



# A Twist in the Tale: Charles Dickens and Islington



**C**HARLES DICKENS (1812–70), England's most popular Victorian novelist, knew Islington well. Dickens recorded life in the area and its surroundings in fiction and in fact throughout his career as a writer. He was particularly attracted to Clerkenwell. The writer regularly visited this densely populated district, drawing influences for his work from the people that he encountered, the buildings that he passed and the scenes that he witnessed.

Charles Dickens's early descriptions of Islington and Clerkenwell are recorded in his *Sketches by Boz* (1836), a collection of observational pieces. Further local settings appear in many of his works of fiction: *Oliver Twist* (1837–9), for example, features locations from Angel to Smithfield and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864–5) takes the reader to Holloway and to Belle Isle, an area of 'noxious trades' to the east of King's Cross Station.

Dickens also documented his observations of Islington in journal articles and through letter writing. He wrote about

affluent Pentonville, industrious Battle Bridge and St Luke's Hospital for Lunatics, Old Street, which he visited on the day after Christmas 1851.

While never a resident of Islington, Charles Dickens was a frequent visitor to the home and studio of illustrator George Cruikshank in Amwell Street. The pair first met in 1835, with the artist going on to create images for the writer's early works, including *Sketches by Boz* and, famously, *Oliver Twist*. Another of Dickens's connections to the area was the Finsbury Savings Bank on Sekforde Street where, in October 1845, he deposited trust funds.

*A Twist in the Tale: Charles Dickens and Islington* explores his connections with the Borough.

The reader is invited to discover the streets upon which the great writer trod, observed and documented and where his celebrated characters could be found. In doing so, bear witness to the invaluable social and historical record that Dickens created about this unique part of north London during the Victorian era.



CHARLES DICKENS aged 46-years in 1858, by Charles Baugnet.



THE FORMER FINSBURY SAVINGS BANK, Sekforde Street, 2010. Dickens deposited funds here in 1845.

*Grassroots*



# Charles Dickens: a writer's life



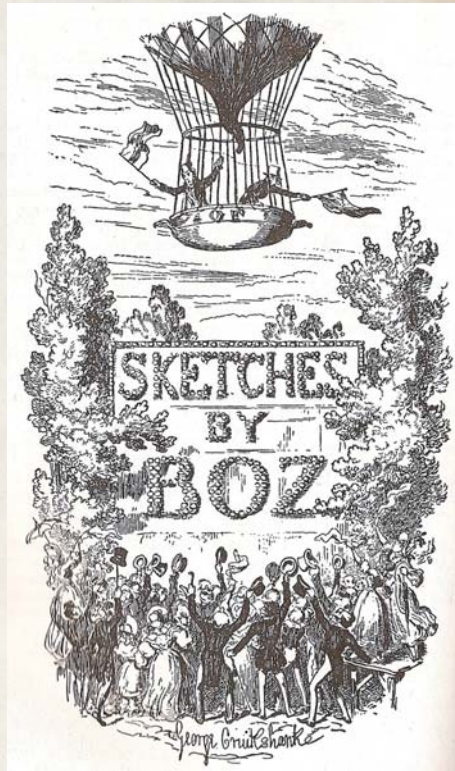
**C**HARLES DICKENS remains one of the most popular writers in the history of literature. He combined masterly storytelling, humour, pathos, and irony with sharp social criticism and acute observation of people and places, both real and imagined.

## Early years

Charles John Huffam Dickens was born on 7 February 1812 in Landport, Portsmouth, the second of eight children. His father, John, was an assistant clerk stationed in the town's navy pay office. However, young Charles spent most of his childhood in London and Kent, both of which appear frequently in his novels. Dickens and his family moved to Camden Town, north London, in 1822. He started school at the age of nine but his education was interrupted when his father, mother and younger members of the family were imprisoned for debt in 1824; a job for Charles was found in a blacking factory just off the Strand. In 1827 Dickens took a job as a legal clerk. After learning shorthand, he began working as a court and parliamentary reporter, developing the power of precise description that was to make his creative writing so remarkable.

## Career

In December 1833 Dickens wrote the first in a series of original descriptive sketches of daily life in London, under the pseudonym 'Boz'; these and similar pieces



FRONTISPIECE TO *SKETCHES BY BOZ* illustrated by George Cruikshank.

were collectively published as *Sketches by Boz* in 1836. The same year he married Catherine Hogarth, with whom he was to have ten children. Dickens transformed another project from a set of loosely connected vignettes into a 'serialised' comic narrative, *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7). Its success made Dickens famous and, at the same time, it

influenced the publishing industry in Great Britain into producing novels in the format of inexpensive monthly instalments.

## Doughty Street

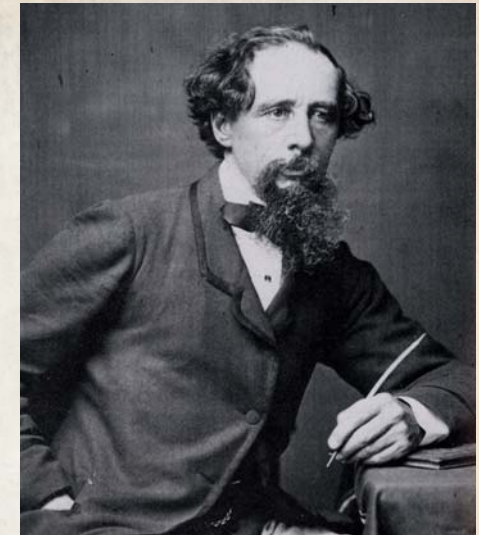
In 1837 Charles Dickens and his young family moved to 48 Doughty Street, Bloomsbury, only a short distance from Clerkenwell. At the address Dickens wrote *Oliver Twist* (1837-9), setting much of the book in this nearby Islington district. The story was a great triumph and Dickens subsequently maintained his fame with a constant stream of novels and journal articles, many again with Islington connections.



DICKENS HOUSE MUSEUM, 48 Doughty Street, 2011. The building is the only surviving Dickens residence in London.

## Dickens as novelist

As Dickens matured artistically, his novels developed from tales based on the adventures of a central character, like *The Pickwick Papers*, *Nicholas Nickleby* (1837-8) and *Oliver Twist* to works of important social relevance, psychological insight and narrative complexity. Among his later, great works are *Bleak House* (1852-3), *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), *Great Expectations* (1860-1), and *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5).



CHARLES DICKENS, England's most popular Victorian novelist.

## Fame

A man of enormous energy and wide talents, Dickens also engaged in many other activities. He edited the weekly periodicals *Household Words* (1850-9) and *All the Year Round* (1859-1870), administered charitable organisations, and pressed for many social reforms. Dickens's extra-literary activities also included managing a theatrical company that played before Queen Victoria in 1851 and giving public readings of his own works in England and America.

## Final chapter

In spite of international fame and success, Dickens's career was shadowed by domestic unhappiness. Incompatibility and his relationship with a young actress, Ellen Ternan, led to his separation from his wife in 1858. He suffered a fatal stroke on 9 June 1870 and was buried five days later at Westminster Abbey.

*Franklin*



# In the footsteps of Dickens and his characters: Angel to Archway



**T**HERE are a number of references to Islington and its northern reaches in the great fictional works of Charles Dickens. It is still possible to recognise some of these locations where the author's characters lived, worked or travelled.

## Angel

"Here London begins in earnest..." Noah Claypole remarks to his companion Charlotte in *Oliver Twist* (1837-9) when walking past the Angel Inn. There had been an inn on this site since the 16th Century and the Angel, so named around 1638, was a popular stopping place for travellers to the City. Dickens would have been familiar with the Angel, by then a well-known coaching inn; the site is now occupied by the Co-operative bank on the corner of Pentonville Road and Islington High Street.



THE ANGEL INN, c.1850.

## Islington High Street

Another famous hostelry and just around the corner from the Angel was the Peacock Inn at 11 Islington High Street. It is mentioned in *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-9) as the first stopping place of the coach that conveyed Nicholas and cruel school master Wackford Squeers to Bothebys Hall in Yorkshire. Dating back to 1564, the Peacock is also mentioned in *The Holly Tree* (1855). The story's narrator found "everybody drinking hot purl [an alcoholic winter drink], in self-preservation" at the inn. The Peacock closed in 1962 and shop premises now occupy the site.



THE PEACOCK INN, Islington High Street, 1821, by Islington-born artist James Pollard.

## Battle Bridge and Holloway

For his last completed novel, *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), Dickens turns in part to Battle Bridge (King's Cross) and Belle Isle, an area of noxious trades to the east of King's Cross Station. While the writer places the story's Reginald Wilfer, the kindly clerk and father of Bella, and his family in the developing residential

district of Holloway, he was less than complimentary about its south-western neighbour, Belle Isle:

"R. Wilfer locked up his desk one evening, and, putting his bunch of keys in his pocket much as if it were his peg-top, made for home. His home was in the Holloway region north of London, and then divided from it by fields and trees. Between Battle Bridge and that part of the Holloway district in which he dwelt, was a tract of suburban Sahara, where tiles and bricks were burnt, bones were boiled, carpets were beat, rubbish was shot, dogs were fought, and dust was heaped by contractors. Skirting the border of this desert, by the way he took, when the light of its kiln-fires made lurid smears on the fog, R. Wilfer sighed and shook his head. 'Ah me!' said he, 'what might have been is not what is!' With which commentary on human life, indicating an experience of it not exclusively his own, he made the best of his way to the end of his journey." (*Our Mutual Friend*, Chapter IV)

Today, the 'Isle' is an area of small businesses and residential housing between Caledonian Road and York Way; the latter once known as Maiden Lane.



HOLLOWAY, early - 19th Century.

The Lane was also the route from Battle Bridge to 'Boffin's Bower', the home of the novel's 'golden dustman', Nicodemus (Noddy) Boffin.

## Archway

While Dickens gave much of his attention to Islington's southern locations, the north of the Borough was not completely without mention. Dickens has characters travelling through the Highgate Archway: Noah Claypole and Charlotte from *Oliver Twist* pass through when heading for London, *The Holly Tree's* narrator comments on road conditions in Islington having been on a "coach rattling for Highgate Archway over the hardest ground I have ever heard the ring of iron shoes", and it was "at the Archway Toll over at Highgate" that Inspector Bucket first picked up the trail of Honoria, Lady Dedlock in *Bleak House* (1852-3).

The Highgate Archway was replaced in 1900 by the present-day Archway Bridge and it served much the same purpose – a gateway into and from London, linking the Great North Road with Holloway Road.



THE HIGHGATE ARCHWAY, c.1820.

*Frankie's*



# In the footsteps of Dickens and his characters: Pentonville to Smithfield



**T**HERE are several references to the southern part of Islington in the works of Charles Dickens. Clerkenwell was especially significant in many of his stories' narratives. Several locations still remain recognisable in spite of damage sustained during the Second World War and later post-war redevelopment.

## Pentonville

Dickens chose Pentonville in which to place a number of his characters. "My own abode is lodgings in Penton Place, Pentonville. It is lowly, but airy, open at the back, and considered one of the 'ealthiest outlet", said William Guppy, a clerk from *Bleak House* (1852-3), about his home at 87 Penton Place (now Rise). Another clerk, Mr Pancks in *Little Dorrit* (1855-7), had a private address in Pentonville and brother and sister Tom and Ruth Pinch, from *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1843-4), also lodged in the area.



**THE NEW ROAD AT PENTONVILLE** (later Pentonville Road), early-19th Century.

The fictional tale of 'The Bloomsbury Christening' published in *Sketches by Boz* (1836) features the ill-natured Nicodemus Dumps who "rented a 'first-floor furnished', at Pentonville, which he originally took because it commanded a dismal prospect of an adjacent churchyard." St James's Chapel Churchyard, now a public garden off Pentonville Road, was the story's point of reference. Elsewhere in the vicinity, and close to the New River Head reservoir, were the temporary lodgings of devious Uriah Heep from *David Copperfield* (1849-50), "The ouse that I am stopping at - [is] a sort of a private hotel and boarding ouse, Master Copperfield, near the New River ed."

## In and around City Road

"My address,' said Mr. Micawber, 'is Windsor Terrace, City Road. I - in short,' said Mr. Micawber, with the same genteel air, and in another burst of confidence - 'I live there.'" So declares Wilkins Micawber in *David Copperfield* (1849-50) when heading home with young David via Finsbury Square. Today, Windsor Terrace features Micawber Court, an apartment block, and nearby Edward Street was renamed Micawber Street in 1937, both commemorating Dickens's celebrated character. The City Road is also briefly referenced in *Dombey and Son* (1846-8).

Goswell Street (now Road) is where the benign Samuel Pickwick lodged with Mrs Bardell in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7). When Pickwick arises on the



**GOSWELL STREET**, early-19th Century.

first morning of his travels, he throws open his chamber window and found, "Goswell-street was at his feet, Goswell-street was on his right hand - as far as the eye could reach, Goswell-street extended on his left; and the opposite side of Goswell-street was over the way."

## Clerkenwell: people and places

In *Bleak House* (1852-3) Mount Pleasant is described as a "rather ill-favoured, ill-savoured neighbourhood." Adelphus Tetterby, impoverished news vendor, kept shop in Jerusalem Passage, Clerkenwell (*The Haunted Man*, 1848) and Gabriel Vardens' locksmith shop, the Golden Key in *Barnaby Rudge* (1841), was said to be "in a venerable suburb - it was a suburb once of Clerkenwell towards that part of its confines which is nearest to the Charterhouse."

Dickens returns to Clerkenwell on many fictional occasions. *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) has Jarvis Lorry, clerk at Tellson's bank, walking along "sunny streets from Clerkenwell (where he lived)" and Mr Venus, a taxidermist featured in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5), lived in "a narrow dirty street in Clerkenwell," where he was visited by sinister ballad-seller and social parasite Silas Wegg.

Smithfield was the location where young Barnaby Rudge helped his father discard his irons after his release from Newgate Prison, and where Pip in *Great*

*Expectations* (1860-1) despairingly exclaimed, "...and the shameful place, being all a smear with filth and fat and blood and foam, seemed to stick to me. So I rubbed it off with all possible speed."

## CLE

- |             |                                 |
|-------------|---------------------------------|
| 4           | Simons I J, furnishing undertkr |
| 4           | Bell Geo, carver and gilder     |
| 5           | Tarrant G and W, pawnbrokers    |
| 6           | Wood Henry, grocer              |
| 8           | Berry Mary, coffee rooms        |
| 8           | Carpenter John, cooper          |
| 10          | Muddock E G & J, glas & lead wh |
| 11          | Dismore T and Son, jewellers    |
| 12          | Perkins W, varnish maker        |
| 13          | Baxter John, japanner           |
| 15          | Munday John, carpenter          |
| 16          | Sully G, comp ornament manftr   |
| 16          | Butes Geo, ivory turner         |
| 18          | Fowler David, carpenter         |
| 20          | Price C, bent glas works        |
| 21          | Thompson Wm, seal maker         |
| *           | Austin Jno, chaser              |
| 22          | Mason Wm, plater                |
| 23          | Phinn Edw, "Lamb and Flag"      |
| 29          | Bryon & Co, "Fox & Frh Horn"    |
| 30          | Howard Henry, grocer            |
| * *         | Kirk Jno Joel, engraver         |
| 32          | Gray Ellis, picture fram: maker |
| 33          | Hunt Robt, potato salesman      |
| 34          | Perks Z W, coffee room          |
| 35          | Shelley Thos, baker             |
| POST OFFICE |                                 |
| 36          | Mullins J J, leather seller     |
| 37          | Oliver F I, grocer              |
| 37 1/2      | Fisher Daniel, bootmaker        |
| 38          | Pitcher Jane, coffee rooms      |
| 39          | Jackson Wm, newspaper office    |
| 40          | Ryan Thos, greengrocer          |
| 41          | Griffiths John, chemist         |
| 42          | Rymer Elizbh, umbrella maker    |
| 43          | Hinton Archibd, "Crown Tavn"    |

**TRADES IN CLERKENWELL GREEN** as listed in *Robson's London Directory*, 1843. Dickens would have been familiar with businesses in and around the Green.

*Franklin*



# Oliver Twist and Islington (Part One)

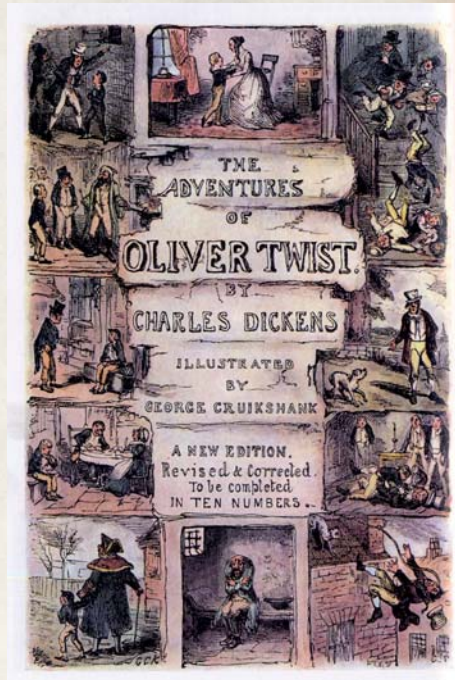


**O**LIVER TWIST or *The Parish Boy's Progress* is perhaps Charles Dickens's most enduring work.

It was originally published in *Bentley's Miscellany* in monthly instalments from February 1837 until April 1839. The first novelisation of the tale appeared in 1838, six months before the serialisation was completed. Dickens was twenty-five-years old and living at 48 Doughty Street (now Dickens House Museum), Bloomsbury, when he began writing *Twist*; the address is near to several locations in Clerkenwell that the author weaved into the story's narrative.



CHARLES DICKENS aged 27-years in 1839, by Daniel Maclise.



A LATER EDITION OF *OLIVER TWIST* with illustrations by George Cruikshank.

## A wretched place

Oliver Twist's initial encounter with Clerkenwell and adjacent neighbourhoods was less than pleasurable, "A dirtier or more wretched place he had never seen... and the air was impregnated with filthy odours. The sole places that seemed to prosper, amid the general blight of the place, were the public-houses." Overcrowding was common-place, with the majority of residents living in poor conditions. In 1831, the population of

Clerkenwell was 47,634, increasing nearly 20% in the following ten years.

## Angel to Holborn

John Dawkins (the Artful Dodger) is Oliver's guide south through the Islington Turnpike, which once stood at the junction of Liverpool Road (then Back Road) and Islington High Street, past the Angel Inn and on towards Sadler's Wells and beyond:

"As John Dawkins objected to their entering London before nightfall, it was nearly eleven o'clock when they reached the turnpike at Islington. They crossed from the Angel into St. John's Road; struck down the small street which terminates at Sadler's Wells Theatre; through Exmouth Street and Coppice Row; down the little court by the side of the workhouse; across the classic ground which once bore the name of Hockley-in-the-Hole; thence into Little Saffron Hill; and so into Saffron Hill the Great: along which the Dodger scudded at a rapid pace, directing Oliver to follow close at his heels."

(*Oliver Twist*, Chapter VIII)



SHOPS IN ST JOHN'S STREET ROAD (now St John Street), early-19th Century.



CLERKENWELL WORKHOUSE from Vine Yard Walk, early-19th Century. Oliver and the Dodger went down a little court by the workhouse on their way to visit Fagin in Holborn.

The Dodger led Oliver past the buildings and through streets of Clerkenwell, their names still largely recognisable today: Angel, Sadler's Wells, Exmouth Market and St John Street. Coppice Row later made way for Farringdon Road and Hockley-in-the-Hole, renamed Ray Street, was once an 18th-century place of entertainment. Today, Oliver's route passes a mix of historical 19th-century housing and 20th-century commercial buildings.

## Archway and Highgate

Even Islington's most northern extremities make an appearance in *Oliver Twist*. Noah Claypole and companion Charlotte pass through the former Highgate Archway when travelling to London. The Archway was built in 1813 to the design of John Nash and was replaced with the present Archway Bridge in 1900. And nearby, Bill Sikes strode up Highgate Hill in his flight from justice.

*Frankie*

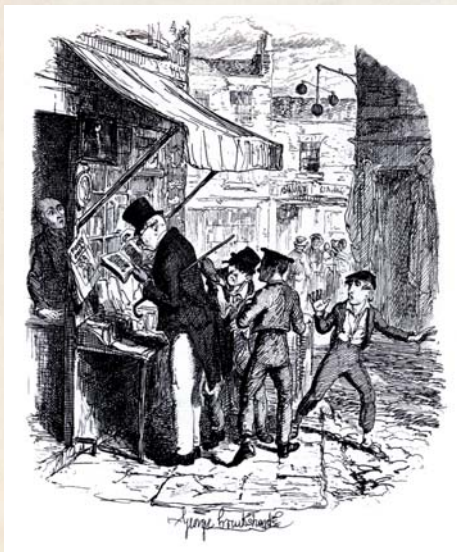


# Oliver Twist and Islington (Part Two)



## Clerkenwell Green

Dickens describes this location as an "open square in Clerkenwell, which is yet called, by some strange perversion of terms, 'The Green.'" However, in spite of lacking any 'greenery', as is still the case today, Clerkenwell Green was the setting for one of the pivotal events in *Oliver Twist* – the titular character's initiation into the art of picking pockets.



**THE DODGER** and Charley Bates 'at work' in Clerkenwell Green. Engraving by George Cruikshank.

The narrow court from which the Artful Dodger, Charley Bates and their 'apprentice' Oliver emerge to rob Mr Brownlow is generally assumed to be Pear Tree Court, which is to the north of Clerkenwell Green. Today, the

late-Victorian Peabody Buildings in Pear Tree Court still hint at the claustrophobic atmosphere of the original setting.

Clerkenwell Green is also the location of the Middlesex Sessions House where, later in the story, Mr Bumble the Beadle is involved in an ill-fated legal hearing before "the quarter-sessions at Clerkinwell [sic]." Completed in 1782, this grand grade II-listed building is now home to the Central London Masonic Centre.



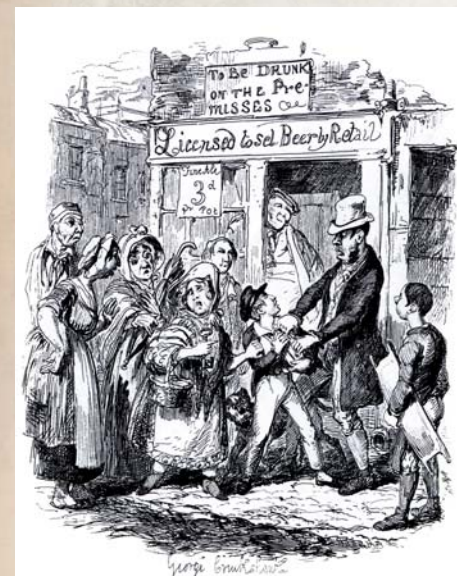
**CLERKENWELL GREEN**, with the Middlesex Sessions House centre background, 1826.

## Pentonville

The Clerkenwell of *Oliver Twist* wasn't entirely devoid of refinement. Its northern district, Pentonville, was occupied by the genteel middle classes. It is here, to his home, that the benevolent Mr Brownlow takes Oliver following his court appearance, "The coach rattled away down Mount Pleasant

and up Exmouth Street...and...when it reached the Angel at Islington, stopping at length before a neat house in the shady street near Pentonville."

Pentonville Road has since been altered by road widening and development into a semi-commercial area, with local authority housing having replaced many of its original houses and buildings.



**OLIVER IS APPREHENDED** near Clerkenwell Green. Engraving by George Cruikshank.

## Smithfield Market

*Oliver Twist* was not to enjoy his initial stay in Pentonville for very long. He was soon whisked away, back to the crime and grime of the Clerkenwell and the City fringes, including a visit to the livestock market at Smithfield. Here, with the brutal Bill Sikes, Oliver experiences market day.

Dickens clearly felt no affection for the market. Smithfield was then a dangerous place but its days were numbered. In 1852 an Act of Parliament was passed for the construction of a new

livestock market and, three years later, the Metropolitan Cattle Market opened on Copenhagen Fields, Islington.

"The ground was covered, nearly ankle-deep, with filth and mire; a thick steam, perpetually rising from the reeking bodies of the cattle, and mingling with the fog, which seemed to rest upon the chimney-tops, hung heavily above... Countrymen, butchers, drovers, hawkers, boys, thieves, idlers, and vagabonds of every low grade, were mingled together in a mass; the whistling of drovers, the barking dogs, the bellowing and plunging of the oxen, the bleating of sheep, the grunting and squeaking of pigs, the cries of hawkers, the shouts, oaths, and quarrelling on all sides; the ringing of bells and roar of voices, that issued from every public-house...and the unwashed, unshaven, squalid, and dirty figures constantly running to and fro, and bursting in and out of the throng; rendered it a stunning and bewildering scene, which quite confounded the senses."

(*Oliver Twist*, Chapter XXI)



**SMITHFIELD MARKET**, which quite "confounded" Oliver's senses, early-19th Century.

*Franklin*



# Dickens and Islington



**D**ICKENS knew Islington well and used his personal experience of the area when writing about local people and places in his factual writings. Here are some examples.

## 'Boz' in Islington

*Sketches by Boz* (1836) is a collection of short, non-fiction and fictional pieces written by Charles Dickens under the pseudonym 'Boz', a nickname that he had given his younger brother Augustus. Islington and its environs appear in a number of 'sketches'.

"Fast pouring into the city, or directing their steps towards Chancery-lane and the Inns of Court..." is how 'Boz' describes Islington and Pentonville clerks' daily commute to work ('The Streets – Morning'). In 'The Prisoners' Van' he describes Coldbath Fields Prison – now the site of the Royal Mail's Mount Pleasant Sorting Office – as the dropping off point for 'Emily', who has been sentenced for six weeks plus labour,



**COLDBATH FIELDS PRISON**, Clerkenwell, early-19th Century. Dickens was a frequent visitor to prisons, campaigning for reforms in the penal system.

"... 'Don't you be in a hurry, coachman,' replied the girl, 'and recollect I want to be set down in Cold Bath Fields – large house with a high garden-wall in front; you can't mistake it'..."

Dickens's own wanderings on 2 May 1836 in 'The first of May' records him heading along Maiden Lane (York Way) to Copenhagen House and Fields (now the area around Caledonian Park) and then returning towards Battle Bridge (King's Cross) where he encounters a 'shed' containing a wayward party of May Day characters. He describes Battle Bridge as a district "inhabited by proprietors of donkey-carts, boilers of horse-flesh, makers of tiles, and sifters of cinders." Dickens was to revisit Battle Bridge in *Our Mutual Friend* (1864-5) thirty years later.



**MAIDEN LANE** (now York Way) in 1835 by E H Dixon. Dickens walked this route in May 1836, past the tile kilns on the right and on to Copenhagen House.

Local public houses did not escape Boz's attention. Two such hostelries appear in 'Miss Evans and the Eagle'. The piece's revellers sample shrub, an alcoholic punch, with intoxicating effect, at the

Crown in Pentonville before commencing to the Eagle, just off the City Road, where further refreshment was taken!

## Pentonville

Dickens liked Pentonville. Early in his writing career, when engaged to Catherine Hogarth, he considered buying a house in the area. At that time, it was occupied by the genteel middle classes but property values were then beyond his means, "strolled about Pentonville, thinking the air did my head good, and looked at one or two houses in the new streets. They are extremely dear, the cheapest being £55 a year with taxes."

Pentonville was to feature in some of Dickens's most famous works, including *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7), *Oliver Twist* (1837-9), *Little Dorrit* (1855-7) and *Bleak House* (1852-3).

## Sadler's Wells Theatre, Clerkenwell

Clerkenwell's famous place of entertainment was founded as a music house and health spa in the 17th Century. Upon publication of *Oliver Twist*, a number of theatrical productions of the story were performed at the Wells, including one with a buxom woman playing the young orphan, much to Dickens's displeasure!

Joseph Grimaldi (1778-1837), the world famous clown, was a regular performer at Sadler's Wells; as a boy,



**SADLER'S WELLS THEATRE**, 1830.

Charles saw the clown perform there. In 1837 Dickens was offered Grimaldi's unfinished *Memoirs* to edit. He reluctantly accepted the commission, finding the task a great chore, and turned to George Cruikshank for illustrations.

## St Luke's Hospital for Lunatics

Dickens attended a seasonal celebration with patients at St Luke's on the day after Christmas 1851. He describes this visit in an article, co-written with William Henry Wills, titled 'A curious dance round a curious tree', published in *Household Words* on 17 January 1852.



**ST LUKE'S HOSPITAL FOR LUNATICS**, Old Street, early-19th Century. It mixed benevolence with "unconscious cruelty." Dickens was a campaigner for asylum reform.

The "gloomy" hospital on Old Street provided free care to the impoverished mentally ill, mixing benevolence with "unconscious cruelty" in the treatments. Dickens was critical of the care of the mentally ill in such institutions. Calling for asylum reform, he concludes 'A curious dance' with an appeal to readers, "if you can do a little in any good direction – do it."

St Luke's Hospital closed in 1916. The building was later acquired by the Bank of England to print bank notes until the early-1950s and demolished in 1963.

*Grainier*



# George Cruikshank: Dickens's illustrator



**L**ONDON-BORN George Cruikshank (1792–1878) was a graphic artist and book illustrator, praised as the ‘modern Hogarth’ during his life. By the 1820s Cruikshank had become an acclaimed caricaturist, social campaigner and supporter of radical causes. In 1836 Dickens himself was described in *The Spectator* as ‘the Cruikshank of writers’.

## Amwell Street, Pentonville

From 1823 until 1849, George Cruikshank lived and worked at three addresses in Myddelton Terrace (later renamed Claremont Square and Amwell Street). A plaque between numbers 69 and 71 Amwell Street commemorates his last two residences and adjoining Cruikshank Street (formerly Bond Street) is named in his honour.



**COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE** to George Cruikshank situated between nos 69 and 71 Amwell Street, the artist's former homes.



**NOS 69 AND 71 AMWELL STREET, 2011.** These addresses were two former residences and studios of George Cruikshank, illustrator of Dickens's early work.

## Cruikshank and Dickens

It was on 17 November 1835 at his Amwell Street home and studio that George Cruikshank first met Charles Dickens to discuss illustrations for *Sketches by Boz*, a collected work of Dickens's accounts of London life to be published the following year.

*Sketches* was a great success, both on account of the writer's rising popularity and because Cruikshank's work introduced dynamic graphic commentaries on the subject matter. Their partnership blossomed and the artist even acted in Dickens's amateur theatrical company. In addition,

Cruikshank's overweight and dozy assistant, the appropriately named Joseph Sleep, was to inspire Dickens's somnolent Joe ‘the fat boy’ in *The Pickwick Papers* (1836–7).

## Bentley's Miscellany

In December 1836 the publisher Richard Bentley, seizing an opportunity to sign up the most popular writers and urban artists of the day, hired Dickens to edit and Cruikshank to illustrate his new journal, *Bentley's Miscellany*.

From January 1837 to November 1843, Cruikshank provided Bentley with some of his best work, including images for Dickens's *The Mudfog Papers* (1837–8) and *Oliver Twist* (1837–9); his depictions of characters and scenes often influenced many dramatic renditions of this famous story.



**GEORGE CRUIKSHANK** aged 44–years in 1836.

## End of a friendship

The friendship between author and artist did not last; biographers suggest that Cruikshank's inability to satisfy Dickens commenced the long falling-off. Their relationship soured further when Cruikshank became a fanatical teetotaler in opposition to Dickens's views of moderation.

what is called a Jew in a condemned cell, and therefore it must be “Bill Sikes” or “Fagan;” at length he allowed me to exhibit the latter.

Without going further into particulars, I think it will be allowed from what I have stated that I am the originator of *Oliver Twist*, and that all the principal characters are mine, but I was much disappointed by Mr. Dickens not fully carrying out my first suggestion.

I must here mention that nearly all the designs were made from conversation and mutual suggestion upon each subject, and that I never saw any manuscript of Mr. Dickens until the work was nearly finished, and the letter of Mr. Dickens, which Mr. Forster mentions, only refers to the last etching—done in great haste—no proper time being allowed, and of a subject without any interest in fact, there

**SECTION TAKEN FROM CRUIKSHANK'S LETTER TO THE TIMES** (30 December 1871) in which he claims to be the ‘originator’ of *Oliver Twist*.

On 30 December 1871, eighteen-months after the death of Dickens, Cruikshank published a letter in *The Times* in which he claimed credit for much of the plot of *Oliver Twist*, “I am the originator of *Oliver Twist*, and that all the principle characters are mine...” The letter launched a fierce controversy around who created the work but, in his preface to the 1867 edition of *Twist*, Dickens strenuously denied any such claim.

George Cruikshank died on 1 February 1878 in his home at 263 Hampstead Road, Mornington Crescent, after a short illness. He was temporarily buried in Kensal Green Cemetery and later reinterred in the crypt of St Paul's Cathedral as befitting ‘the modern Hogarth’.

*George Cruikshank*



# Dickens's Legacy



## A final farewell

Dickens gave his last public reading at 8pm on 15 March 1870 at St James's Hall, London. Dickens, in grave health, read *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and the 'Trial of Pickwick' from *The Pickwick Papers* (1836-7). Dickens concluded his recital with the following words:

"...from these garish lights I vanish now for evermore, with one heartfelt, grateful, respectful, and affectionate farewell."

Charles John Huffam Dickens died on 9 June 1870 at his home at Gad's Hill, Kent, aged 58-years. Five days later he was buried in Poet's Corner at Westminster Abbey. The inscription on his tomb read:

"He was a sympathiser to the poor, the suffering and the oppressed, and by his death, one of England's greatest writers is lost to the world."

## Islington legacy

Dickens chose to read from *The Pickwick Papers*, his first novel, in his farewell public performance. This is a fitting reminder of the influence Islington had on the great writer. Samuel Pickwick was amongst the first of a number of his characters to reside or work in the area. The author selected Goswell Street (now Road) in which to house Pickwick and, subsequently, chose to return to Islington for later novels and factual articles.

Charles Dickens's place in the Borough's literary heritage is assured. Through his works, and with always a 'Twist in the Tale', this great Victorian writer continues to encourage the reader to follow his footsteps and discover the Islington that he once knew and appreciated.



**CHARLES DICKENS AGED 56-YEARS.** In the remaining years of his life the writer's health declined. During one his readings in 1869 he collapsed, showing symptoms of a mild stroke.

## Selected bibliography

Further explore Charles Dickens and London with the following selection of publications.

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**ENGRAVING SHOWING DICKENS PERFORMING AT HIS FINAL PUBLIC READING** in 1870, (*Illustrated London News*, 19 March 1870).

*Gracie's*