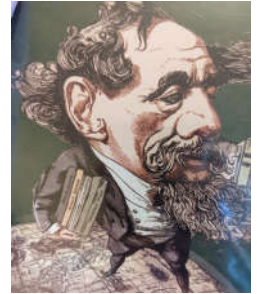


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electronic newsletter from The Cleveland Dickens Fellowship

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January 20, 2024

- **Come Tuesday, February 6, 11:15, to Beachwood Library to celebrate Dickens's birthday and our branch's birthday!**
- **Be there Sunday, Feb. 18, when Appletree Books lauds Dickens with a catered Tea, and presents Mark Dawidziak on Dickens and Poe.**
- **Smithsonian Zooms Dickens lectures on Saturday, Feb. 3.**
- **Do you plan to attend International Conference in August 2024?**
- **Book Review: Enjoy this Victorian detective tale, *Wobble to Death*.**
- **Critics slam the new biography *The Life and Lies of Charles Dickens*.**

Meet February 6, 11:15, at the Beachwood Library.

February of 2024 marks our 40th anniversary. Kathy Broz founded us in CD's birthday month in 1984. We'll mark the occasion with bios and memoirs.

Appletree Books honors Dickens with a Catered Tea, Feb. 18, 2024, 2:00 to 4 pm.

During CD's birthday month, Appletree will offer a Tea to those interested in Charles Dickens. Briefly, **Kathy Broz** and **Paul Siedel** will introduce our group as well as guest speaker **Mark Dawidziak**. Mark's talk is titled "Dickens and Poe: The Perfect Manic-Depressive."

For the most up to date info about Mark, visit his author website: <https://www.markdawidziak.com/bio>

Mike Wells, one of our group and an employee of Appletree, is coordinating the tea. Sophie Gourmand will cater, so expect a variety of teas and various finger desserts. Attendance limited to 30. Appletree has offered similar occasions in the past with great success. **Mark your calendars for Sunday, February 18, 2 to 4 pm.** Bring any bookmarks you have left. Cost of admission to be announced in a few days.

Smithsonian to Zoom Dickens lecture/symposium Saturday, February 3.

Paul Siedel sends us notice of this opportunity. Smithsonian members pay \$80, non-members, \$90.

The lecturer is **Joseph Luzzi**, a professor of literature at Bard College.

Here's a link to registration with lecture titles and times.

[Charles Dickens: The Ultimate Storyteller - Smithsonian Associates](#)

Plan to attend the 2024 International Conference in England August 5 to 8.

The website gives us a look at what's on offer from host Portsmouth Birthplace Branch.

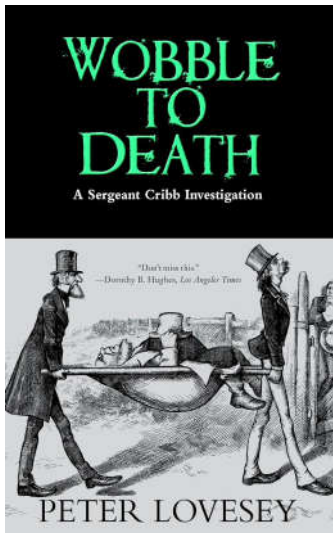
Dickens was born in Portsmouth, his father worked there at the Navy Office. Conference includes a day on the Isle of Wight (Who knew that's what IoW means?), a boat trip, tours of many places he and his family knew. The Banquet will be held aboard the HMS Warrior in the dockyard where John Dickens worked. Note the conference is in August, not July as usual, and is not residential. Find your own place to stay—hopefully with other Dickensians.



<https://dickensfellowship.org/index.php/annual-fellowship-conference/542-annual-fellowship-conference-2024-portsmouth-iow>

Book Review: Victorian detective/murder mystery for those of us who enjoy such things.

We know Dickens enjoyed creating Inspector Bucket in *Bleak House*. It is said he modelled him on Detective Inspector Charles Field. Dickens wrote of his real-life London adventures with Field in his periodicals.



According to the *Oxford Reader's Companion to Dickens* (ed. Paul Schlicke), when Bucket appeared in Dickens's novel, the detective business gained respectability.

Peter Lovesey's series of Victorian detective stories stars Sergeant Cribb. The first one, *Wobble to Death*, treats murder during a walking marathon, a competition during tough economic times that sounds like the dance marathons in this country during the Depression. Contestants walk in an indoor arena until they drop or pick up money prizes--or they're found murdered.

The Sergeant Cribb novels happen a few years after Dickens's death, but the times are close enough to the atmosphere CD knew.

Lovesey might have boned up on Pierce Egan, author of *Life in London*. Dickens owned Egan's tales of sporting events and Cockney adventures.

Cruikshank's illustrations sold Egan. They sparked boys' fancies. *

If you're a connoisseur of mysteries and detective stories, you'll give this one a B at most, but for those of us interested in the Victorian setting, it's first rate. And

Lovesey doesn't quit. The series goes on for eight novels. [Ed's note: Today I'm reading the 2nd, *The Inspector Wore Silk Drawers*.]

*This link takes you to Cleveland Branch's 1998 essay by Joan Freilich, RIP, [Pierce Egan and Charles Dickens](#)

Latest biography leans on scandals, inconsistencies in accounts of Dickens's life.

[Ed's note and full disclosure: I haven't read it. But, based on the reviews, I don't intend to. How about you? **K. S.**]

The Life and Lies of Charles Dickens by Helena Kelly calls itself a biog. It seems rather a compendium of "What if's" and "Suppose that's". *The Guardian's* reviewer subtitles it "Great Speculations." That's because Kelly, working on the premise that CD was always conscious of guarding his reputation and burnishing his brand, sold Forster, Dickens's friend and first biographer, a load of spin.

How old was CD when he was put out to work in the blacking factory? Was his father guilty of embezzlement? Did Ellen Ternan give birth to Dickens's baby and then pass it off as one of the sons of Ternan's cousin? Did CD give his wife Catherine syphilis?

Rumors have swirled for a long time now and scholars have investigated. But *The Guardian's* critic John Mullan thinks Kelly has crossed the line.

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2023/nov/16/the-life-and-lies-of-charles-dickens-by-helena-kelly-review-great-speculations>

For a less accusatory view of *Life and Lies* read NYT reviewer Alexis Coe.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2023/11/16/books/review/the-life-and-lies-of-charles-dickens-helena-kelly.html>



Was John Dickens, father of Charles, guilty of embezzlement?



Illustration: C. L. Doughty