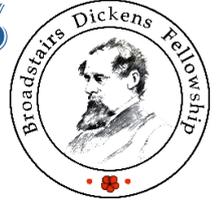


SKETCHES FROM BROADSTAIRS

The Newsletter of the Broadstairs Dickens Fellowship
September 2025



Welcome to the new issue of **SKETCHES FROM BROADSTAIRS**. It is good to be back with a newsletter that celebrates all things Fellowship as well as all things Dickens and the Victorian era and of course not forgetting Broadstairs "Our English Watering Place". In this issue there is an article from Ken Nickoll, a book review from Val Whitehouse, a Declaimers' review from Chris Ewer, a photo gallery of Dickens Week 1961 and a quiz on your least favourite characters. So, not much then! But first there is an article by our current Fellowship Branch Chair, Louise Stubbings.

I hope you enjoy reading our rejuvenated newsletter and I would welcome your feedback or an article of interest to our readers.

Andrew Stokes, Editor, stokesa@btinternet.com

WEB: <https://www.dickensfellowshipbroadstairs.com/>

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MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



photo courtesy of Louise Stubbings

Hi, my name is Louise Stubbings (nee Woodcock) and it's my honour to be the Broadstairs Dickens Fellowship Chair. I have been on the Fellowship committee for about 16 years and been a part of Broadstairs Fellowship and Dickens Festival for about 25 years and a committee member of the festival for 21 of those years. During that time I have seen so much change for the good.

The Fellowship has had some brilliant speakers this year and some fun evenings with quizzes and social meetings and there is still plenty more to come this year.

We also have had trips to Rochester and had a cream tea with entertainment from our Declaimers at the Italianate Glasshouse in Ramsgate and coffee mornings at Bleak House where everyone is welcome to join us.

Our Declaimers raise funds for our branch and they have also raised lots of money for charity.

In July we welcomed our fellow Fellowship members from Rochester and Central branches and we also had our American cousins from Philadelphia and Georgia visit us in Broadstairs. No matter where you go, if there is a Fellowship, you will always have a friend.

Finally, I am so pleased that our Branch Newsletter has restarted and I hope that it will keep all our members informed and entertained.

THE TUGGSES AT RAMSGATE



On Wednesday 6th August in the lovely grounds of the Italianate Glasshouse in Ramsgate, the Dickens Declaimers performed to an enthusiastic audience, consisting of both members of the public and the Fellowship, as part of an afternoon of entertainment and the delights of an excellent cream tea.

The afternoon was blessed with sunny skies and a warm breeze as the Dickens Declaimers performed Dickens's short story of The Tuggses at Ramsgate. It is a very humorous

tale about a working class family in London who find they have come into money and therefore try to raise their social standing. By trying to reinvent themselves with more socially acceptable names and by closing their shop, they embark upon new recreational travel much enjoyed by the upper classes at the time, and take the steamer from London to enjoy the coastal resort of Ramsgate. Unfortunately their naivety in so many things results in their being preyed upon by a couple of confidence tricksters, Captain and Mrs Waters.



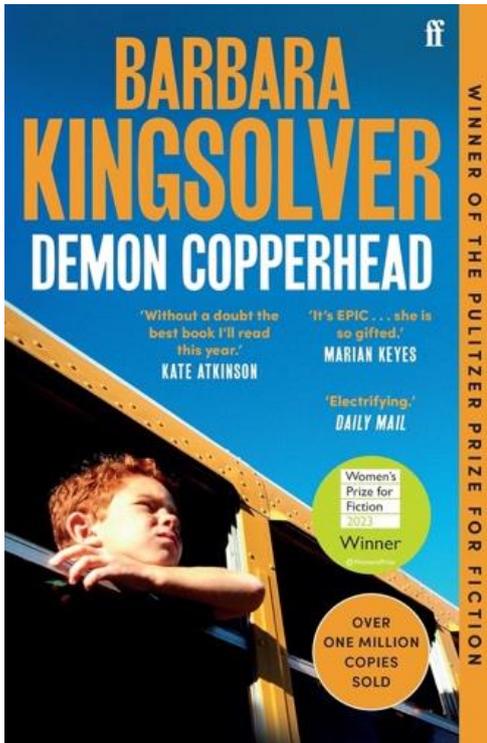
The Dickens Declaimers brought the sketch to life with much hilarity and, in certain areas involving donkeys, carriages and cupboards to hide behind, they developed a farce-like quality, much to the delight of their audience. As usual they gave an amazing performance, giving Dickens's sketch a new energy and vitality, ensuring that the afternoon was a huge success.

Chris Ewer

(The Dickens Declaimers are: Alan Root, Val Whitehouse, Clive Whitehead, Liane Blades, Viv Wilson and Tony Clark.)



Demon Copperhead by Barbara Kingsolver



This book traces the autobiographical story of a child growing up in the Southern Appalachians of Virginia. He is born to a single mother in extreme trailer poverty. Even so, he has happy times with the nearby Pegott family who befriend him. However, mother's new partner treats him cruelly and sends him away to work like a slave on a farm along with other unfortunate boys who are half starved and worn out. An older boy, nick-named Fast Forward, tries to look after them even though he is spoilt and arrogant, and Demon idolises him. Demon is then "fostered" by a worthless family and is so unhappy that he runs away to a distant relative who, with her crippled brother, takes him in and sees that he gets a placement with a local football manager, Coach Winfield, where he makes friends with Coach's tomboy daughter.

Why on earth am I telling you about a modern narrative set in the USA when this is a newsletter for Dickensians? Well, if I reveal some of the character names you might start to understand. We have the Pegotts, McCobb, Betsy Woodall, Hammer and Emmy, Dori Winfield, Rose Dartell Yes, you've got it: they are versions of names from "David Copperfield". Demon's story follows loosely the narrative of David.

However, this is not just a carbon copy updated to the present time. This is a hard-hitting illustration of poverty and drug addiction which is painful to read. The huge scandal of opioid addiction in the States is the basis of the misery that afflicts the whole community, stultifying and ruining lives. There are huge differences between the two books as well as similarities, and it would be unfair of me to spoil your reading by pointing them out.

The writing is tough as well as poetic. The idiomatic language of the Appalachians is often hard to grasp. You may be offended by the everyday swearing and revolted by the depiction of life in the community, but you will also be warmed by the hope and comfort that love brings. Kingsolver makes the point very strongly that this poverty and addiction is happening right now, not in Victorian times. If Dickens were alive now, he would be writing just such a book with children growing up in deep-seated ignorance and institutional grinding poverty in some of the poorer states, exacerbated by the opioid addiction which is rife. It is an eye-opener to us just as "David Copperfield" was in its time.

I don't want to leave you with a feeling of depression. There are some great comic lines ("a quarterback who claimed he got his speed from being the youngest in a family of 9 and his mum only ever cooked for 8") and some lovely descriptions of people and countryside ("snowflakes looped and glared in the headlights like off-season lightning bugs" and the Steerforth character "an older boy that never knew safety himself trying to make us feel safe"). It's a strong story that draws you in and makes you want to know how it will progress and end. How wonderful that Dickens should be such an inspiration to an important writer now.

Val Whitehouse

Editors note - Demon Copperhead is a 2022 novel by Barbara Kingsolver. It was a co-recipient of the 2023 Pulitzer Prize for Fiction, won the 2023 Women's Prize for Fiction and the 2022 James Tait Black prize for fiction.



DOWN MEMORY LANE

It is time to take an excursion down memory lane when Broadstairs had a Dickens Week. These photos, supplied by Angela Norman, show some of her family photos from a Dickens Week in the early 1960s. Does this stir up any memories and even better some old photos? If it does please contact me and we might be able to go back even further in time.

Many thanks to Angela.



Three young maids in their Sunday best, Linda Milner, Jane Bennett and Angela Bennett, admire a doll in costume like their own at the period cricket match which opened Broadstairs Dickens Week events on Sunday. The Week was formally declared open by the Chairman of Broadstairs Council. (C) L. Bennett at the Lighthouse, the Sands, yesterday. (Monday). Full page of 20. News—Page Three.



17 June 1961

Dear Edith Sid,

Hope you like the picture of Eva, Angela + I on right of picture. Note Angela's muffle + hat, she stole the show. it was Dickens festival week + we took part. We are tired of having pictures taken, by press + by people from all parts of the country.
Love Vera - all
x x



"Three young maids in their Sunday best, Linda Milner, Jane Bennett and Angela Bennett, admire a doll in costume like their own at the period cricket match which opened Broadstairs Dickens week events on Sunday. The week was formally declared open by the chairman of Broadstairs Council at the Garden on the Sands yesterday."

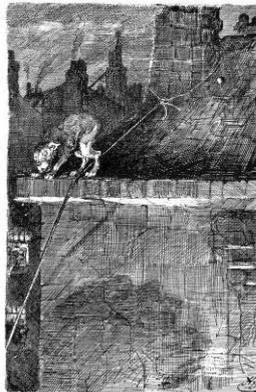
IT'S QUIZ TIME

At our branch meeting in June we had a lively round table discussion on our least favourite Dickens characters. Each of us was able to put forward our selection for least favourite and then it was discussed by the rest of the group. Even as we discussed our selections new choices kept popping up and it soon became apparent that Dickens included many, many 'baddies' in his novels and this is part of his genius, bringing out the dark underbelly of Victorian society.

For the quiz I have taken the least favourite concept and included illustrations of a selection of characters. All you have to do is identify the character and the novel in which they appear. The answers are on page 8. All images are reproduced by kind permission of *Michael John Goodman, Charles Dickens Illustrated Gallery* www.CharlesDickensIllustration.org.



1 Selfish, manipulative and dishonest, but a child



2 This person must be the top of the list of all bad characters. As a hint it is not the dog!



3 Selfish and manipulative



4 Gratuitous child abuse



5 Two baddies for the price of one both getting their comeuppance.



6 Self-serving and heartless. 'The law is a Ass'.



7 A definite villain. Greedy and murderous



Our Housekeeping.

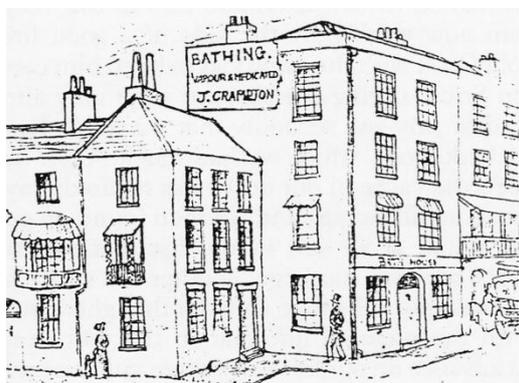
8 Not a bad person, just very irritating

DICKENS AND THE BROADSTAIRS DEMON

by Ken Nickoll

The Broadstairs branch secretary recently received an email from Dr Nicholas Cambridge who is researching Charles Dickens' bathing habits, including his daily use of a shower bath. Dr Cambridge, a member of the Central branch of the Dickens Fellowship, was especially interested in a bath the novelist used whilst holidaying in Broadstairs. Writing to a friend from the town's Albion Hotel in July 1849 Dickens said: "There is no shower bath like the Demon". Dr Cambridge asked if any branch members knew where this "Demon" had been located. I was able to provide Dr Cambridge with the following information which members might find of interest:

Dickens, who is known to have holidayed in Broadstairs around 20 times between 1837 and 1862, had a choice of two bathing establishments in the resort. There was Mary and John Crampton's vapour, medicated and & general bathing establishment on The Parade (sometimes called The Terrace) overlooking the pier and sands. Today this building is Chiappini's coffee lounge and ice-cream parlour. 50 yards away, in Albion Street was Barnes Library with its warm, shower and vapour baths in the basement. This is now the Forno Lounge.



*Left, an old drawing showing the Cramptons' bathing establishment on the clifftop at Broadstairs when Charles Dickens was a patron between 1837 and 1862.
Right, today the building is Chiappini's coffee lounge and ice-cream parlour*

The 1840 Pigot's Directory of Broadstairs and St Peter's describes these bath houses in the following terms: "For the accommodation of visitors many new buildings have been erected, libraries opened, and an hotel established; the baths, likewise, are most convenient, and arranged with every requisite; those under the superintendence of Mr BARNES and Mr CRAMPTON are the principal and most highly favoured of these sanitary establishments."



Left, Barnes library and baths in Albion Street from an 1857 drawing and right, the building today

I believe it was the Cramptons' baths that Dickens used and where The Demon was situated. There are a number of reasons for supposing this.

At the beginning of September 1859, Dickens stayed alone at the Albion Hotel for five days whilst writing *A Tale of Two Cities*. He spent his mornings writing, afternoons walking and evenings dining with Wilkie Collins who was renting a nearby cottage whilst writing the opening chapters of *The Woman In White*. On Friday September 2, 1859, he wrote from the hotel to his daughters Mamey and Katey: "My cold is so bad, both in my throat and in my chest, that I can't bathe in the sea; Tom Collin dissuaded me – thought it 'bad' but I get a heavy shower-bath at Mrs. Crampton's every morning. The baths are still hers and her husband's, but they have retired . . ." The Tom Collin (sometimes spelt Collins) mentioned was a local bathing machine proprietor. The important part of the sentence is Dickens' use of the adjective "a heavy shower-bath" which brings to mind his reference to The Demon in his 1849 letter from the Albion Hotel.

Secondly, I believe he preferred the Cramptons' establishment because he didn't like David Barnes who ran the rival establishment. In that same 'Demon' letter of 1849, he said: "Barnes is several degrees more offensive than ever."

My third reason for believing The Demon was at Cramptons is that their son, Thomas Russell Crampton, was an eminent Victorian railway engineer who designed and patented his own steam engines. Who better to install both the steam engine which raised sea water from the harbour to his parents' baths and a shower powerful enough to impress Charles Dickens?

We know how fond Dickens was of bathing, both in the sea and in bath houses, from his daughter Mary (Mamey). In her book *My Father As I Recall Him*, she wrote: "He was a firm believer in the hygiene of bathing, and cold baths, sea baths and shower baths were among his most constant practices. In those days scientific ablution was not very generally practised and I am sure that in many places during his travels my father was looked upon as an amiable maniac with a penchant for washing. "During his first visit to America [1842], while he was making some journey in a rather rough and uncomfortable canal boat, he wrote: 'I am considered very hardy in the morning, for I run up bare-necked and plunge my head into the half-frozen water by half-past five o'clock'."

She also quotes from a letter he wrote from Broadstairs on September 1, 1843: "In a bay window sits, from nine o'clock to one, a gentleman with rather long hair and no neckcloth, who writes and grins as if he thought he were very funny, indeed. At one o'clock he disappears, presently emerges from a bathing machine, and may be seen a kind of salmon-coloured porpoise, splashing about in the ocean . . ."

We have a description of the bathing facilities at Barnes Library from an auction advertisement which appeared in the *Dover Telegraph* on May 7, 1859 – three years after David Barnes' death. It is likely Cramptons' baths would have been similarly equipped:

"To be sold by Auction . . . all those substantially and well-built and extensive Premises, Nos 35 and 36, Albion Street, Broadstairs used for many years as a Library and Bathing Establishment, containing on the Ground Floor, a compact Library and Reading Room, facing the Sea; large Sitting Room, two entrances . . ."

The Bathing Establishment comprises Five Bath Rooms, with three Marble Baths, two Shower Baths, Vapour Bath, Boiler Room, Engine Room with a one-horse power Steam Engine, Pump, Reservoir and Plant. The Premises are delightfully situated, face the Promenade and the Sea, command an uninterrupted Marine prospect, and provide a good opportunity for profitable occupancy or investment."

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AND FINALLY ... COMING UP AT OUR BRANCH OVER THE REST OF 2025:

Our next meeting will be on **Wednesday 10th September at 7pm at Bleak House**. The Declaimers will present a new script, "Charlie's Angels". Who is Charlie? and who or what are his Angels? Come along to Bleak House to find out.

October 1st- speaker Dr Peter Orford speaking on Edwin Drood.

Dr Orford is a Lecturer in English at the University of Buckingham and the Course Director of the MA course in Dickens Studies run in conjunction with the Charles Dickens Museum. He writes extensively on the work of Dickens and is particularly interested in "The Mystery of Edwin Drood", Dickens' last, unfinished, novel.

Friday 3rd and Saturday October 4th

A Dickensian Murder Mystery, "Who Killed Miss Havisham"

St Peter's Church – Main Community Hall. *Public ticketed event.*

Join us for a murder mystery evening with a Dickensian twist. Enjoy a dramatic reading, then help solve the crime by identifying the murderer, motive, and method. No knowledge of Dickens required!

Please note that October 4th is now sold out but tickets are still available for the 3rd.

Wednesday 10th November at 7pm is our Branch AGM followed by a short talk on Dickens and housework by our acting Secretary Viv Wilson.

December 3rd - Social event at Bleak House. A Dickens Christmas with Victorian food and drink.

The Dickens Book Group will be restarting on September 19th, 10.15 at the Charles Dickens pub and then fortnightly. Having completed our reading of Dickens novels we will go back to his early collection of stories, "Sketches by Boz". The group will be led by Tessa Coulson.

The Dickensian Coffee morning takes place monthly on the second Thursday at Bleak House starting at 10am.

A Christmas Carol. Don't forget that the Dickens Declaimers will be giving their traditional performance of "A Christmas Carol" in December. There will be one performance at the Pavilion and a second performance at Bleak House. The dates will be confirmed very soon

Thank you for reading this issue of Sketches from Broadstairs. I hope you enjoyed it. Thanks to all the contributors for their interesting articles. Unless noted otherwise, all the photos in this issue were provided by Andrew Stokes.

Andrew Stokes, Editor, stokesa@btinternet.com

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Quiz answers

1 Harold Skimpole, Bleak House, 2 Bill Sykes, Oliver Twist, 3 Miss Havisham, Great Expectations, 4 Mrs Squeers, Nicholas Nickleby 5 Uriah Heep and Littimer, David Copperfield, 6 Mr Bumble, Oliver Twist, 7 Jonas Chuzzlewit, Martin Chuzzlewit 8 Dora Spentlow, David Copperfield