

**‘A veritable Dickens shrine’:
Commemorating Charles Dickens at the Dickens House Museum
Catherine Malcolmson**

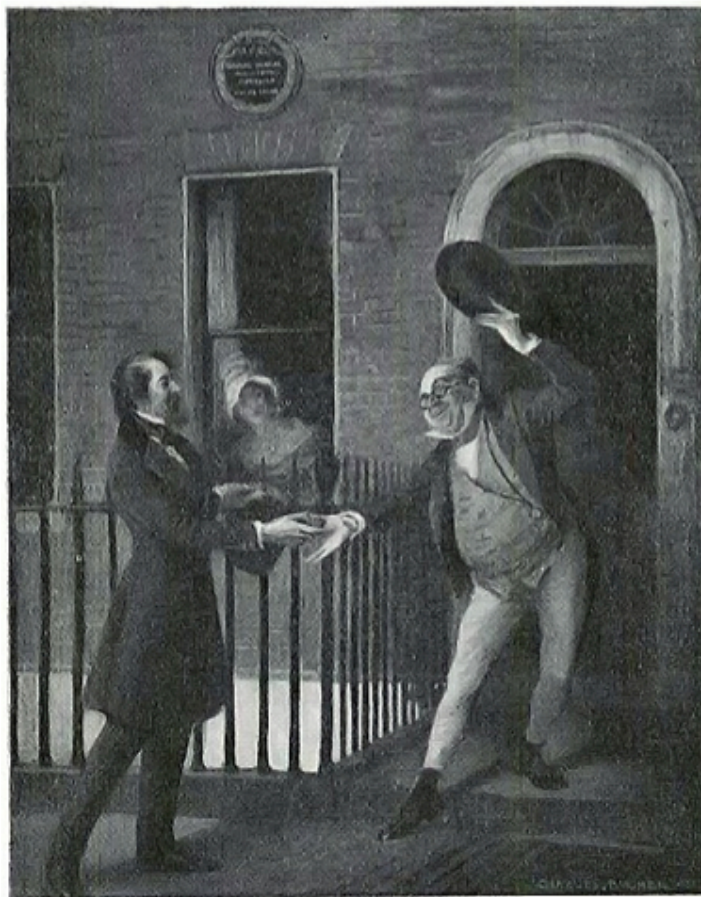


Fig. 1: Charles Buchell, Mr. Dickens and Mr. Pickwick Meet on the Door Step of 48 Doughty Street
(Credit: Charles Dickens Museum)

Charles Buchell’s drawing, ‘Mr. Dickens and Mr. Pickwick Meet on the Door Step of 48 Doughty Street’ is included in the 1926 *Illustrated Guide* to the Dickens House Museum [Fig. 1]. As the title suggests, the image features the front door of Dickens’s former home and the site of the new museum. Yet, although he is the resident of the house, it is Dickens who is approaching the front door to be greeted by Mr Pickwick, hat raised and bowing to receive his visitor. Dickens is portrayed as a guest arriving at the home of his most famous character. The artist suggests that Mr Pickwick was not invented by the author’s pen at his writing desk, but rather existed as a presence before Dickens arrived at Doughty Street, and is more a resident of the house than a literary creation.¹

This image reflects the narrative of 48 Doughty Street promoted by the Dickens Fellowship: that the house held a particular imaginative resonance as the birthplace, or home, of many of Dickens's most celebrated characters, and that visiting the house was a means of accessing both the imagination of the author and encountering his creations. While the Dickens family may only have lived at 48 Doughty Street for just over two years, the literature produced by the Dickens Fellowship emphasizes the author's literary creativity during this period, creating an association between Dickens's early novels and his Doughty Street home.

In *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory*, Harald Hendrix states that, 'writers' houses have meaning, even beyond their obvious documentary value as elements in the author's biography. They are a medium of expression and of remembrance'.² This paper will consider how these dual aspects of expression and remembrance are invoked in the establishment of 48 Doughty Street as a site for literary pilgrimage. It will extend Hendrix's formulation to consider the house's role and sentimental value as a Dickens memorial and will suggest that its appeal lay in the sense of intimate and imaginative access it gave visitors, both to the author and to his characters. It will evaluate the language of feeling which characterized the promotion of the museum project and will suggest that the Dickens Fellowship constructed an association between the Doughty Street house and the characters created there, presenting a particular and constructed narrative to the visiting public.

Charles and Catherine Dickens moved to 48 Doughty Street in April 1837 after one year of marriage. The location of his new home reflected Dickens's recent and rapid rise to the status of celebrity author. Six months after moving in Dickens had completed *The Pickwick Papers* and over the next two years he wrote some of his most celebrated novels: *Oliver Twist* (1837–39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838–39) and *Barnaby Rudge* (1841).

The house itself is a typical London-brick, Georgian townhouse, with rooms arranged over three storeys. Michael Slater notes the respectability of the 'handsome street which at this period had gates and a porter at either end'.³ Yet, Doughty Street was placed just on the fringe of respectable London, still within sight of the hardships of Dickens's youth. Slater notes:

Just east of it runs the then insalubrious Gray's Inn Road, along which cattle were driven towards Smithfield on market days, while to the north and west lay the fashionable squares and terraces of the estates of the Foundling Hospital and the Duke of Bedford.

Slater suggests that Dickens displays an awareness of this sudden change in circumstances as he locates Fagin's lair, home to the gang of child pickpockets in *Oliver Twist*, on Saffron Hill, 'only a short walk east' from his new family home.⁴

Dickens's biographers characterize the period at Doughty Street as a largely happy and prosperous one for the family, with the exception of the sudden death of Dickens's sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, in May 1837. By 1839, the couple had three children and a larger home was necessary. The household consequently moved to Devonshire Terrace, close to the fashionable Regents Park. Dickens described his new home in a letter to Forster as a house of 'excessive splendour', demonstrating a further rise in the standards and comforts of his domestic situation.

As an author, Dickens generally used the domestic space to represent security and family, and it is his domestic descriptions which have remained enduringly popular, from the charm of Peggotty's boat-home in *David Copperfield* (1849) to the kitchen at Dingley Dell in *The Pickwick Papers*. Dickens encouraged this association with the home through the title of his journal *Household Words* (1850–59). Furthermore, since the publication of *A Christmas Carol* (1844), Dickens had used the idea of Christmas to evoke powerful connotations of domestic and family life. His Christmas publications became so rooted in associations of the home, that when he was unable to produce a Christmas volume for 1849, he expressed his regret at leaving 'any gap at Christmas firesides which I ought to fill'.⁵

As domestic space featured prominently in his fiction and journalism, Dickens's relationship to the domestic was bound up with his identity as a writer and his popular public image. Juliet John observes a 'self-mythologising' tendency which extends to his personal letters about his home life.⁶ She points to a letter from Dickens to Cornelius Conway Felton, where the family holiday at Broadstairs is 'sketched' by the author who presents his own version of himself in the third person:

This is a little fishing-place; intensely quiet; built on a cliff whereon — in the centre of a tiny semicircular bay — our house stands [...] In a bay window in a one pair, 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. His name is Boz. [...] Nobody bothers him unless they know he is disposed to be talked to; and I am told he is very comfortable indeed. He's as brown as a berry, and they *do* say, is a small fortune to the innkeeper who sells beer and cold punch. But this is mere rumour.⁷

In creating this ‘character’ Dickens is fashioning his self-image for public consumption. The wry description of a gentleman unwilling to be disturbed, deep in thought over his work, is reminiscent of the way in which Dickens wrote of his characters, and indicative of the manner in which he fictionalizes himself and his surroundings. In this sense, Dickens’s home life functions within the framework of Harald Hendrix’s term for the cultural value of the writer’s home. It serves as a ‘medium of expression’ for the author. Hendrix writes:

Houses that have been shaped or reshaped by writers may well be read as alternative auto-biographies or self-portraits. Their orientation, however is not primarily retrospective, but prospective instead. What they reflect is not a factual account of a writer’s life or a neutral assessment of his mental disposition, but an attempt to construct and mould these on the basis of a particular kind of self-interpretation. Rather than alternative autobiographies, therefore, writers’ houses are instruments of self-fashioning. They can reveal not just a writer’s ideas and ambitions as to the contents and the means of literature, but his aspirations regarding his own artistic and private persona as well.⁸

This view is remarkably persuasive in the context of Dickens’s final home, Gad’s Hill Place. Dickens’s relationship with this house formed part of the self-mythologized version of Dickens’s past. Forster records that Dickens and his father often passed by the imposing house. John Dickens reportedly told his son that ‘if you were very persevering and were to work hard, you might someday come to live in it’.⁹ For Dickens, the purchase of Gad’s Hill represented an outward symbol of his professional success and his status as a literary and public figure. It was a statement of his social ascendance and a mark of the ‘hard work’ which had secured his place as a popular author. Gad’s Hill was the image of domesticity which Dickens wished to present to the outside world. Juliet John further highlights Dickens’s self-fashioning of his life at Gad’s Hill in a letter to Annie Fields, the wife of his American publisher. Dickens describes his return home after his second American tour:

You must know that all the farmers turned out on the road in their market-chaises to say ‘Welcome home, sir!’ and that all the houses along the road were dressed with flags; and that our servants, to cut out the rest, had dressed this house so that every brick of it was hidden. They had asked Mamie’s permission to ‘ring the alarm bell’ (!) when master drove up, but Mamie, having some slight idea that that compliment might awaken master’s sense of the ludicrous, had recommended bell abstinence.¹⁰

Dickens once again uses the third person to place himself at a distance from the depiction of his own arrival; he constructs the narrative around his homecoming with the same exuberant detail which characterizes his fiction. As John observes, he ‘create[s] his homes as he created his fictions and his public persona, stroke by stroke’.¹¹

If Dickens’s homes and letters could be seen to project a certain image of the author during his lifetime, after Dickens’s death in 1870 the various domestic spaces inhabited by him took on a particular resonance for the literary tourist. In the weeks following Dickens’s death, the immediate focus of memorialization was his home, at Gad’s Hill. The artist J. E. Millais sketched his drawing ‘Charles Dickens after Death’ at Gad’s Hill, while the more iconic and emotive drawing by Luke Fildes entitled ‘The Empty Chair’, depicted the writer’s abandoned Gad’s Hill study.

Nicola J. Watson suggests that literary tourism and interest in the domestic space of the author is a nineteenth-century phenomenon, proposing that an expanding popular fiction market led to an interest in ‘pilgrimages to literary destinations’, where

readers were seized en masse by a newly powerful desire to visit the graves, the birthplaces, and the carefully preserved homes of dead poets and men and women of letters; to contemplate the sites that writers had previously visited and written in or about; and eventually to traverse whole imaginary literary territories.¹²

She claims that this new interest in turn spawned an industry dedicated to assisting these literary pilgrims.

These ‘new systems of memorialisation’ included the public or corporate acts of remembrance such as the publication of topographical guidebooks and maps, the establishment of memorials and plaques to the dead, as well as a thriving literary souvenir industry. More personal or individual acts of remembrance included reading works at significant sites, writing in a visitor’s book, or leaving a signature as graffiti. In a culture of rapid social and industrial change, there emerged a sentimental and nostalgic association with the past and this prompted both a desire to visit these historical landscapes and to preserve them. The establishment of organizations like the National Trust (1895) and the Royal Society for the Arts commemorative plaque scheme (1867) reflect the fact that this desire for preservation and commemoration had attained a national level of interest by the close of the nineteenth century. In this context of literary pilgrimage, the writer’s house functioned as a focus for memorialization which was invested with an emotional connection to the writer. The writer’s house, and in particular

the writer's study, was a site where readers could enhance, or add to, their experience of reading a text.

Julian North suggests that pilgrimages to literary sites marked a shift in the relationship between the writer and their readers. Examining the beginnings of the literary tourism industry, she notes how writers and poets such as Wordsworth expressed irritation at the intrusive nature of tourist visits to the homes of, or places closely associated with, the author. These visits resulted in a private space being made a public one and represented a crossing of a boundary by the visitor.¹³ In this respect however, Dickens's relationship with his audience was distinctive in that he actively sought to foster a reading community. The serialization of his novels contributed to a sense that the reader was a participant in the narrative. Publication by instalment allowed the plot to develop over an extended period of time and for a sense of a relationship to develop between readers and characters. Peter Ackroyd recounts how 'one young woman, who saw an illustration in a bookseller's window and rushed into her house screaming, "What *DO* you think? Nicholas has thrashed Squeers!"'.¹⁴ Fiction and reality are blurred in this statement, as Nicholas Nickleby is discussed as a personal acquaintance rather than a fictional creation. The serialization of the narrative contributed to a sense of immediacy and participation on the part of the reader with the events of the novel. Having established this distinctive relationship with his readers, Dickens invited them to share in his domestic space, albeit a certain constructed image of his home life. John suggests that Dickens capitalized on this relationship with his readership, as he 'sought to engineer mass market success which he saw as intrinsic rather than antithetical to the establishment of a cultural heritage presence'. She comments that 'Dickens is remarkable for the extent to which he literally willed the association between the artist's image and material things and/or places'.¹⁵ Dickens can be seen to anticipate, and to a certain degree shape, his cultural legacy through drawing on the personal connection with particular places, demonstrated most clearly in the projected image of his Gad's Hill home. As Alison Booth observes:

Aware of the precedents of Scott, Wordsworth, and others, Dickens established a home in a setting of personal and literary associations, rehearsing and repeating the sensation of haunting. Anticipating that his renown would infuse where he lived, he created a prophetic ghost story about the inevitability of his literary inheritance of Gad's Hill House, to be repeated by later pilgrims and biographers.¹⁶

Booth suggests that Dickens's popularity and vivid writing style made him a natural choice as the subject of literary pilgrimage. She highlights Dickens's ability to portray recognizable character types in his writing, types which could exist beyond the pages of the novel they came from: 'What is especially uncanny is the undying vitality of the replicas of English people this Frankenstein created. It is the sort of reanimation that underwrites house museums, literary biography and national canons, and it certainly warrants tourism.'¹⁷ Booth's use of the term 'reanimation' is particularly interesting in the light of the Dickens House project. It can be applied to the image of Mr Pickwick greeting Dickens, discussed above, and provides a helpful means of considering the engagement of the Dickens Fellowship with Dickens's characters. If the Fellowship sought to 'reanimate' Dickens's creations, it may have been in response to the particularly 'animated' form in which they were presented by their author. Peter Ackroyd observes that the notion of Dickens's characters existing independently of their texts was an idea which originated with Dickens himself, that 'the reality of his characters was impressed as much upon him as upon any of his readers':

Dickens relished the idiosyncrasies and mannerisms of his characters; once they had been created they continued to live within him as so many imaginary companions whom he delighted to introduce to others on appropriate occasions [...] as one friend remembered, 'he said, also, that when the children of his brain had once been launched, free and clear of him, into the world, they would sometimes turn up in the most unexpected manner to look their father in the face. Sometimes he would pull my arm while we were walking together and whisper, 'Let us avoid Mr Pumblechook, who is crossing the street to meet us'.¹⁸

In this light, the image 'Mr. Dickens and Mr. Pickwick Meet on the Door Step of 48 Doughty Street' would appear to follow a pattern set out by Dickens, where characters can be 'reanimated' in a different context from the one in which they were first imagined.

The potential value of 48 Doughty Street as a location to reanimate Dickens's characters was one of several reasons for the Dickens Fellowship to launch a campaign to purchase the house in 1923. B. W. Matz proposed at the Fellowship's conference in 1922 that a 'shrine' to Dickens would be a worthy act of commemoration both of the author and as a testament to the work of the Fellowship itself, which was approaching the twenty-first anniversary of its foundation. The *Dickensian* for July 1922 notes that:

He placed before the members and delegates a scheme for purchasing 48 Doughty Street, London, where Dickens had lived as a young married man. This is the only one of the novelist's London homes which remains as it was

when Dickens inhabited it. An opportunity occurs just now for acquiring the property, and Mr. Matz's scheme will enable the Dickens Fellowship to become the means of preserving for all time this house as a Dickens shrine and as a National Dickens Library and Museum. Carlyle has a shrine, Shakespeare has a shrine, Dr. Johnson has a shrine, and it is high time that such an immortal as Dickens was similarly honoured, and that Dickens-lovers (of which there are many thousands, both in this country and all over the world) should possess a centre where they could foregather, and which they could regard as a permanent home.¹⁹

The value of the house is here measured by its place in Dickens's biography. There is a sense of urgency in the Fellowship's proposal. Doughty Street was a means of 'preserving' an association with Dickens in a London where time seemed to be eroding its ties with his writings. Articles in the *Dickensian* in this period share a preoccupation with cataloguing or capturing by photograph, places mentioned in Dickens's novels or sites associated with the author, with the sense that this was a changing space and one to which successive generations would not have immediate access. Dickens's Tavistock Square home (1851 to 1860) had already been demolished and Devonshire Terrace, where he lived from 1839 to 1851 had been significantly altered.

In Matz's proposal there is also a feeling of indignation at the lack of a Dickens memorial in contrast to other great writers who are commemorated by 'shrines' at their former homes. This sentiment of neglected duty towards Dickens was one which the Fellowship drew upon on several occasions, most notably the Centenary Testimonial Campaign in 1912. The final justification is also revealing. The Dickens Fellowship are seeking a 'permanent home'. They wanted a meeting place for Dickensians and a centre for their activities, yet the deliberate use of the word 'home' evokes a sentimental value in their plans. Just as Dickens's novels drew upon a powerful evocation of the domestic, so his former domestic space inspires the same feelings in his admirers.

The intention of the Fellowship to honour Dickens with a 'shrine' came in spite of the author's own stipulations as to how he wished to be remembered. Dickens had stated emphatically in his will that his legacy should rest upon his published works and that he should not be the subject of 'any monument, memorial, or testimonial whatever'.²⁰ In this light the proposed 'shrine' appears to conflict with the last wishes of its intended object of commemoration.

The Fellowship may have been reassured by Dickens's involvement in the campaign to assist the Shakespeare Birthplace, to which he had made his own pilgrimage

in 1838.²¹ Ten years later he took part in several theatricals to raise funds to establish curatorship there.²² However Dickens had also refused to become involved in the Shakespeare Tercentenary Committee's project to erect a monument to the playwright at Stratford in 1864.²³ Perhaps by this stage in his career he was considering his own public legacy, as he maintained that the best form of commemoration was through the continued appreciation of a writer's work.

Dickens's literary work on the subject of writers' homes is decidedly ambivalent. In his novel *Nicholas Nickleby* (1839), Dickens drew upon his visit to the Shakespeare Birthplace. Here the upwardly mobile Mrs Witterly remarks to Lord Verisopht that she finds Shakespeare's plays much more interesting 'after having been to that dear little dull house he was born in!'. She urges Lord Verisopht to pay a visit, claiming, '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'. Her husband is quick to interject, apologizing for his wife's 'fervid imagination' and assuring Verisopht that 'there is nothing in that place [...] nothing, nothing'. On hearing this, Mrs Nickleby attempts to come to the aid of Mrs Witterly, recounting:

After we had seen Shakespeare's tomb and birthplace, we went back to the inn there, where we slept that night, and I recollect that all night long I dreamt of nothing but a black gentleman, at full length, in plaster-of-Paris, with a lay-down collar tied with two tassels, leaning against a post and thinking; and when I woke in the morning and described him to Mr Nickleby, he said it was Shakespeare just as he had been when he was alive, which was very curious indeed.²⁴

Through Mrs Witterly's opinion of the Birthplace, Dickens makes reference to the popular view that the writer's house is imbued with a particular power. She suggests that the ritualized act of inscribing her name in the visitor's book produces a sense of a greater affinity with Shakespeare. However Dickens deflates this sense of intimacy through Mrs Nickleby's well-meaning, but lengthy, chatter. Her emotional response to Shakespeare's Birthplace is not a greater affinity with the playwright, but a disturbed night's sleep.

More broadly, the motivation for purchasing the Shakespeare Birthplace closely parallels the rhetoric used in the Fellowship's campaign to secure 48 Doughty Street. Julia Thomas suggests that the campaign presented

a conflation of Shakespeare and the birthplace: the meanings of Shakespeare, the man and his works, were inseparable from the meanings of the house in

Henley Street. No longer merely four walls, the birthplace contained the spectral trace of the bard.²⁵

This sense of access to the author through the space associated with them is the same sensation remarked upon by Mrs Witterly, and sought by the Dickens Fellowship at Doughty Street. In the press, the Birthplace Committee was congratulated for securing the house ‘for the nation’. This term was used in the Fellowship’s fundraising material in 1925, highlighting that Dickens was viewed by the Fellowship as a figure of national cultural standing equal to that of Shakespeare. Thomas also notes that ‘in the call for subscriptions, the birthplace was defined in religious terms; as “hallowed”, a “shrine”, a “relic”, a “monument”, a “place of pilgrimage”, a “temple”’.²⁶ These same phrases are adopted by the Fellowship, claiming the kind of iconic status for Dickens equal to that which Shakespeare held in the public consciousness.

Following Matz’s proposal, the Fellowship refined their aims for the scheme and launched a public appeal to raise funds to buy the house in 1923. In the January issue of the *Dickensian* they reaffirmed the commemorative value of the project, but also the educational potential of a Dickens House Museum. They are eager to distinguish their scheme from a memorial statue, and claim that Dickens himself would have seen the value of their project:

It is the intention of the Dickens Fellowship to make 48 Doughty Street worthy in every way of its title. It will naturally do its best to inspire and inculcate a spirit of sentiment and reverence; and it will aim at something much more permanent, something much more substantial and valuable, than a sentimental monument to the novelist’s name and fame: it is intended to make it above all educational [...] Apart from all this the Dickens house shall also be London’s Dickens Mecca, a meeting place for all Dickens lovers. It shall be the Dickens Information Bureau, the Dickens University [...] London shall boast the very memorial Dickens himself would have most desired.²⁷

‘Mecca’, like ‘shrine’, points to a religious site of pilgrimage, a place where Dickens can be worshipped. Although the Fellowship aspire to the museum functioning as a ‘University’, it is at the same time a space for ‘Dickens lovers’, not for critical study of the author. The ‘spirit of sentiment and reverence’, not critical enquiry, appears to be the most appropriate emotion when entering the author’s former home.

The language of sentiment pervades the fundraising material issued by the Fellowship for the Museum scheme. In the prospectus for ‘The Dickens Memorial’, it is proposed that the house will serve as ‘a veritable Dickens shrine, inspiring sentiment and

inculcating a spirit of veneration for the great writer'.²⁸ It is the intention of the Dickens Fellowship that 48 Doughty Street, and the objects displayed within it will evoke an emotional response in the visitor, which will in turn lead to a greater appreciation of Dickens.

Nicola Bown reflects on the particularly intimate effect of sentimental writing, suggesting that it operates by 'collapsing the distance between reader or viewer, text or object or image'.²⁹ She argues that being moved to tears by fiction involves the reader emotionally in the action of the novel.³⁰ This effect is very clear in early twentieth-century responses to Dickens and in the culture of the Dickens Fellowship. In her appeal to American members of the Fellowship, Alice Newcomer of the New York branch, draws upon the shared experience of Dickens's writings and the sentimental value of the writer's home to stir her audience to contribute to the scheme. She writes:

As a Nation, I believe we of the United States, way down in our hearts, are the most sentimental in the world [...] And now we are offered another chance to prove our love for that which has a sentimental value only. The birth-place of the *Pickwick Papers*.³¹

Given the distance between New York and London, and in an era before commercial passenger flights were routine, it seems unlikely that many of the American supporters of the scheme would visit 48 Doughty Street, yet Newcomer calls them to imagine entering the house and to consider the emotional response which such a visit would inspire:

Just think of the atmosphere of guilelessness and kindness and true friendship which will envelop us when we enter those doors! And how tender and gentle will be the letters we write to our friends across the sea, as we sit at the desks provided for us within those walls! Think how we women will thrill our clubs back home with accounts of how WE have walked on the very floors which Dickens feet had trod.³²

The writer's house is a place of pilgrimage which leads to a greater sense of association with the author. Just as Mrs Witterly felt 'inspired' by signing her name in the visitor's book at the Shakespeare Birthplace, Alice Newcomer suggests that letters written home from Doughty Street will be 'tender and gentle', inspired by association with Dickens. For Newcomer, there is a particular power in the intimacy of walking 'on the very floors' which Dickens had trodden; this very literal following in the author's footsteps achieves a sense of personal connection with him. Newcomer is unhesitant about using the term 'shrine' to describe the proposed museum. She writes:

The dictionary tells us ‘a shrine is a case for sacred relics.’ [...] Are not the mementos of that Master of kindness and joy really ‘sacred’ to us who love him and his works? And shall we not, by word and deed, do what we can to make it not only ‘a case for sacred relics,’ but a living, breathing, loving memorial of him who so loved life?³³

The language attributed to the museum project is one of sentimental association, predicated on an emotional attachment both to Dickens’s writing and to the man himself. This ‘stirring up’ of feeling is used as an effective fundraising tool for the purchase of Doughty Street.

The Fellowship’s appeal to raise the £10,000 required for the acquisition and endowment of Doughty Street was well publicized. The Lord Mayor of London supported the scheme, urging Londoners to ‘preserve one of the most valuable literary relics of our time’.³⁴ Coverage in the press was also on the whole positive, encouraging of the Fellowship’s aims of preservation and of establishing a heritage venue for public use. From a collection of press coverage, reprinted in the *Dickensian*, it is clear that the language of sentiment extends to these external views of the potential value of the house. The *Daily Telegraph* asserts that Doughty Street has ‘a right to be a place of pilgrimage’, the *Daily Graphic* refers to it as a ‘Dickens Shrine’ and in the *Saturday Review* the house is described as ‘a living warmth of reminiscence’.³⁵

The Dickens House Museum was opened on 9 June 1925, as the culmination of the Fellowship’s annual commemoration of Dickens’s death, underlining the memorial role of the museum. In its coverage of the opening, the *Daily Telegraph* suggests that the particular appeal of the house is in the intimate associations with Dickens which it can evoke:

For it is a very human and pardonable foible that we should be so curious to see the houses where great men have lived [...] the sight seems to bring them nearer and closer akin to us. We fancy that we somehow know them better if we see the front door through which they passed from the public street to the privacy of their home life, the windows which gave them light, the fireplaces round which they drew their chairs, the desks at which they wrote [...] But though a mere memorial plaque — and we wish there were many more of them — can wake pleasant memories or send us inquiringly to our books, how much greater is the enchantment of the memorial house!³⁶



Fig. 2: Opening of the Dickens House Museum by Lord Birkenhead
(Credit: Charles Dickens Museum)

The writer of this article responds to the sentimental and emotional appeal of the writer's house, suggesting that it has a value greater than a mere memorial plaque, as it inspires a sense of intimate connection with the author.

It is this insight into the private domestic life of the author which captures the interest of the writer of an article in the *Daily Mail*. The journalist directs his readers' attention to the personal objects on display. 'Amongst these are two of his pens — one with the famous curving quill — a card case given to his wife on their wedding day, and a lock of his hair.'³⁷ These items have a sentimental value through their associations with Dickens. The lock of hair suggests the Victorian practice of retaining hair of a loved one as a *memento mori*. The Dickens House Museum is both a memorial and a shrine to Dickens, a private space made public, where visitors can commemorate the author and establish a sense of intimacy through a common experience of the surroundings.

While the Dickens House Museum was promoted as a site where the reader could access the author in a manner which deepened their association with him, Alison Booth makes the point that, 'the very openness of the author's house to the public is a proof of that author's absence'.³⁸ Visitors are only able to gain access to Dickens's home when it is no longer inhabited by him. In this sense, writers' houses which are opened to the public

posthumously are always, by necessity, recreated or constructed spaces. Such recreations of private domestic life are always subject to manipulation or distortion, as they reflect the views, beliefs or aspirations of their designers or curators. In describing the role of the writer's home after their death, Hendrix suggests that these houses shift from functioning as mediums of 'self-expression' to mediums of 'remembrance'. Hendrix contends that the structuring of these sites of remembrance is always 'selective' as they tend to 'privileg[e] some aspects and interpretations of the author's work over others'.³⁹ He writes:

They accumulate the various interpretations and appropriations of those ideas and ambitions by later generations, who tend to project onto the material object of the house both their vision of the writer and some of their own ideals and idiosyncrasies. As a medium of remembrance, writers' houses not only recall the poets and novelists who dwelt in them, but also the ideologies of those who turned them into memorial sites.⁴⁰

A certain degree of mythmaking existed in the Doughty Street project. Dickens had inhabited multiple houses during his lifetime and as the writer of the *Daily Telegraph* report on the opening of the museum noted, 'the house, to be quite frank, is not so large or distinguished-looking as 1 Devonshire Terrace still is, or as Tavistock House (now demolished), in Tavistock Square, once was'.⁴¹ In his own mythologizing of his home life, Dickens had particularly associated himself with Gad's Hill Place. In contrast to the memorial statues he so emphatically disavowed, and despite his explicit desire not to be memorialized after death, Gad's Hill was fashioned as a lived-in monument to his successful career. In order to present 48 Doughty Street as a valid site for literary pilgrimage therefore, the Dickens Fellowship sought to construct an association between the Doughty Street house and the characters Dickens created there. The house was presented to the public not only as a place of access to the author, but also as a site of reanimation for his creations.

In the *Dickensian*, the value and significance of 48 Doughty Street is presented in terms of Dickens's creative output while he lived there. E. V. Lucas remarks that 'the Doughty Street Period lasted less than three years. But what years! They comprised the second half of *Pickwick*, all of *Oliver Twist*, all *Nicholas Nickleby*, and the beginning of *Barnaby Rudge*'.⁴² The house is presented as having ownership of these characters, a notion reiterated in a comment from the *Star* newspaper, which informs its readers that

Number 48 Doughty Street is a very ordinary house in a very ordinary street in Bloomsbury; but it happens to be the house in which Dickens wrote *Oliver*

Twist and *Nicholas Nickleby*. What Englishman could deny that the fact at once adds a glamour to the house?⁴³

The Museum holds a particular ‘glamour’ as a Dickens site for literary tourists as it can lay claim to be the point of origin for some of Dickens’s most popular writings.

The official guidebook to the museum, issued by the Fellowship in 1926, draws heavily on Forster’s *Life of Dickens* (1871–74), yet the guidebook relates events in Dickens’s life without applied reference to the domestic space of the museum. The narrative emphasizes that Dickens’s ‘fame [was] established while at this house’, justifying once again the importance of the site in the light of its literary creations: an objective reinforced by the image of Dickens greeted at the door of the house by Mr Pickwick, which appears on the first page of the guide.⁴⁴

The guide pays little attention to objects actually displayed within the house and the only detail of the interior it refers to is the likely location of Dickens’s study. In the April 1925 *Dickensian*, Lucas commented that

There is no information as to which was his workroom; but it was probably behind that one on the first floor which is to be the library. We may suppose that here the great man wrote, because writers usually choose retired rooms.⁴⁵

Interestingly, the guide makes the authoritative claim that ‘the back room on the first floor was Dickens’s study’.⁴⁶ New information may have come to light regarding the function of the room, or the guide may have sought to establish a visual focal point within the Doughty Street house for Dickens’s writings. This association is strengthened as the guide notes, ‘here are shown the first editions of the work done in this room’, and then proceeds to list the titles of the Doughty Street novels. The Dickens Fellowship is presenting Dickens’s study, and his writing desk in particular, as the source of his creative output in a manner reminiscent of the tradition of Dickens sketches and paintings which depict animated images of his characters springing from the author’s pen.⁴⁷

The *Illustrated Guide* may have avoided detailed commentary on the objects on display as the content was very much a work in progress. A list of gifts to the museum printed in the *Dickensian* provides a sense of the eclectic and broad nature of the collection. Valuable literary collectors’ items such as an ‘original first issue of the first edition’ of *A Christmas Carol* are supplemented by Dickens ephemera (‘Admission Tickets for a Public Reading by Charles Dickens’) and commercially produced Dickens souvenirs (‘Statuette — “Dolly Varden and Joe Willett, Joe’s Farewell”’).

However one aspect of the museum's interior received much discussion in the pages of the *Dickensian*. This was the decision to decorate the room which would have formerly been the Dickens family kitchen in the style of the kitchen at Dingley Dell in *The Pickwick Papers*. The editor informs readers that 'the large kitchen has been appropriately decorated and arranged in the old fashioned Dingley Dell style'.⁴⁸

The use of the term 'appropriately' demands evaluation. The style is not appropriate as an authentic recreation of a London townhouse of this period, or as an attempt to reproduce the environment in which the Dickens family lived. Rather, it is a means of engagement with one of Dickens's texts. By creating a 'Pickwick' kitchen, visitors are able to participate in the setting of Dickens's popular novel. Visitors to the museum are encouraged not merely to learn biographical facts about Dickens's residence there but to engage imaginatively with his works. This process is described by Lucas as he informs readers of the *Dickensian*:

And this reminds me that one of the alterations now in progress at 'Dickens House' is the conversion of its ordinary kitchen, in the basement, into something more like an inn-parlour of the past, with a tiled floor and a great open fireplace, and settles, and pipes, and a kettle for hot brandy and water or pineapple rum: an old fashioned cosy room where at any moment the sound of hoofs might be heard and the door might open to admit the burly figure of Mr. Anthony Weller in his many capes, just descended from the box and in more than a little need for comfort.⁴⁹

Lucas presents the room as a stage set, containing all the appropriate props, and where at any moment the scene may come to life with the arrival of Anthony Weller. He describes a process of 'inhabiting' the novel; both imaginatively, but also physically in the created space of the kitchen.



*Fig. 3: The Dickens House:
A Corner of the Old-time Kitchen
(Credit: Charles Dickens Museum)*

There is no information in the *Dickensian* as to why the Dingley Dell Kitchen was singled out for this kind of recreation, but it is a further demonstration of the particular regard with which the Dickens Fellowship held *The Pickwick Papers* and the character of Mr Pickwick. This early work by Dickens seems to have become emblematic for the Fellowship of all that they considered ‘Dickensian’, to the extent that their representations of Dickens and Mr Pickwick become almost interchangeable: Mr Pickwick is the image chosen to feature on the cover of the first issue of the *Dickensian* in 1905. The novel’s ‘gentlemen’s club’ frame may have appealed to the Dickens Fellowship, just as it inspired many other organizations. The founder of the Pickwick Bicycle Club (1870) describes how the name ‘Pickwick’ was adopted into the club’s title in tribute to the recently deceased Dickens, but also reveals how the imaginative appeal of the novel was incorporated into the club’s practice: ‘it was further agreed that each member should be known by a sobriquet selected from the characters in *The Pickwick Papers*, and be addressed by that name at all club meetings’.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the Dickens Fellowship may have been drawn to the values represented by the Pickwickians, with what Tobey C. Herzog terms their ‘social and familial code of trust, love, benevolence, and community’.⁵¹ These qualities echo the Fellowship’s aims, with their focus on service and philanthropic giving, as well as their chosen title; the term ‘fellowship’, evoking these same connotations of friendship and community. The fireside scene at Dingley Dell, evocative of warmth and hospitality, would have been considered the apotheosis of these qualities, suggesting that in its recreation at the Dickens House Museum the Fellowship are not only endorsing a particular and selective version of Dickens, but also projecting a certain image of their organization.⁵²

Visitors’ reactions to the newly opened museum are not recorded in the *Dickensian*, but an unofficial guidebook produced in 1925 offers one such response. Notably, it focuses on the imaginative appeal of the museum. *Under a Dickens Roof*, written anonymously, is part of the British Library’s Dexter Collection of Dickensiana. The author of the guide encourages visitors towards an imaginative engagement with the house:

One may safely prophesy that visitors from all parts of the world will go there like homing pigeons and will repeople the rooms in imagination. They will see there, with the mind’s eye, the brilliant young writer in the dawn of his fame, his wife, their little boy, and their two baby girls, and that circle of intimate

visitors who began there to find the Dickens home a centre of happy friendship.⁵³

Like the official guidebook, there are few detailed references to objects on display, with one exception. The author notes a casement window, displayed above a fireplace at the museum, but taken from Dickens's childhood home at Bayham Street, and through which the author informs his readers, 'Dickens, then a boy of eleven, used often to look'. The significance of this object lies in the way it allows a visitor to look through a frame as Dickens would have done. The author observes:

The little iron catch is still intact, and it gives one a curious sensation to turn it and open the window, as the child must have done so many times. What strange scenes may not the sensitive, dreamy lad have seen through that casement, time and time again, when his family played round the passers-by and made of them personages in many an unwritten tale! If you and I could see through it anything to rival those visions that crowded on the boys far away gaze, it would be a 'Magic Casement' indeed. Shall we look?⁵⁴

The author urges readers to echo Dickens's gaze, suggesting that the casement serves as a figurative 'window' into Dickens's imagination. On looking through it, the author describes a reanimation of a variety of Dickens characters: Harold Skimpole, Tom Pinch, Pecksniff and Mr Micawber. The author writes:

The procession of men, women, and children created by the genius of Dickens comes thick and fast into our sight as we look through the Magic Casement. They shake hands and talk with one another in utter disregard of the separate water-tight compartments in which they began their existence, namely, the individual novels.⁵⁵

The author suggests that these characters can be accessed by the reader in a manner which goes beyond their compartmentalized existence in the novels. These characters can be reanimated in a space associated with Dickens, in his former home, and the readers' sense of intimacy with them can be deepened. The house functions as a point of access to Dickens's creative imagination.

The opening of Dickens's former home at Doughty Street as the Dickens House Museum was used by the Dickens Fellowship as a means of honouring their revered author, but also presented an opportunity to extend public engagement with him and with his creations. For the wider public, access to the private space of the author was also appealing, contributing to a privileged sense of intimacy. This sense of proximity to the author was cultivated by the Fellowship through a language of sentiment and feeling, which to some extent scripted the experience of visitors to the museum. This constructed

version of Dickens drew upon elements of his biography, but placed much greater emphasis on the literary figures he created at 48 Doughty Street. Yet while the Museum may have been a constructed, and in some instances an invented, space, it invited Dickens's wide readership to develop their relationship with the author beyond the pages of his books.

¹ Dickens began *The Pickwick Papers* in 1837, while living at Furnival's Inn.

² Harald Hendrix, 'Writers' Houses as Media of Expression and Remembrance: From Self-Fashioning to Cultural Memory', in *Writers' Houses and the Making of Memory*, ed. by Harald Hendrix (New York: Routledge, 2008), pp. 1–11 (p. 1).

³ Michael Slater, *Charles Dickens* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009), p. 97.

⁴ Slater, *Charles Dickens*, p. 98.

⁵ Letter to John Forster, 18 September 1847, *Pilgrim Edition of the Letters of Charles Dickens*, ed. by Madeline House and others, 12 vols (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965–2002), V, 165–66 (p. 165).

⁶ Juliet John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), p. 260.

⁷ Letter to C. C. Felton, 1 September 1843, *Letters*, III, 547–51 (p. 548), quoted in John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, p. 259 (emphasis in original).

⁸ Hendrix, 'Writers' Houses', p. 4.

⁹ John Forster, *The Life of Charles Dickens*, 3 vols (London: Chapman and Hall, 1872–74), I: 1812–1842, 5.

¹⁰ Letter to Mrs T. J. Fields, 25 May 1868, *Letters*, XII, 118–120 (p. 119), quoted in John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, p. 260.

¹¹ John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, p. 262.

¹² Nicola J. Watson, 'Introduction', in *Literary Tourism and Nineteenth Century Culture*, ed. by Nicola J. Watson (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), pp. 1–12 (p. 3). The essays in this collection demonstrate the variety of literary sites in Britain in this period, highlighting the range of authors and poets who attracted this tourist following.

¹³ Julian North, 'Literary Biography and the House of the Poet', in *Literary Tourism*, ed. by Watson, pp. 49–63.

¹⁴ Peter Ackroyd, *Dickens* (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 143 (emphasis in original).

¹⁵ John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, p. 241.

¹⁶ Alison Booth, 'Time-Travel in Dickens' World', in *Literary Tourism*, ed. by Watson, pp. 150–63 (p. 153).

¹⁷ Booth, 'Time-Travel', p. 151.

¹⁸ Ackroyd, *Dickens*, pp. 144–45.

¹⁹ T. W. Hill, 'The Dickens Fellowship: The Sixteenth Annual Conference', *Dickensian*, 18 (1922), 133–36 (p. 134).

²⁰ Slater, *Charles Dickens*, p. 618.

²¹ Letter to Mrs Charles Dickens, 1 November 1838, *Letters*, I, 447–48 (p. 447).

- ²² Slater, *Charles Dickens*, p. 275.
- ²³ Letter to Wilkie Collins, 25 January 1864, *Letters*, X, 346–49 (p. 349).
- ²⁴ Charles Dickens, *Nicholas Nickleby* (London: Everyman, 1993), pp. 352–53.
- ²⁵ Julia Thomas, ‘Bidding for the Bard: Shakespeare, the Victorians, and the Auction of the Birthplace’, *Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, 30 (2008), 215–28 (p. 220).
- ²⁶ Thomas, ‘Bidding for the Bard’, p. 220.
- ²⁷ ‘When Found’, *Dickensian*, 19 (1923), 3–8 (pp. 3–4).
- ²⁸ *The Dickens Memorial* (London: Charles Dickens Museum [n.d.]).
- ²⁹ Nicola Bown, ‘Introduction: Crying Over Little Nell’, in *Rethinking Victorian Sentimentality*, ed. by Nicola Bown (= *19: Interdisciplinary Studies in the Long Nineteenth Century*, 4 (2007)), p. 3 <<http://19.bbk.ac.uk/index.php/19/article/view/453/313>> [accessed 27 April 2012].
- ³⁰ While it is one of several possible definitions of sentimentality, Bown’s suggestion that sentimental writing ‘collapses’ the distance between writer and reader is particularly applicable to the Doughty Street project, which sought to cultivate a sense of proximity to the author and his characters. The *Oxford Bibliographies Online* project provides a useful overview of the debates surrounding sentimental literature. See Kirstie Blair and Eliza O’Brien, ‘Sentimentality’, *Oxford Bibliographies Online: Victorian Literature* <<http://oxfordbibliographiesonline.com>> [accessed 27 April 2012].
- ³¹ Alice Newcomer, ‘London’s Dickens Shrine’, *Dickensian*, 19 (1923), 14–15 (p. 14).
- ³² Newcomer, ‘London’s Dickens Shrine’, p. 14.
- ³³ Newcomer, ‘London’s Dickens Shrine’, pp. 14–15.
- ³⁴ ‘The Dickens House Endowment Fund’, *Dickensian*, 20 (1925), 70.
- ³⁵ ‘What the Press Thinks’, *Dickensian*, 21 (1925), 71–72.
- ³⁶ ‘Dickens House’, *Daily Telegraph*, 10 June 1925, p. 10.
- ³⁷ ‘Dickens’ London Home’, *Daily Mail*, 9 June 1925, p. 7.
- ³⁸ Booth, ‘Time-Travel’ p. 151.
- ³⁹ Hendrix, ‘Writers’ Houses’, p. 1.
- ⁴⁰ Hendrix, ‘Writers’ Houses’, p. 5.
- ⁴¹ ‘Dickens House’, p. 10.
- ⁴² E. V. Lucas, ‘With Dickens in Doughty Street’, *Dickensian*, 21 (1925), 65–66 (p. 65).
- ⁴³ ‘What the Press Thinks’, *Dickensian*, 21 (1925), 72.
- ⁴⁴ *The Dickens House: An Illustrated Guide* (London: Speaight, 1926)
- ⁴⁵ Lucas, ‘With Dickens in Doughty Street’, p. 66.
- ⁴⁶ *The Dickens House*.
- ⁴⁷ See, for example, W. H. Beard, ‘Dickens Receiving His Characters’ (1874), R. W. Buss, ‘Dickens’s Dream’ (1875), or J. R. Brown, ‘Dickens Surrounded by His Characters’ (1889–90).
- ⁴⁸ ‘When Found’, *Dickensian*, 21 (1925), 59–63 (p. 59).
- ⁴⁹ Lucas, ‘With Dickens in Doughty Street’, p. 65.

⁵⁰ *History of the Pickwick Bicycle Club*, compiled by 'The Hon. Mr. Cruston' (London: Pickwick Bicycle Club, 1905), p. 3.

⁵¹ Tobey C. Herzog, 'The Merry Circle of the *Pickwick Papers*', *Studies in the Novel*, 20 (1988), 55–63 (p. 55).

⁵² The association between Dickens and Mr Pickwick was not just confined to the Dickens Fellowship, but is an enduring trope in popular culture. As Juliet John observes, the image chosen to represent Dickens on the Dickens £10 note (between 1992 and 2003) was an illustration of the cricket match at Dingley Dell (John, *Dickens and Mass Culture*, pp. 240–241).

⁵³ S. N. E., *Under a Dickens Roofree* (London: Spottiswoode, Ballantyne, 1925), p. 1.

⁵⁴ S. N. E., *Under a Dickens Roofree*, pp. 17–19.

⁵⁵ S. N. E., *Under a Dickens Roofree*, p. 21.