

# A Twist of Dickens



Newsletter of the Cleveland Branch  
International Dickens Fellowship

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May 2023

In this issue...

- Help Wanted...below
- Dickens's stuff: medicine bag...2
- Review: *Night Walks*...2
- Review: *Dickens and Travel* ...3
- This is us...3
- Audrey Barnes on *Chuzzlewit*...4
- Cigarette card characters...4

## Meeting Schedule

2022-2023 Book of the Year:

*Martin Chuzzlewit*

*Meetings, free and open to all admirers of Charles Dickens, begin at 11:00 am. Bring a friend. All are welcome.*

Tuesday, May 2, Beachwood Library, Rm B, 11:00 am to 1:00 pm. Concluding discussion of *Martin Chuzzlewit*. Who's your favorite character? Why?

Tuesday June 6, 6 to 9 pm. Memorial Dinner, Geraci's, 29425 Chagrin Blvd. Beachwood. Largely Literary Theater's co-founders Mark Dawidziak and Sarah Showman present "A Tale of Two Writers: Charles Dickens and Rod Serling." Part talk, part performance, their presentation charts the influence of Dickens on Serling and "The Twilight Zone."

Ask Beth to reserve your place by **May 2<sup>nd</sup>**. Write check for **\$55 per person** to Cleveland Dickens Fellowship. Mail to Beth Bliss, 1131 East Blvd, Aurora, OH 44202.

Will you join Charla representing Cleveland? Annual International Fellowship Conference London, July 26-29.

Book of the Year for 2023-2024:  
*Dombey and Son*

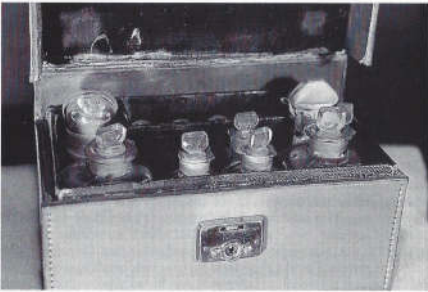
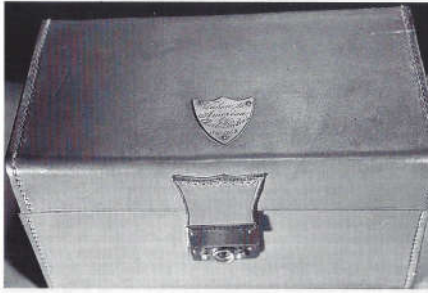
## Help Wanted!

Our long serving *A Twist of Dickens* editors **Kathleen Schuerger** and **Beth Bliss** will be changing their status of "Editors" to that of "Consultants" effective June 2023. If our triannual *Twist of Dickens* newsletter is to continue, it will need new editors. Although the monthly *etwist* will be continued by Kathleen, our 4-page newsletter, *Twist* (May, September, January), will not. Please consider becoming the new editor (or co-editor) of this entertaining and popular paper! We have all enjoyed the many book reviews, members' notes, collectors' corners, banquet pictures and meeting reports. Please refer to the *Twist* Archive on our website for inspiration and ideas. Kathleen and Beth will be happy to answer any questions and provide necessary coaching. We heartily thank them for their many years of service for our reading pleasure and wish them a happy retirement.

—Co-chair Charla Coatoam



Here's Charla, our representative at the Sydney International Conference in 2018. Please consider answering her plea above—and perhaps joining her in London this July for the first non-Zoom conference in a few years.



Figs 1 and 2. Charles Dickens's Travelling Medicine Chest, "Taken to America", 1867



Fig. 4. Contents of Charles Dickens's Medicine Chest.

### ***Dickens's stuff: his traveling medicine bag***

On his reading tours, Dickens spent more energy than he should. The doctor who tended him after he enacted "The Death of Nancy," advised him to never do it again.

Find in *The Dickensian*, Spring 1996, an article by David Dickens and Norman Jacoby, a physician (Consultant Paediatrician) whose special interest was asthma. They looked for evidence that CD was asthmatic. Indeed, their research confirmed that there was asthma in the family. They even speculated that Sydney's sudden death at sea might have been from asthma. When the owner of Dickens's own traveling medicine chest emerged and sent them photos (left) and a description, they hoped to find their answer.

In the chest they found purgatives, aloes, and quinine (this last they think might have been used as an appetizer, like gin and tonic). In fact, Dickens's bag carried the usual remedies of his age for the ailments we know he had. Renal colic, gout, constipation, but no proof of asthma. There was no treatment; only laudanum eased it. Still, he wrote of times at night when only laudanum allowed him to sleep. After investigating the bottles and packets, the authors concluded:

*The striking feature was the quantity of opium products included. That Dickens was in the habit of taking laudanum is known. We do not suggest that he was an addict.*

*...Rather, if asthmatic, what he required was a dose of laudanum, and he wanted it immediately, and this could only be assured by having an adequate supply available.*

So, the question remains. Asthma? It's a disease the medicos still don't completely understand. —K. S.

## **Book Review: *Night Walks* by Charles Dickens. Penguin Books Great Ideas**

Contributors to Penguin's Great Ideas series: Epictetus, Descartes, John Stuart Mill, Darwin—Dickens? Yes, Dickens. The "conductor" of *Household Words* and *All the Year Round*, the journalist/novelist who spent hours walking through London at night observing and preparing to write.

Remember that when CD edited writers who contributed to his periodicals, over and over he prompted them to "brighten it, brighten it." He wanted specifics, examples of emotional situations, stories to move the readers. This slim collection of articles demonstrates his "brightened" painting of London, its inequalities and injustices. When the young Dickens first got lost in the city, when he worked at the blacking factory and lived away from home, when he visited betting shops and Wapping Workhouse, boy and man, he stored away the detail he'd need to help us see, smell, understand, and form our opinions.

One example grabs the reader, "A Small Star in the East," about poverty we can't imagine in an area where available work for women was in the lead mill and work for men had dried up completely. We meet a poisoned veteran of the lead mill, dismissed to starve and die in great pain. A kind neighbor described her friend "as bad as can be and her brain is coming out at her ear and it hurts her dreadful."

Nearby, a doctor and nurse, husband and wife, had cobbled together The East London Children's Hospital dedicated to serving the poorest of the poor. Nurses there earned little, and Dickens says the best skilled of them, "came originally from a kindred neighbourhood, almost as poor; and she knew how much the work was needed." He stopped to watch her washing a baby boy and says, taken by her pleasant face, he spoke to them—"a common, bullet-headed, frowning charge enough, laying hold of his own nose with a slippery grasp, and staring very solemnly out of a blanket. The melting of the pleasant face into delighted smiles, as this young gentleman gave an unexpected kick, and laughed at me, was almost worth my previous pain."

"A Small Star in the East," one of Dickens's Great Ideas. —K. S. *A Twist of Dickens*, May 2023, p.2

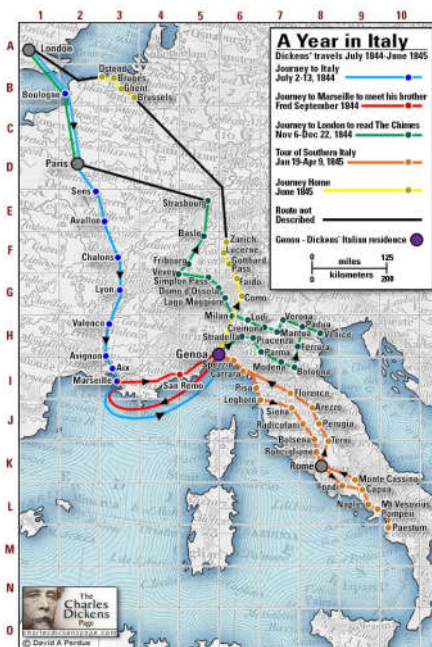
## *Dickens and Travel: The Start of Modern Travel Writing*

Lucinda Dickens Hawksley 2022

Review by Editors Beth Bliss and Kathleen Schuerger

Lucinda (right) deftly weaves together Dickens's narrative, her own comments, and various letters and memoirs. Lucinda's great, great grandfather traveled a lot—inside England, up to Scotland and Ireland, across to France, Italy, Switzerland, and, of course, over to America. He never made it to Australia, though it was on his bucket list. Sometimes he went with friends, sometimes with Catherine, and later, with Ellen Ternan. In Lucinda's opinion, he took the family to Italy when life closed in on him. Exhausted, he'd finished *Chuzzlewit*, invested deeply in *Carol*, was in debt, and was stressed out. He could rent the London house for months and live

more cheaply in a sunny country. Whether legitimately or not, she speaks for his emotional state. She claims he learned to be lazy in Genoa. Do you believe her? CD lazy? What about the traveling he did while in Italy? (See map right.) But Lucinda's grand daughterly perceptions touch us as we read. Dickens himself wrote directly to his readers in his travel writings, describing sights, smells, and personal emotions. Hence, the subtitle, "The Start of Modern Travel Writing." Cleveland is mentioned twice, once when he walked around at night in 1842, and later when he gave readings in the USA and Canada in 1868.



### **This Is Us: Cleveland Branch for the next few months.**

In our chronological study of Dickens's novels, we're finishing *Martin Chuzzlewit* this summer and boldly moving on to *Dombey and Son*, another doorstep-sized novel.

At our **Annual Memorial dinner** June 6, 6 to 9 pm, our only purely social get-together in the year, we'll offer the traditional toasts, destroy a buffet at Geraci's new restaurant, 29425 Chagrin Blvd. and hear **Mark Dawidziak and Sara Showman**. Reservation deadline, May 2. How about helping **Beth Bliss**? Call her. **Charla Coatoam** expects to attend the **International Conference** in London in July. Anyone else? It features the star Dickensians we admire and draws fellow aficionados from all over the world. Problem: accommodations are not offered. Hotel?

Will we continue meeting in the **11:00 am slot**? Whom have we gained or lost?

**Zooming in January and February** worked well, especially for **Anne Meissner's** talk about Angela Burdett Coutts. **Kathy Broz** reports that 15 attended, 7 of us and 8 from around the Dickens world. We need someone who is willing to learn to engineer Zoom during a face-to-meeting.

Our **website** is alive again, but **Willem Ekels** of Curated IT Solutions, webmaster and savior, is not a Dickensian, so who will step up to feed him the news he needs? As he steps back from the site, who will step forward? **Kathy Broz** is ready. Are you also willing to learn?

How about the **newsletters**? This editor is weakening. Beth Bliss and I are eager to turn over the triannual *Twist* to our successors. (**See Help Wanted, p. 1.**) Again, who will step up? Required: minimum word processing skills and the will to try. —K. S.

# HELP!

A Twist of Dickens is published three times yearly by the Cleveland Dickens Fellowship. Coeditors no more: Beth Bliss and Kathleen Schuerger. Gretta Ryan remains. Send email address changes or additions to [cctoam@yahoo.com](mailto:cctoam@yahoo.com)

***The last time we studied Chuzzlewit, in 2005/2006, Audrey Barnes, a thoughtful and discerning member, wrote an intro for the Twist. Here's part of it.***

*Martin Chuzzlewit* has three things to recommend it—humor, language and characterization. Dickens very cleverly combines all three to create unforgettable passages. Sairey Gamp leaps from the page in the fictional Mrs. Harris's description of her. "If ever there was a sober creetur to be got at eighteenpence a day for working people and three and six for gentlefolks—night watching...being an extra charge—you are that inwallable person." Of course Mrs. Gamp is not above spilling snuff in the medicine or yanking the pillow from under the patient's head to make herself more comfortable. Then there is the insufferable Mr. Pecksniff with his pompous verbosity. "Even the

worldly goods of which we have just disposed...even cream, sugar, tea, toast, ham ... and eggs, even they have their moral."

The plot of *Martin Chuzzlewit* is as complex as the route to Todgers Boarding House, "a labyrinth whereof the mystery was known but to a chosen few." The reader is led down devious paths and ends up coming to wrong conclusions. Jonas has murdered his father. Not so; he just thinks he has. Martin Chuzzlewit the grandfather allows Mr. Pecksniff to get the upper hand of him; actually it's the other way around. Bailey is killed in the coach accident; no, he turns up again a little worse for wear "in top-boots with his head bandaged up." The reader must be very alert to untangle all the plots and sub-plots.



Seth Pecksniff, from Arents Collection of Cigarettes Cards, N.Y. Public Library

## Cigarette cards for Dickens lovers



They were like bubblegum cards for grown-ups. Players and Arents Cigarette companies issued them with cigarettes. Now they're collectors' items.

Joseph Clayton Clarke (Kyd) was tapped for the popular Players cards. He based his 50 illustrations on those of Phiz and Seymour, and most were of characters in the earlier novels, especially *Pickwick*. Most were male; just 7 female. From *Chuzzlewit*, Sairey Gamp (left). Only 2 cards, Major Bagstock and Mrs. McStinger, from *Dombey and Son*, our next novel. Obviously we are working our way out of the novels of Dickens's youth.

For Arents Cigarette cards, just a few characters differ from those of Kyd.

Chesterton (*Charles Dickens, A Critical Study*, 1906) talks of "grotesques" in the early work. He claims that "Dickens had to make a character humorous before he could make it human..." Along with CD, Chesterton finds great humanity in the grotesques, however he sees *Dombey* as part of the author's transition to greater realism.

When we discuss *Dombey and Son*, we'll be entering a later stage in Dickens's career—characters memorable, but not so funny. So strap in as we get ready to appreciate his more serious, more artistic novels. —K. S.

