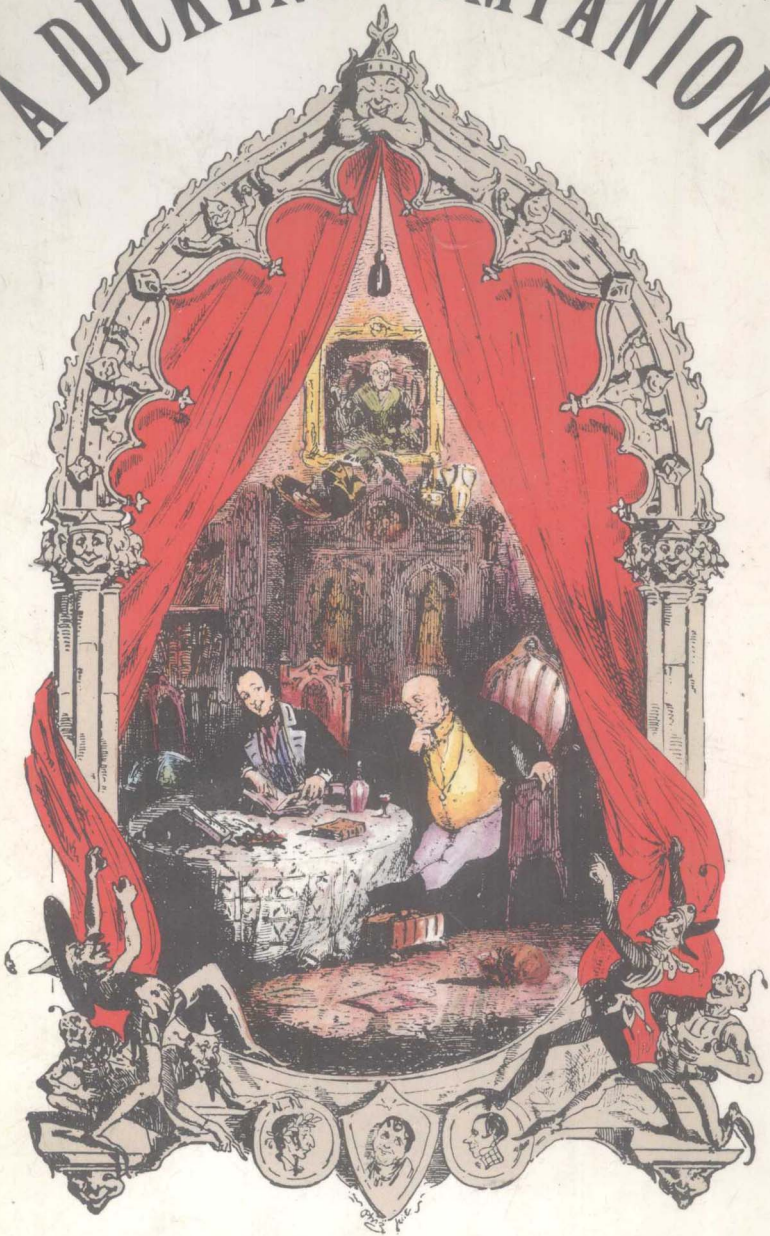


A DICKENS COMPANION



NORMAN PAGE

Macmillan Literary Companions

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**To Valerie and Campbell Purton,
and the Infant Phenomena Dinah and Tom**

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Preface

An elderly charwoman employed about the place . . . was told of the approaching visit, and who it was that was coming. . . . 'Lawk ma'am!' she said. 'Is the young gentleman upstairs the son of the man that put together *Dombey*?' Reassured upon this point, she explained her question by declaring that she never thought there was a man that *could* have put together *Dombey*. Being pressed further as to what her notion was of this mystery of *Dombey* (for it was known she could not read), it turned out that she lodged at a snuff-shop kept by a person named Douglas, where there were several other lodgers; and that on the first Monday of every month there was a Tea, and the landlord read the month's number of *Dombey*, those only of the lodgers who subscribed to the tea partaking of that luxury, but all having the benefit of the reading; and the impression produced on the old charwoman revealed itself in the remark with which she closed her account of it. 'Lawk ma'am! I thought that three or four men must have put together *Dombey*!' Dickens thought there was something of a compliment in this, and was not ungrateful—John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens* (1872–4).

It seems that on a just view of the matter the books we call classics possess intrinsic qualities that endure, but possess also an openness to accommodation which keeps them alive under endlessly varying dispositions—Frank Kermode, *The Classic* (1975).

It is sometimes said that the study of English literature in our time is kept alive only by the academic establishment, and that great authors have come to owe their immortality to the life-support systems provided by set books and examinations. This mournful truth admits, however, of not a few happy exceptions. There is, for

example, a company of nineteenth-century novelists who are unquestionably read and re-read by large numbers of people not out of duty but out of delight. This company (which also includes, for example, Jane Austen and Thomas Hardy) surely has Charles Dickens at its head – a position that that vigorous and domineering personality would doubtless have insisted on. For a century and a half people have been reading – or, like the charwoman, listening to – Dickens' novels for pleasure; and even though the custom of reading aloud has sadly declined, the death of the reading habit has been frequently announced, and nearly all of Dickens' work has been made available through other media in countless adaptations, there is no sign that ordinary readers are going to stop turning to his books. At the same time the 'official' revaluation of Dickens by the literary and academic establishment during the past generation has been an extraordinary phenomenon: no other novelist or nineteenth-century author is now so frequently written about by scholars and critics.

There have been numerous guides and companions to Dickens; one of them appeared within a couple of years of his death and is thus more than a century old; and it is probably not unfair to say that, to a greater or lesser extent, most of them have been amateur productions in both the favourable and the pejorative senses of that term – labours of love, products of an admirable energy and enthusiasm, but frequently incomplete and not infrequently inaccurate. Many of them reflect bygone fashions and exhibit a kind of literary tunnel-vision in their preoccupation with, for example, characters, prototypes, or topography.

The present volume has been designed as a reference book that will be found useful by students of Dickens and general readers alike – by scholars needing to check a point quickly, by undergraduates or sixth-formers working on an essay, and by those who simply (and sensibly) want to satisfy their curiosity on some topic relating to this endlessly fascinating man and writer. So far as I know there is no single volume that provides ready answers to such questions as: When did Dickens start writing *Dombey and Son*? When did he finish *Our Mutual Friend*? What alternative titles did he consider for *Edwin Drood*? In what month did the final instalment of *David Copperfield* appear? Who were the prototypes of Mr Merdle and Miss Mowcher? What did Ruskin say about *Hard Times*, and Aldous Huxley about *The Old Curiosity Shop*? Who was Mark Lemon? When did Dickens visit Pompeii, and when did his father

die? What are the Dickensian associations of Hampstead and Brighton and Kettering? How many public readings did Dickens give in America? What film versions of *A Tale of Two Cities* have there been? This book enables the answers to any of these – and, I suppose, several thousand others – to be found within a few moments.

The chronology of Dickens' life with which the book opens is followed by an alphabetical 'who's who' of those who were associated with Dickens personally or professionally. Then, as the core of the *Companion*, separate sections are devoted to Dickens' books in the order of their appearance. For each of the novels there is information on composition, publication in serial and volume form, and reception, with an indication of the best available texts and summary discussion of some of the main directions taken by interpretation and criticism, and with indications of material that can be consulted by those wishing to make a more serious study of the work in question. There is also a list of characters, with brief notes on each character's role in the novel and on prototypes and other points of interest; an index of characters at the end of the volume enables a character to be traced even when the reader does not know in which book it appears. In addition to the novels, information will be found on Dickens' travel books, his Christmas books and stories, his letters, speeches, readings, plays, poems, journalism, and other minor writings. Next there are sections on Dickens' illustrators and on the topography of his works; and finally a select bibliography, a filmography, and a list of some of the early dramatizations. The appendices reprint three documents of particular interest that the reader may find it useful to have conveniently to hand, and describe Dickens' notebook and memoranda.

My debts to a large number of those who have written on Dickens will be obvious, but I should like to make special mention of three on whom I have drawn especially heavily: Philip Collins, whose extensive bibliographical work and whose work on Dickens' reputation in *Dickens: The Critical Heritage* (1971), referred to throughout as *Critical Heritage*, form only a part of his total contribution to Dickens studies; Edgar Johnson, whose biography of Dickens (referred to throughout as Johnson) has been indispensable; and Robert L. Patten, whose recent *Charles Dickens and his Publishers* is a mine of precise and accurate information in a complex field in which there has in the past been much inaccuracy and

vagueness. I am also grateful to Barnaby Page for compiling the filmography; to Valerie Purton for pointing out some omissions in my original list of the Dickens circle; and to Philip Collins for reading my typescript and suggesting numerous improvements and additions. I am glad to have been able at the last moment to take advantage of Professor Collins' most recent contribution to Dickens studies, *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* (1981).

Abbreviations

CD	Charles Dickens
<i>AN</i>	<i>American Notes</i>
<i>ATTC</i>	<i>A Tale of Two Cities</i>
<i>AYR</i>	<i>All the Year Round</i>
<i>BH</i>	<i>Bleak House</i>
<i>BR</i>	<i>Barnaby Rudge</i>
<i>DC</i>	<i>David Copperfield</i>
<i>D&S</i>	<i>Dombey and Son</i>
<i>ED</i>	<i>The Mystery of Edwin Drood</i>
<i>GE</i>	<i>Great Expectations</i>
<i>HT</i>	<i>Hard Times</i>
<i>HW</i>	<i>Household Words</i>
<i>LD</i>	<i>Little Dorrit</i>
<i>MC</i>	<i>Martin Chuzzlewit</i>
<i>MHC</i>	<i>Master Humphrey's Clock</i>
<i>NN</i>	<i>Nicholas Nickleby</i>
<i>OCS</i>	<i>The Old Curiosity Shop</i>
<i>OMF</i>	<i>Our Mutual Friend</i>
<i>OT</i>	<i>Oliver Twist</i>
<i>PP</i>	<i>The Pickwick Papers</i>
<i>SB</i>	<i>Sketches by Boz</i>
<i>UT</i>	<i>The Uncommercial Traveller</i>

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A Dickens Chronology

(For further information concerning various individuals referred to in this chronology, see the next chapter, 'The Dickens Circle'.)

1812 (7 February) Charles John Huffam Dickens born at 1 Mile End Terrace (now 393 Commercial Road and a Dickens museum), Landport, Portsmouth, Hampshire, second child and eldest son of John Dickens, a clerk in the Navy Pay Office at Portsea, and Elizabeth Dickens (née Barrow). ('Huffham' in the baptismal register is a clerical error: CD was named after his godfather, Christopher Huffam, and always spelt the name thus.)

(4 March) CD baptized at St Mary's, Kingston, Portsea.

(June) The Dickens family move, possibly to 16 Hawke Street, a smaller and cheaper house (destroyed in the Second World War).

(Christmas 1813) they move again, to Wish Street (later renamed Kings Road), Southsea (house now demolished).

1814 At the end of the year John Dickens is transferred to Somerset House, London, and establishes his family in lodgings at 10 Norfolk Street, off Fitzroy Square, St Pancras.

1817 (midsummer) John Dickens is moved to Chatham, Kent, and the family settle at 2 (now 11) Ordnance Terrace. Their servant Mary Weller looks after young Charles, who often plays with their neighbours' children, George and Lucy Stroughill; later he is sent with his sister Fanny to a dame school held over a shop in Rome Lane.

1821 (25 March) The Dickens family move to a smaller and cheaper house, 'The Brook', 18 St Mary Place (now demolished). Charles and Fanny begin to attend a school in Clover Lane kept by William Giles.

1822 Towards the end of the year John Dickens is transferred back to London. William Giles gives CD a copy of Goldsmith's *Bee* as a parting present. The Dickens family settle at 16 Bayham Street (now demolished), in Camden Town. CD's schooling is not resumed: 'What would I have given . . . to have been sent back to any other school, to have been taught something anywhere!' (CD, quoted by Forster).

1823 (Michaelmas) The family's financial situation growing desperate, CD's mother rents a house at 4 Gower Street North (now demolished) in a vain attempt to establish a school: 'Nobody ever came to the school, nor do I recollect that anybody ever proposed to come, or that the least preparation was made to receive anybody' (CD, quoted by Forster). (Compare Mrs Micawber's similarly unsuccessful attempts: *DC*, Ch. 11.)

1824 (9 February) At the suggestion of James Lamert, CD starts work at Warren's Blacking Warehouse, 30 Hungerford Stairs, Strand (on the site now occupied by Embankment Gardens), for six shillings a week: 'My father and mother were quite satisfied. They could hardly have been more so, if I had been twenty years of age, distinguished at a grammar-school, and going to Cambridge'. (For this and other quotations see Appendix A. See also under Dilke in 'The Dickens Circle', below). His job was

to cover the pots of paste-blackening: first with a piece of oil-paper, and then with a piece of blue paper; to tie them round with a string; and then to clip the paper close and neat all round, until it looked as smart as a pot of ointment from an apothecary's shop. When a certain number of grosses of pots had attained this pitch of perfection, I was to paste on each a printed label; and then go on again with more pots.

By his fellow-workers, who included Bob Fagin and Poll Green, he was nicknamed 'the young gentleman'. Years later he wrote that

No words can express the secret agony of my soul, as I sunk into this companionship; compared these every day associates with those of my happier childhood; and felt my early hopes of growing up to be a learned and distinguished man, crushed in my breast My whole nature was so penetrated with the grief

and humiliation of such considerations, that even now, famous and caressed and happy, I often forget in my dreams that I have a dear wife and children; even that I am a man; and wander desolately back to that time of my life.

(20 February) John Dickens is arrested for debt; after three nights in a sponging-house he is sent to the Marshalsea prison.

(25 March) Mrs Dickens and the younger children move into the Marshalsea, leaving CD in lodgings with Mrs Elizabeth Roylance in Little College Street, Camden Town. CD spends his Sundays at the prison; later he moves into an attic in Lant Street, near the Marshalsea, and is able to have his breakfasts and suppers with his family.

(28 May) John Dickens is released from prison, a timely legacy of £450 from his mother, who died on 28 April, enabling him to discharge his debt. The family lodge briefly with Mrs Roylance, and in June take a small house in a poor area, 29 Johnson Street, Somers Town. John Dickens resumes work at the Navy Pay Office and CD continues at the blacking warehouse (now moved to Chandos Street, Covent Garden). John Dickens quarrels with James Lamert, and CD leaves the blacking warehouse after spending four or five months there:

I never afterwards forgot, I never shall forget, I never can forget, that my mother was warm for my being sent back It was a very long time before I liked to go up Chandos Street. My old way home by the Borough made me cry, after my eldest child could speak.

(Late June) CD begins to attend Wellington House Academy, Hampstead Road, run by William Jones.

1824-7 At Wellington House Academy, where his friends include Daniel Tobin, John Bowden, Henry Danson, Richard Bray and Owen Thomas. He wins a Latin prize.

1827 (March) The Dickens family are evicted from 29 Johnson Street for non-payment of rent, and move into lodgings at 17 The Polygon (now demolished), Somers Town. CD leaves school, and after a few weeks spent working for Charles Molloy, a solicitor with offices at 6 Symonds Inn, Chancery Lane, he begins work (May) as

office-boy for Ellis and Blackmore, attorneys, of 5 Holborn Court, Gray's Inn, and subsequently of Raymond Buildings, Holborn. He buys Gurney's *Brachygraphy* and begins to learn shorthand.

1828 (November) He leaves Ellis and Blackmore's to become a free-lance shorthand-reporter at Doctors' Commons, near St Paul's Cathedral.

1829-31 He falls in love with Maria Beadnell; visits the theatre frequently and takes lessons in acting; is a great admirer of Charles Mathews, a celebrated comic actor; arranges an audition with Mathews and Charles Kemble, but is prevented by illness from attending. On his eighteenth birthday CD applies for a reader's ticket at the British Museum. At this time his parents are in lodgings above a greengrocer's shop at 10 Norfolk Street, Fitzroy Square (now 22 Cleveland Street).

1832 CD is employed as shorthand-reporter for the *Mirror of Parliament*, a transcript of parliamentary proceedings started in 1828 by his uncle John Henry Barrow. From 5 March he also works as reporter for a new evening newspaper, the *True Sun*, edited by Samuel Laman Blanchard. He quickly acquires a reputation as a top-rank reporter, outstanding in the gallery of the House of Commons 'not merely for accuracy in reporting, but for marvellous quickness in transcript' (James Grant, quoted by Forster).

(July) Resigns from *True Sun*. After a period in lodgings in the Strand, he lives with his parents again, now at 13 (later 25) Fitzroy Street.

1833 The Dickens family move to 18 Bentinck Street, near Portland Place, and CD's twenty-first birthday is celebrated there. His four-year-old relationship with Maria Beadnell comes to an end. He begins to write short fictional sketches of London life.

(December) His first published fiction, 'A Dinner at Poplar Walk', appears in the *Monthly Magazine* 'in all the glory of print', and is quickly followed by other unsigned contributions in 1834.

1834 (August) CD uses the pseudonym 'Boz' for the first time. He becomes a parliamentary reporter for the *Morning Chronicle*, whose offices were at 322 Strand. During parliamentary recesses he travels all over the country to cover political meetings and elections