

DICKENS' LEGAL LONDON

On the 29th of September, twenty-one Croydon Catenians and their Ladies gathered at Temple Underground Station on the Victoria Embankment to begin a tour of the Inns of Court arranged by Brother President Terence de Souza whose professional life has been spent in the practice of law.

Our tour was led by Ian Bevan M.A. an accredited City of London Guide since 2006 and who had, in recognition, been granted the Freedom of the City of London in 2017. Ian entitled his tour "Dickens Legal London" and there were many references along the way to Charles Dickens and his wonderful books and characters.

There are four Inns of Court: Middle and Inner Temple, Grays Inn and Lincoln's Inn. They date from about 1425 and are known as "Inns" because they provided accommodation for lawyers and law students and "of Court" because their members appeared in the King's Court. Each Inn has its own Hall, Chapel, Library and Garden.

Dickens arrived in London at the age of 10. At first he lived in relative comfort but his father's profligacy depleted the family's finances and young Charles was forced to work in a blacking factory. At the age of 15 he joined the legal firm of Ellis and Blackmore at Gray's Inn. Two years later he moved to Doctors' Commons (near Blackfriars) where he was a reporter. Thus, Dickens was very familiar with the Inns of Court, and it was this experience that led to his cynicism and contempt of the legal profession which is reflected in his novels and the inspiration for his comic description of the breach of promise case in *Bardell v Pickwick*.

Dickens used both Middle and Inner Temple locations in his works. For instance, in *Great Expectations* Pip and Herbert Pocket rented rooms in Garden Court, Middle Temple near the River Thames (the Embankment had not yet been built). Fountain Court is a wonderful place of peace and tranquility and where, in *Martin Chuzzlewit*, Ruth Pinch and John Westlock meet. Built between 1562 and 1573, the main buildings remain

virtually untouched to this day having survived the Great Fire of London and two World Wars. They have provided filming locations for many productions such as *Poirot*, *The Da Vinci Code*, *Shakespeare in Love* and *Bridget Jones*.



Dickens was a member of Middle Temple for 15 years and dined regularly in the Hall between 1839 and 1855.

Inner Temple is where Dickens imagined the chambers of Sir John Chester, the barrister consulted by *Barnaby Rudge*. Here too was the office of Mr C.J. Stryver, Sydney Carton's great friend in *A Tale of Two Cities*.





Close to Temple Church we saw the grave of Oliver Goldsmith and it was near the grave that Dickens placed the chambers occupied by Mortimer Lightwood and Eugene Wrayburn in *Our Mutual Friend*. We left the Temple by the Inner Temple Gate where Fleet Street is dominated by the Temple Bar - the ceremonial entrance from the City of London to the City of Westminster in the Middle Ages and the Royal Courts of Justice.

To the north of the Royal Courts is Lincoln's Inn, the main access being via an elegant set of wrought iron gates memorialising the cricketing legend Dr WR Grace. The barristers acquired the land from the Earl of Lincoln in the 14th century. Lincoln's Inn is unique in having two Halls. New Hall was built in 1845 and was the location of the Jarndyce v Jarndyce case in *Bleak House*. The legendary, legal bookshop of Wildy & Sons still exists at Lincoln's Inn Arch on the infamous Carey Street.

North of Holborn we moved to Gray's Inn. Number 2, South Square was the location of Tommy Traddles's chambers in *David Copperfield*. Dickens spent time at number 1 South Square when he was a legal clerk at Ellis and Blackmore.

It was time for Lunch and after saying goodbye with grateful thanks to Ian Bevan, we made our way back to Fleet Street and to the Old Bank of England pub, a lovely Grade 2 listed building in the Italianate Style, which was the old Law Courts branch of the previous Bank of England from 1888 to 1975. Its stunning interiors with vaulted ceilings and mezzanine gallery were the perfect way to complete a memorable experience.



Paul Connolly

