your chance to discover or revisit many of our heritage sites, to uncover stories from our quirky past that match some of Dickens's great reveals, while sharing conversation and food with fellow Dickensians.

Speak to one of the Committee, or email nswdickens@gmail.com to book. Limit of 15, so first come, first served. There will also be a bus tour (later in the year) suitable for the more sedentary amongst us.

"David Copperfield" for the time poor:

Steerforth, for all his dazzling looks, with rottenness is burning up,

While old Micawber gravely waits for something that is turning up.

How do they figure in one book? That's not a very easy one,

Because we have to add to them Uriah Heap (the greasy one),

Barkis who's willing, Mr Dick, and every single Peggotty,

Aunt Betsey Trotwood, of whose love our hero is the legatee,

And many more. Let's sum it up, and put our rhymes and puns away:

Our hero, David Copperfield, is born, and later runs away.

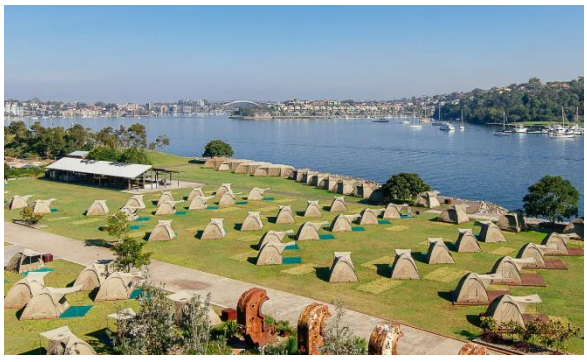
He prospers, and he marries twice; his ladies do not capture us,

But all his other friends and foes make every moment rapturous.

At nearly half a million words the novel's hardly cursory,

But it is fit (I trumpet it) for nunnery or nursery.

Paul Griffin



One of the mystery Dickensian Sydney Walking Tour locations ...

Some Brief Notes on *David Copperfield* (our "Book of the Year").

The Title

On the 26th of February 1849 Charles Dickens wrote a letter to John Forster asking for his opinion on a suitable title for David Copperfield. Some of the possibilities were –

1. The Copperfield Disclosure: Being the personal history, experience, and observation, of Mr David Copperfield the Younger, of Blunderstone House.
2. The Copperfield Records. Being the Personal History, Experience, and Observations, of Mr David Copperfield the Younger, of Copperfield Cottage.
3. The Last Will and Testament of Mr David Copperfield. Being his personal history left as a legacy

In April 1849 he informed Forster that the first issue in May would have the title, The Personal History, Adventures, Experience, and Observations of David Copperfield the Younger, of Blunderstone Rookery, Which He never meant to be Published on any Account. This is very close to the first title he submitted to Forster and a lot more descriptive of the book than The Last Will and Testament of David Copperfield. In saying that the account of David Copperfield's Life was never meant to be published Dickens is alerting us to the very personal, first person, nature of his narrative.

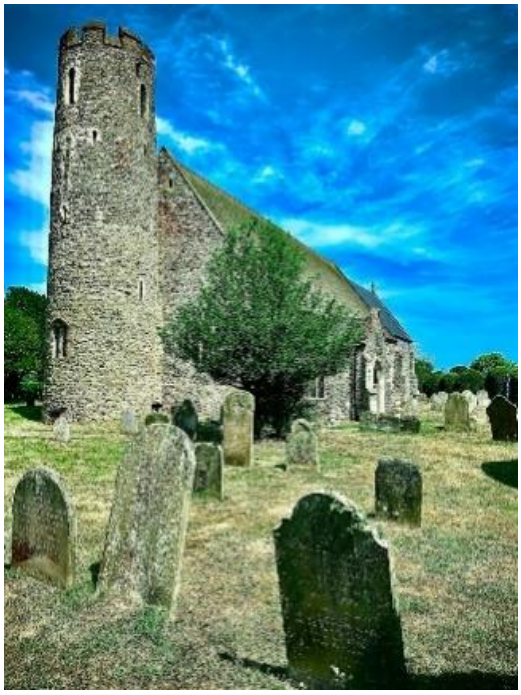
Locations in the novel

In Chapter 1 we are informed that David was born at The Rookery in Blunderstone, a village in Suffolk. This name is fictional but bears a close resemblance to the village of Blundeston which is also in Suffolk between the towns of Yarmouth and Lowestoft. It is thought that Dickens passed the sign to the village on his way to Great Yarmouth in January 1849. It is not known whether he visited the village but the descriptions of the village in the novel are suggestive. The sign pointing the way to Blunderston today has a picture of David Copperfield looking towards the Church. The Plough Inn features a plaque over the door proclaiming that Barkus the

Blundeston inn sign, with David Copperfield

Carrier from the novel David Copperfield by Charles Dickens started from there.

St Mary's Church has a round tower which dates from the 11th Century and a nave dating from the 12th. Its graveyard and grassy lawn are also evocative of the



St Mary's Church

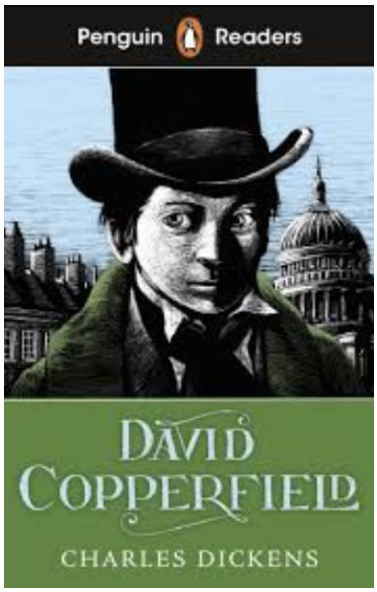
Church described by David in Chapter One. 'There is nothing half so green that I know anywhere, as the grass of that churchyard; nothing half so shady as its trees; nothing half so quiet as its tombstones. The sheep are feeding there, when I kneel up, early in the morning, in my little bed in a closet within my mother's room,'

The Dedication of the Novel

The original edition of David Copperfield was 'Affectionately inscribed to the Hon Mr. and Mrs. Richard Watson of Rockingham, Northamptonshire. Dickens formed a friendship with Richard and Lavinia Watson 1846 when he was staying in Lausanne, Switzerland. He and

Rockingham Castle

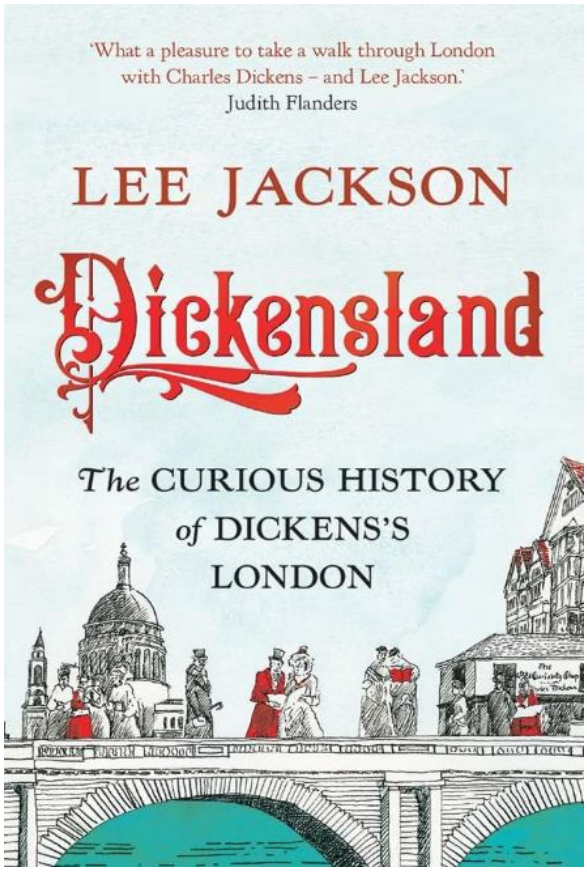
Catherine made frequent visits to Rockingham Castle, the home of the Watsons. While they were staying at the house Dickens wrote short plays to be staged in a little theatre he had contrived. Catherine and Dickens took part in the performances. After one visit at Christmas in 1851 he sent Lavinia a thank you note saying that he felt he belonged to the castle and had left a bit of his heart behind when he left. Dickens asserted that Rockingham Castle was the inspiration for Chesney Wold, and that the yew walk at the end of the terrace was the original of the ghost walk in Bleak House.
AB



Dickensland: The Curious History of Dickens's London by Less Jackson

Yale University Press, USA, 2024, 274 pages

As every reader of Dickens knows, the city of London was his great inspiration. He describes it memorably in so many novels – *Oliver Twist, Great Expectations, Bleak House, Our Mutual Friend* etc. He knew its streets, prisons, shops and buildings intimately and it was said he could always instruct a hansom cab driver if the fellow didn't know where to go, or the best route to get there. Dickens left his mark on London in the form of blue plaques, museums, shops and guided walks for tourists.



Lee Jackson, like Dickens, knows the city well and is an excellent guide for his readers. He explains how some places actually unconnected with Dickens came to be associated with his name (the Old Curiosity in Portsmouth Street is one example), he informs us which of Dickens's homes was the first to get a blue plaque, he provides the histories of the old coaching inns – when they were pulled down, what efforts were made to prevent the destruction of inns mentioned by Dickens, and what the George Inn (today owned by the National Trust) has done in the past to ramp up its slight connections with the famous author. He takes the reader searching for places from the novels – for example, where was the Old Burial Ground visited by Jo and Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House* and did Dickens have an actual place in mind? He discusses the impact of American tourists, eager to discover 'Ye Olde England' in their search for Dickens, and he talks of 'Dickens World', the Chatham theme park which opened in 2007, failed badly, and had to close in 2016.

I found this a fascinating book which touched on the whole business of literary tourism in an erudite and yet also entertaining way. As a literary tour guide myself, I found the book's topic appealing, and I was not disappointed in its contents. I can recommend this new book to all members of the NSW Dickens Society.

Susannah Fullerton

Round and About

Charles Dickens in the News!

The evergreen relevance of Charles Dickens' thinking continues to be featured in the local press. This article in the Sydney Morning Herald in March 2025 noted that for the coming term of parliament, a "Dickensian approach" would be central to the policy platform of one of Australia's major political parties.

Speculation about the Reserve Bank and potential upcoming rate cuts would also be incomplete, without reference on the front page of The Australian Financial Review to the works of Boz:

RBA cut make or break for Labor

Positions Vacant!

Your NSW Dickens Society Committee could use more help! Thank you to those who put their hands up either at, or immediately after the 2025 AGM including **Anne Burns** who has offered to help with *Household Words*, **Graham Harman** who will edit the 2025 edition of Boz in Oz, and **Margaret Greathead** who has joined the Committee as a general committee member.

We still need:

Vice-President. This is the best job of all! – having no obvious job description. It would be great if we could not leave all the Presidential work, on the President's shoulders though.

Webmaster. Alert readers of this edition of Household Words will have picked up on the message that 213 years have slipped by, since the birth of Charles Dickens. It's the 21st Century and we really do need, a functioning website. The building work is already done – thanks to all who contributed to that – and now we just need a webmaster to keep it updated. Training provided!

We could also use a:

Publicity officer

Membership Secretary

Talent Scouts wanted

If you hurried over the previous section – because you don't feel in a position to join the Committee – but you'd still like to help, here's a great opportunity! Finding speakers for our Saturday morning meetings is an ongoing task, and the more of our members that can keep an eye out for potential candidates, the better our chances.

You don't need to ***give*** a talk! You don't need to ***ask*** anyone to give a talk! **BUT** – please give this some thought – any suggestions or leads that you can give to the Committee,

are gold dust. Remember! – it doesn't necessarily need someone who's a literary expert on a particular Dickens' novel. Think outside the box! Many topics, could be of interest and relevance to our members – anything from prisons, to stagecoaches, to the houses that Dickens lived in, his friends, his life, his times, his travels, his relevance, today.

Website update

www.dickenssydney.com.au

The NSW Dickens Society website has fallen into disrepair in recent years (due to a range of headwinds – CoViD, change of personnel, lack of tech-y Committee Members and – let's be candid – we forgot the password).

The good news is – it is now back up and running! And includes:

- A Home page welcoming visitors
- Information about the society
- A clickable calendar with information about upcoming events
- Application forms and information about membership
- Recent copies of *Household Words*
- Links to related Dickensian and other literary websites
- Contact details

Even if you don't feel you can volunteer as Webmaster, you can still help the NSW Dickens website. **We need your photos of anything NSW Dickens-related** (phone-camera quality is good enough). It makes our newsletter illustrations specific to our Society and also sidesteps copyright issues.

Dickens and Shakespeare

William Shakespeare, that towering figure of English literature, exerted a profound influence on Charles Dickens, another literary giant. While Shakespeare's impact on Dickens is evident in the language, characterisation, and thematic concerns, Dickens' novels contain numerous allusions to Shakespeare's works, often shaping the structure and tone of his storytelling. As we know, it's difficult to find a piece of writing that is totally original in every way; I challenge anybody to find an author who hasn't previously been a reader. As a consequence, I confess that some of my assertions in this article are necessarily surmise.

What we do know for certain, in the novel David Copperfield, is that the eponymous hero reveres Dr. Strong, the diligent, but naïve, headmaster of his new school at Canterbury. David pictures him as a 'scholarship boy' in his earlier days, and admires the erudition involved in the creation of his mentor's long-delayed dictionary project. David tells us, '[Doctor Strong] was very fond of Shakespeare. I have seen him so completely carried away by a passage in his reading, that he would put down his dictionary; shake his head and roll his eyes; turn up his cuffs; and go on with the quotation in a tremendous voice and with the greatest animation.' David, as Dickens' alter ego, would likely be expressing the author's own views on his creations.

In the same novel, David fights with the local butcher boy, the 'terror of the youth of Canterbury'. This youth has an 'ill-conditioned mind, and an injurious tongue' both of which he uses to disparage Dr. Strong's young gentlemen, simply because he sees them as upper-class toffs. The, normally placid David, tells us, 'He waylays the smaller boys to punch their unprotected heads, and calls challenges after me in the open streets. For these reasons I resolve to fight the butcher.' In David's imagination, before they fight, 'The shade of a young butcher rises, like the apparition of an armed head in Macbeth', a vivid reminder of Banquo's ghost at the feast! David is soundly beaten by his opponent on this occasion, but gets his revenge in a later bout when he spoils the

bully's appearance by knocking out his two front teeth.

Mister Micawber, arguably one of Dickens most remembered characters, has all the braggadocio of Falstaff, in Henry IV, but probably not the cowardice or deceit of the latter. Both characters use language with extraordinary flair, in their efforts to make the desired impression on their audience. In parallel ways, the two writers are able to indicate the pathos that both characters exude. We understand each of their weaknesses: Falstaff, when he questions the concept of 'Honour', and Micawber when he writes of his despair, in suicidal tones. Their use of humour juxtaposed with quiet tragedy is what makes these writers true magicians in their chosen art.

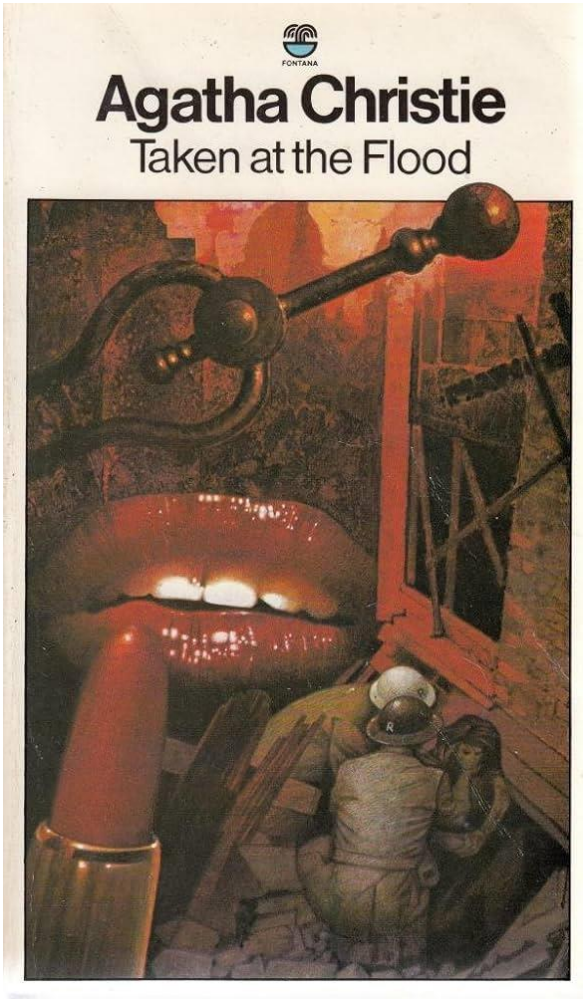
During the writing of Nicholas Nickleby, Dickens visited Shakespeare's birthplace in Stratford-upon-Avon. It inspired him sufficiently to include these words in the novel, spoken by Mrs Wititterly. Together with her husband, she is an avid social climber who feels they can amass kudos by osmosis; simply by visiting homes of the rich and famous. 'I don't know how it is, but after you've seen the place and written your name in the little book, somehow or other you seem to be inspired; it kindles up quite a fire within one.' This is Dickens at his most mischievous, highlighting pretension wherever he sees it.

In Dombey and Son, the character, Captain Cuttle, frequently misquotes Shakespeare, with comic results. It's necessary to have a sufficiently good handle on the works of the bard, in order to ensure that distortion of the language retains the essential element of humour. In the same way, the character of Wopsle in Great Expectations, aspiring to be an actor, performs in a comically disastrous production of Hamlet.

As a competent actor himself, Dickens' critique of the performance mirrors, in some ways, Hamlet's instructions to the travelling players at Elsinore castle, on how best to act, while he awaits the arrival of Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.

Every piece of writing, then, is derived from somewhere else. So many commonplace expressions we regularly use have been drawn from fine works of literature, that we're not always aware of the fact. When Doctor Strong advises Jack Maldon, on the eve of his departure

for India, that ‘Time and tide wait for no man’, he’s echoing a phrase used by Geoffrey Chaucer in ‘The Canterbury Tales’. Shakespeare would go on to enhance this phrase, in the play, ‘Julius Caesar.’ ‘There is a tide in the affairs of men, which, taken at the flood leads on to fortune.’



So, there we have it; there’s nothing new under the sun. Now, I wonder where that one came from?

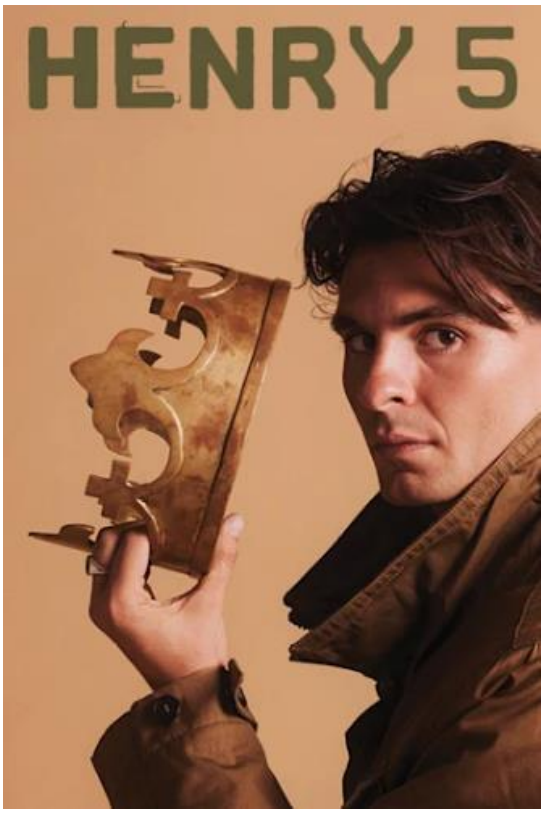
SC

Bell Shakespeare – Henry V

The Bell Shakespeare Company is touring NSW at present, with its production of **Henry V**, starring JK Kazzi as the King.

Dickensian quiz: Which well-known phrase, associated closely with Charles Dickens, and quoted by Dickens in over 50% of his editions of ***Household Words***, was originally coined by William Shakespeare and is a part of the famous Agincourt/St Crispin’s Day speech, in Henry V?

[Answer at: *www.dickenssydney.com.au*]



JK Kazzi as Henry V

Farewell to Hard Times?

Don't feel you have to stop reading a particular Dickens novel just because it is no longer the "Book of the Year". The NSW Dickens Society "Book of the Year" for 2024 was "**Hard Times**", and as we bid it farewell for now, it's heartwarming to think of the change, for good, that Charles Dickens' writing has delivered for society. As recently as 1850, it was accepted that children of primary school age, far from receiving any developmental education, were exploited in the drudgery of the Industrial Revolution, typically in appalling conditions.

Let's fast-forward a hundred years, and listen in on a conversation between four, 10 year old and 11 year old boys, in 1950, as recorded by **Richmal Crompton**. Now liberated from the bondage of the mills and of the mines; and celebrating the transformative legacy that had been bestowed upon them by such progressive authors as Charles Dickens; these boys express their deep gratitude for the rebellion of those enlightened writers against the oppressive status quo of the mid-nineteenth century ….

"You know" said Wiliam "I think it's time there was another rebellion. There's not been one, since the ones in hist'ry. I mean, when people put the days we're livin' in now into hist'ry books in a hundred years' time, it's goin' to be jolly dull without a few rebellions."

The other three considered this point of view with interest.

"I think we ought to do somethin' to make hist'ry a bit more int'restin'," continued William. He looked at Henry. "What did people rebel about?"

Henry considered. " 'Cause they had grievances," he said.

William gave a short ironic laugh.

"We've got plenty of them," he said. "Gosh! when I think of the amount of them we've got, it's a wonder we didn't start rebellin' years ago."

"There was a sort of rebellion not very long ago," said Henry thoughtfully. "I heard my father talkin' about it las' week. It was the Irish, an' they rebelled 'cause they'd had their priv'leges took away an' they wanted them back. They used to have a Parliament an' such-like an' they got 'em took away an' they made a rebellion to get 'em back."

"That's what we'll do," said William. "Jus' think of the priv'leges we've had took away! Think of the days when children used to work in the mills an' down coal mines an' up chimneys. It mus' have been wizard! I went to a mill once with my uncle an' – gosh! It was grand! Wheels whizzin' round all over the place, an' you put stuff in at one end of a thing an' it came out diff'rent at the other! An' they let me help take somethin' from one place to another in a sort of cage that went whizzin' along the ceiling right high up jus' like an aeroplane. It was abs'lutely grand! An' jus' think of workin' in a place like that every day 'stead of goin' to school – same as children used to in the old days. An' think of goin' down underneath the earth messin' about with coal. An' goin' up chimneys. An' jus' think that children used to do all these things every day till grown-ups stopped them 'cause they didn't want them to have a good time. They wanted us to have a rotten time doin' sums and French verbs an' g'ography instead."

The Outlaws had frequentlyheard William give voice to these opinions, but they still found them inspiriting. They gave a murmur of agreement, and William continued.

"Well now, that's all fixed up. We're goin' to have a rebellion to get back the priv'leges that grown-ups took off us an' then we're goin' to have a jolly good time in mills an' up chimneys an' down coal mines."

Thank you for your efforts, Charles Dickens.

Dickens Novels Ranked in order of Popularity

A recent article by Maria Leticia Gomes in The Express UK (1 March 2025) ranked Dickens" novels in order of the most popular on Amazon's Goodreads. **Great Expectations** did not top the list as might have been expected. 984,152 respondents read **A Tale of Two Cities** placing it as number 1 with an overall rating of 3.87. **David Copperfield** was ranked 5 with 249,132 readers who gave it an average rating of 4.04. It seems that while fewer people read this novel they rated it higher as a good read. It was not so surprising that **Our Mutual Friend** was only read by 30,529 readers which placed it at the bottom of the list at number 12. Those who did make the effort gave it an average rating of 4.09. **Hard Times** which was our book of the year for 2024 received the lowest reader satisfaction rating of 3.54.

Do you agree? AB

Bleak House – Our focus novel for April 2025

"Novels of the Year" are not everything, and our speaker for April 2025 will be focusing on "**Bleak House**".

Did you know that:

1. Several real court cases inspired *Bleak House*'s legal case, *Jarndyce and Jarndyce*.

Dickens was inspired by several court cases in writing *Bleak House*. The most notable one was that of author Charlotte Smith, whose inheritance case took 36 years in England's court system. The phrase "Jarndyce and Jarndyce" was used in the legal world to define a complex case that required absurd amounts of time and money to rectify.

2. Inspector Bucket was inspired by a detective Dickens knew personally.

Dickens's personal friend, Inspector Charles Frederick Field, was the basis for Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*. Field worked for Dickens as undercover security in 1851, an experience that encouraged Dickens to use Field as literary fodder. Before *Bleak House*, Field appeared in a journalistic article by Dickens entitled "On Duty with Inspector Field."

3. Neurologists believe members of the Smallweed family in *Bleak House* suffer from an extremely rare disease.

Grandfather Smallweed, an extortionist moneylender who lends to Mr. George, is part of a family whose odd physical characteristics have led some scientists to determine that they may have suffered from the condition known as Progeria. This condition makes the body appear to age more rapidly than usual. Dickens's descriptions of the Smallweeds appearing

as "little old men and women" match the symptoms of the rare disease, although victims of it rarely live anywhere near as long as the villainous Grandfather Smallweed.

4. *Bleak House* helped spur British legal reforms.

In *Bleak House* Dickens so vividly portrayed the absurdity of the Chancery Courts in England—which clearly stalled cases to prolong legal payments and often took decades to settle cases—that reforms to the courts were enacted in the years following the book's publication.

5. Dickens's summer house was renamed "Bleak House" after the author's death.

Dickens visited the home in Kent every summer for 22 years, and its views of the English Channel inspired him to write *Bleak House*. Originally called "Fort House," the beautiful manor was renamed "Bleak House" after the author's death in 1870.

6. Dickens clashed with scientists over the plausibility of Krook's spontaneous combustion.

The author insisted that Krook's spontaneous combustion featured in his novel was, in fact, possible, despite scientific evidence against it. Although some forms of matter, such as compost piles, can generate enough heat to ignite at random, scientists generally agree that any human combustion requires an external flame.

7. A historian used *Bleak House* as a primary source of legal history.

The legal historian William Searle Holdsworth wrote a book entitled Charles Dickens as Legal Historian, in which he claimed that Dickens's depictions of England's Chancery Courts were so true to life that *Bleak House* could be considered a primary source to draw upon.

8. Dickens had his own problems with the Chancery Courts of England.

The author worked as a junior clerk for the courts at age 15 and later as a court reporter. He also became entangled in an expensive, drawn-out case involving the rights to his novel *A Christmas Carol* (1843). These experiences with the courts led him to write, "The one great principle of the English law is to make business for itself."

9. Esther Summerson is the only female narrator to appear in any of Dickens's literature.

Esther Summerson narrates the proceedings of the *Jarndyce and Jarndyce* case and is the only woman whom Dickens features in such a role in any of his novels. Some have criticized her character, however, such as author Charlotte Brontë calling her "weak and twaddling."

10. A rediscovered film from 1901 featuring Jo, the street sweeper, is the oldest cinematic representation of a Dickens character.

The film, entitled *The Death of Poor Joe*, focuses on Jo, who ties together story lines in *Bleak House*. It was rediscovered in 2012, exactly 200 years after Dickens's birth. Only one minute in length, the film shows the death of Jo in a churchyard, freezing in the snow. A British Film Institute film curator, Bryony Dixon, found the film by accident while researching early films about China.