

## A VISIT TO THE DICKENS THEATRE DURING THE DUTCH ELECTIONS

Annet Duller

That Mr Dickens, without hesitation, completed the crossing of both the Styx and the North Sea does justice to his dynamic personality and his enthusiasm to show his friends a way out of the excitement and chaos of politics as election fever raged in March. He was welcomed with gratitude by the 30 attendees at the cosy Dickens Theatre in Laren, North Holland – an audience that was urgently looking for clarification of electoral visions and contradictions through his reading of 'The election at Eatanswill' (from *Pickwick Papers*) that featured in the night's programme.

*Mr Dickens (aka Adrian Kok)*

Among the audience were members of the Dickens Fellowship and The Lord Mayor of Laren who just arrived in time from Bergerac to meet the great man. In fact Mr Dickens himself came a little late due to the small delay inevitable through the necessity of drinking two glasses of champagne prior to a lecture.

The Lord Mayor spoke a few words at the beginning underlining that, by law, she was not supposed to take part in any activities concerning the elections. Therefore her presence at the event was exceptional (although she was thoroughly enjoying being there) and her role was simply to ensure that the official process leading to the outcome of the elections would be carried out to the satisfaction of the voters.

After this brief introduction Mr Dickens took to the stage and spoke until we were all aware of the intricacies of political craftsmanship. The surprising resemblance of the election at that time in Eatanswill to virtually every other election anywhere in the world is striking. Various interesting activities took place. He told of the importance of controlling public houses so potential voters for the opposition are too intoxicated to

vote, the possibility of imprisoning voters in a coach house, the hazards of noisy supporters (on both sides), Sam Weller's tale of a coachload of (opposition) voters disappearing into a canal, and the role and influence of Mrs Pott (the wife of the local newspaper editor) – a case of 'cherchez la femme'. We learnt immediately to mistrust any politician who starts kissing children – a vital lesson. And we hoped that the mayor had also picked up some tips, namely that it is not so bad to use her influence in restoring everything to as it was before and then everyone can go back to work cheerfully.

Mr Dickens was accompanied by his regular hostess and lanternist Mrs Else Flim who, with the help of her magic lantern and well-chosen slides, also informed the audience of interesting facts about the life of Mr Dickens. When Mr Dickens left the building to journey home, we were all struck by his sudden absence but overwhelmed with excitement and fresh courage to deliver a well-considered vote. At last we all said 'good-bye' and, as the time came to leave the theatre, Mrs Flim offered us the comfort and support of a delicious alcoholic cherry bonbon. We could not have enjoyed this inspiring evening more.



*Mrs Else Flim with lantern ... and bonbons*

*All photographs taken by Leo Janssen and Monique Wezenberg*



*Mr Dickens with the Lord Mayor*

## CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM

If you have never visited the Charles Dickens Museum in Doughty Street, London, then now is an excellent time to remedy that. Charles Dickens moved into no. 48 with his wife Catherine in 1837 as a little-known author and left three years later as an international superstar with *The Pickwick Papers*, *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* to his credit. Every room in the basement and four floors is beautifully laid out with interesting furniture, paintings and artefacts that give fascinating insights into Dickens' life, family and friends. However until 11 November there is an additional reason to visit as their current special exhibition (in no. 49) on *Charles Dickens: Man of Science* includes some treats for magic lantern enthusiasts as well as other points of interest such as Faraday's candle. From early childhood Dickens loved magic lanterns and he described the London streets through which he walked daily – and sometimes nightly – as his 'magic lantern' of inspiration. The magic lantern on display is made by Scottish opticians Lizars and dated, on the descriptor, as around 1850. Another exhibit is a very effective demonstration of Pepper's Ghost. In 1862 Dickens allowed John Pepper to use his story *The Haunted Man* to debut his famous optical illusion at the Royal Polytechnic – both men wanted to show that the 'science' of spiritualism was fraudulent. Go with a friend to appreciate fully the effect! *Charles Dickens Museum, 48 Doughty Street, Bloomsbury, London WC1N 2LX (nearest tube: Russell Square) (www.dickensmuseum.com), open Tuesday–Sunday, 10:00–17:00*



*A ghostly Jerry Fisher!*

*Jerry Fisher, George and Mary Ann Auckland*