

THE CRICKET ON THE HEARTH

News from the Dickens Theatre Laren

Mary Ann Auckland

Once again Else Flim and Adrian Kok at the Dickens Theatre in Laren, The Netherlands, have a busy Christmas season. This year, on 21 November, they performed the première of their version of Charles Dickens' *The Cricket on the Hearth*. First published in December 1845 this was the third of Dickens' Christmas books – the others being *A Christmas Carol* and *The Chimes* before it and *The Battle of Life* and *The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain* afterwards. Now probably considered the second most loved of the five, when published in book



Else operating the biennial lantern

presenting reflections as in "a magic glass" in his reading. In the original book he writes about the toy merchant Tackleton: "He had even lost money (and he took to that toy very kindly) by getting up Goblin slides for magic lanterns, whereon the Powers of Darkness were depicted as a sort of supernatural shell-fish, with human faces." Here Else showed slides from sets of *Gabriel Grub* (see TML 17).

They had three performances of *The Cricket on the Hearth* (21 and 28 November and 4 December) with the new Lord Mayor of Laren – a Dickens admirer – attending the first. On 12, 19 and 26 December they hope, Covid rules permitting, to perform a programme comprising *The Pickwick Papers/The Skating Experience*, *Christmas Magic Lantern Intermezzo* and *A Christmas Carol*.

To find out what they are planning and for more information about the Dickens Theatre go to their website www.dickens theater.nl (part of the site is in English).



Adrian as Mr Dickens and a slide from *The Cricket on the Hearth*

form this story was very popular and sold

more copies than *A Christmas Carol* at the time. Dickens himself only performed it on stage four times – but there may be a reason for this as we explain further on. The first occasion was in 1853 at a charity event in a venue well known to MLS members ... the Town Hall in Birmingham!

The cricket of the title lives at the home of the Peerybingles – John and his much younger wife Dot. It chirps when things go well or as a sign of warning. A mean old miser called Tackleton attempts to poison John's mind about Dot who, it seems, is meeting a younger lover from earlier days. The cricket – as a good fairy or presence – helps John to reflect. The twists that Dickens adds are surprising! Else translated the book, over 170 pages long, and adapted it for the stage turning it into a 30-page script for Adrian to perform as Mr Dickens, playing a 'monopolylogue' as Dickens did himself in his public readings. The show is in two halves of about 45 minutes each.

Adrian managed to find a prompter's copy of the lecture Dickens used on stage and it really was a mystery. No wonder it was not one of his most popular performances as it is very difficult to follow the narrative. Else had to add scenes from the book in order to make the story complete.

Adrian and Else also enjoyed including Dickens' observations on the magic lantern, writing about



Two life model slides from *The Cricket on the Hearth* used in the Dickens Theatre performance