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Opening Extract from...

Dickens's England

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far advanced, by some bold vagrants, who, after establishing their own possession, took to letting them out in lodgings. Now, these tumbling tenements contain, by night a swarm of misery...

Twice, lately, there has been a crash and a cloud of dust, like the springing of a mine, in Tom-all-alone's; and each time a house has fallen.

In *Sketches by Boz* Dickens describes certain gin shops in the vicinity of Clare Market.

CLERKENWELL, LONDON — It is at a bookstall near Clerkenwell Green in *Oliver Twist*, that the Artful Dodger, Charley Bates and Oliver Twist spot an old gentleman (Mr Brownlow) as he browses through the wares on display. "He'll do," said the Dodger.

"A prime plant," observed Master Charley Bates. This pair then relieve the old gentleman's pocket of its handkerchief. In that instant, the reasons behind Fagin's 'training' become horribly apparent to young Oliver. In the confusion that follows, our hero is captured for the crime.

Later in *Oliver Twist*, Mr Bumble proceeds to



The Artful Dodger and Oliver Twist.

the Clerkenwell Session House, having advised Mrs Mann that:

'...A legal action is coming on, about a settlement; and the board has appointed me – me, Mrs Mann – to depose the matter before the quarter-session at Clerkinwell. And I very much question,' added Mr Bumble, drawing himself up, 'Whether the Clerkinwell Sessions will not find themselves in the wrong box before they have done with me.'

'Oh! you mustn't be too hard upon them, Sir,' said Mrs Mann, coaxingly.

'The Clerkinwell Sessions have brought it upon themselves, Ma'am,' replied Mr Bumble; 'and if the Clerkinwell Sessions find that they come off worse than they expected, the Clerkinwell Sessions have only themselves to thank.'

In *Barnaby Rudge*, the locksmith Gabriel Varden lives:

In the venerable suburb – it was a suburb once – of Clerkenwell, towards that part of its confines which is nearest to the Charter House, and in one of those cool, shady streets, of which a few, widely scattered and

dispersed, yet remain in such old parts of the metropolis, – each tenement quietly vegetating like an ancient citizen who long ago retired from business...

Varden lived in:

a modest building, not very straight, not large, not tall; not bold faced, with great staring windows, but a shy, blinking house, with a conical roof going up to a peak over its garret window of four small panes of glass, like a cocked-hat on the head of an elderly gentleman with one eye.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* Jarvis Lorry 'walked along the sunny streets of Clerkenwell, where he lived, on his way to dine with the Doctor.' (See also SOHO.) In *Our Mutual Friend*, Mr Venus, the preserver of animals and birds, was found residing 'in a narrow and dirty street', in Clerkenwell.

CLEVELAND STREET, LONDON — Charles Dickens first came to London as a two-year-old, when his father was transferred back there from Portsmouth in January 1815. The family took lodgings in Norfolk Street (now Cleveland Street), off Fitzroy Square, and close to the Middlesex Hospital. They stayed until 1817 when John Dickens was relocated yet again by the Navy (see also CHATHAM and SHEERNESS). There is little documented evidence of their stay here, only that many years later Dickens told his good friend, John Forster, that he had a vague memory of leaving

Portsmouth and arriving in London in the depths of winter. The house in question was swallowed up in the later development of the Middlesex Hospital.

In 1829–30 the family again lived in Norfolk Street at Number 10; above a greengrocer's shop (now 22 Cleveland Street), this being the address given by Dickens when applying for a reader's ticket at the BRITISH MUSEUM in February 1830.

CLOVELLY, DEVON — Clovelly was the original of 'Steepways', in the 1860 Christmas Story *A Message from the Sea* which Dickens wrote jointly with Wilkie Collins. "And a mighty singular and pretty place it is, as ever I saw in all the days of my life," says Captain Jorgen, looking up at it ... Captain Jorgen had to look high to look



The steep, winding main street of Clovelly, Devon.



The handsome front door of Dickens's former home at Doughty Street, now the Charles Dickens Museum.

last two letters at this desk. The table from his Swiss Chalet (see also GAD'S HILL PLACE and ROCHESTER) at which he wrote the final pages of the unfinished *Edwin Drood* is also on display.

The Dickens Reference Library, containing the collections of B. W. Matz and F. G. Kitton, is also on view at Doughty Street, as is the Suzannet collection of Dickensiana (the Comte Alain de Suzannet, 1882–1950, a former vice-president of the

Dickens Fellowship, devoted much of his time to the assembly of this fascinating array of books, letters, portraits, prints etc).

The room once occupied by Mary Hogarth contains one of the two remaining letters written in her own hand, as well as a pendant presented to her by Dickens in 1835 and worn by him on his watch-chain after her death in 1837. Between 1980 and 1983 the museum's curator, Dr David Parker, undertook the

daunting task of restoring Charles Dickens's Doughty Street drawing-room to its apparent condition of 1837–1839. This project involved detailed detective work, gently scraping away at layers of paint on the walls; finding carpets, curtains and other furnishings matching those shown in sketches made by Dickens's good friend George Cruickshank; and painstakingly tracking down pieces of furniture once owned by Dickens. The results of this remarkable enterprise are now on public view. Further refurbishments were made ahead of the Dickens Bicentennial celebrations of 2012.

smelling deliciously'. This is Betsey Trotwood's cottage, which Dickens's literary imagination had transferred several miles along the Kentish coastline from BROADSTAIRS.



David Copperfield with Betsey Trotwood.

In *A Tale of Two Cities* Jarvis Lorry always stays at the Royal George Hotel (now gone). Dover is also mentioned in *The Pickwick Papers*, *Little Dorrit* and *The Uncommercial Traveller*. In 1852, during the writing of *Bleak House*, Dickens stayed for three months at 10 Camden Crescent. He considered Dover 'infinitely too genteel

... But the sea is very fine and the walks are quite remarkable'.

Dickens gave one of his Public Readings in Dover on 5 November 1861 and thought the audience there had 'the greatest sense of humour'.

DOVER, KENT — In *David Copperfield* young David treks from London to Dover in order to be with his Aunt, Betsey Trotwood. Unsure of the whereabouts of her cottage he sits 'on the step of an empty shop at a street corner, near the market place'. Eventually a friendly fly driver acquaints the boy with Miss Trotwood's maid who in turn leads him to 'a very neat little cottage with cheerful bow windows: in front of it, a small square gravelled court or garden, full of flowers carefully tended, and

DRURY LANE, LONDON — In his days as a labouring boy at Warren's Blacking Warehouse (see also COVENT GARDEN and STRAND), Dickens worked alongside a boy named 'Poll' Green, whose father was a fireman at the famous Drury Lane Theatre.

Dickens's original for Jo's churchyard, in *Bleak House*, where Captain Hawdon

men and making the streets hum ... through the fields, through the woods, through the corn, through the hay, through the chalk, through the clay, through the rock, among objects close at hand, and almost in the grasp, ever flying from the traveller, and a deceitful distance ever moving slowly with him; like as in the track of the remorseless monster, Death.

Having survived the rail-journey, Dombey and Bagstock put up at Copp's Royal Hotel (now demolished). Next day, en route to the pump room, the two gentlemen encounter Mrs Skewton, in her wheeled-chair, and Edith Granger, the woman who will eventually become Dombey's second wife.

Dickens had stayed at Copp's Royal Hotel with Hablot Knight Browne on 29 October 1838, and reported in a letter to his wife 'We found a roaring fire, and elegant dinner, a snug room and capital beds all ready for us at Leamington, after a very agreeable but very cold ride.'

He gave Public Readings in the town, at the Music Hall, in 1858 and in 1862.

LEICESTER SQUARE, LONDON — Following the completion of *The Pickwick Papers*, in October 1837, Dickens held a celebratory dinner at the Prince of Wales Tavern (now gone) in Leicester Place, north of Leicester Square.

A shop (now rebuilt) in Green Street (now Orange Street) laid claim to being Dickens's original for his Old Curiosity Shop.

In *Barnaby Rudge* the home of Sir George Saville stands in Leicester Field (now Leicester Square). In *Bleak House* Mr George's Shooting Gallery is situated in the vicinity of HAYMARKET and Leicester Square.

LIMEHOUSE, LONDON — Several times during the stay in CAMDEN TOWN Dickens's father took Charles to visit his godfather Christopher Huffam in Limehouse. Limehouse was then a thriving naval district where Huffam plied his trade as a ships' rigger; John Forster describes him as living in 'a substantial handsome sort of way' at 12 Church Row (now gone). Here young Charles would often perform something from his repertoire of comic



The Grapes, Limehouse, the original for the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters in *Our Mutual Friend*.



Lizzie Hexam looking for her father in *Our Mutual Friend*.

songs learnt in Chatham, and the delighted Huffam proclaimed him, prophetically enough, a 'prodigy'.

Limehouse most probably appears in *Dombey and Son* as the location of Brig Place where Captain Cuttle lodged at No. 9 (the home of Mrs MacStinger) and of his meeting with Jack Bunsby who is on his way to marry Mrs MacStinger.

In *Our Mutual Friend* the Hexam family live in Limehouse Hole:

'Here's my father's sir; where the light is.'
The low building had a look of once having been a mill. There was a rotten

wart of wood upon its forehead that seemed to indicate where the sails had been, but the whole was very indistinctly seen in the obscurity of the night.

In the same book Rogue Riderhood 'dwelt deep and dark in Limehouse Hole'; while Dickens modelled the Six Jolly Fellowship Porters Tavern on the Grapes Inn, Narrow Street. This was:

a tavern of dropsical appearance ... long settled down into a state of hale infirmity. In its whole constitution it had not a straight floor, and hardly a straight line;