

Our Mutual Friends

Dickens Walk #1: Southwark & City with Henry Hitchings



Five walks that highlighted Dickensian landmarks in London, including places that Dickens frequented and the areas that featured in his books. Compiled by Andrew Pitcairn-Hill, these walks provide a frame of reference for Our Mutual Friends as a whole, and were walked by five well-known writers, who each produced a record, on Tumblr and Google Maps, of what they saw on the day, and what the journey called to mind.



Walk 1: Start

About Henry Hitchings

Henry Hitchings is the author of three books about the English language: an account of how Samuel Johnson produced his famous Dictionary; a history of the acquisitiveness of English, *The Secret Life of Words*, which won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and a Somerset Maugham Award; and *The Language Wars*, an exploration of arguments about English usage. He has recently completed another history - this time of English manners. He lives in South London and is the theatre critic for the *Evening Standard*.



Union Jack pub



The pub is called the Union Jack. But there's no sign of the Union Jack itself. Instead the most loudly declared allegiance is to a particular brand of beer – an example of a modern pub showing its true colours.



Copperfield Street



'Schoolkeeper'. The sign is somewhat forbidding. Gatekeeper, Innkeeper, Goalkeeper, Gamekeeper – these 'keeper' words in their different ways suggest a role as a sentinel, controlling and denying access.

In the nineteenth century the word schoolkeeper was often used pejoratively of bad teachers or unqualified ones – they merely kept schools, rather than running them well. In David Copperfield, David attends the bullying Mr Creakle's boarding school Salem House, where he is saddled with a sign that bears the legend 'Take care of him. He bites.'



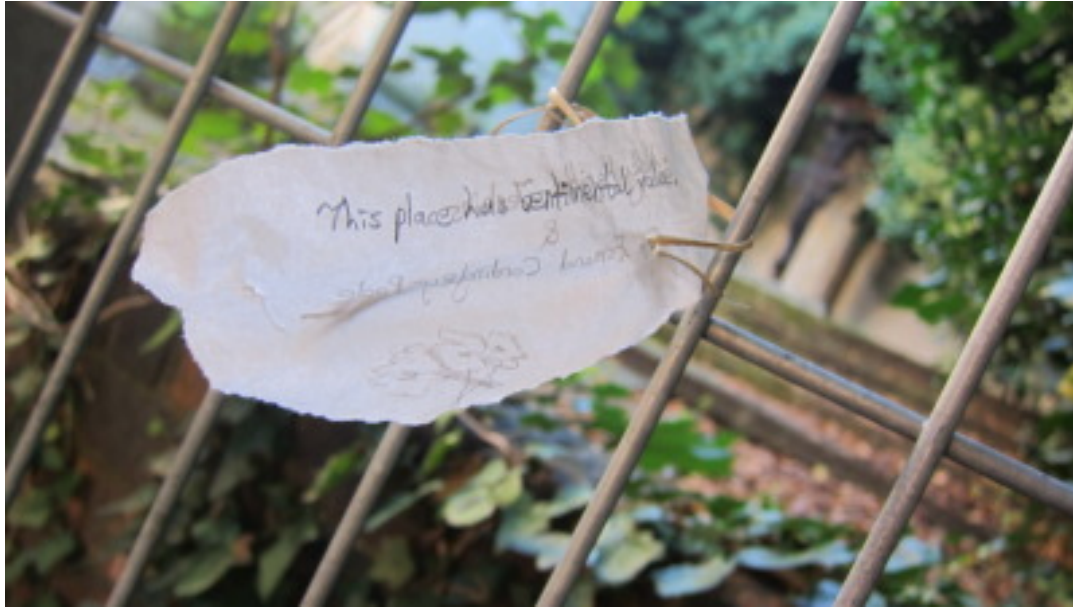
The Copperfields



This sign is at once appealing and uninformative. Is this a block of flats or an office building? An internet search reveals that until 2012 it was the home of a travel and tourism agency which handled PR for Air France and the Aruba Tourism Authority.



Sentimental value



'This place has sentimental value.' Before someone put up this tag, or as a result of his or her doing so? The word sentimental is Janus-faced, suggesting both a capacity for refined feeling and a tendency to overindulge the emotions.



Endless



'Endless'? What is this? It seems to bear no relation to anything going on nearby. Is it a relic of rave culture? A provocation or a remnant of a more riotous past?



Commit no nuisance



This sign, on Great Guildford Street, is well-known; another, in better condition, can be seen around the corner on Doyce Street. There is a similar sign on Fournier Street, Spitalfields.

It seems these signs were originally put up to discourage public urination outside places of worship. They now feel like precursors of ASBO culture. Since the fifteenth century nuisance has been a term in law for interference in an individual's property rights. In the nineteenth century the word lost some of its force; Dickens has fun with it in his story 'Tom Tiddler's Ground'.



Toulmin Street



This plaque on Toulmin Street commemorates Harry Cole, a furrier's son from Rotherhithe who served as a police constable for 29 years. Cole published the first of his dozen novels in 1980; depicting the lively, grubby reality of a constable's South London beat, it had to be vetted by Scotland Yard before publication. I think the street takes its name from William and Joseph Toulmin, soap manufacturers whose premises once stood in Great Suffolk Street.



The Charles Dickens School



The tablet elegantly records the enlargement in 1901 of Lant Street School, which in 1911 became Charles Dickens School. Within recent memory, the enlargement of the school's outside space has had the effect of cutting Lant Street in half, significantly altering its character.

The street takes its name from the landowner Thomas Lant (1661-1722). In Dickens's time 'lant' had other associations; it was a term for the stale urine used in certain industrial processes.



Lant Street



‘There is an air of repose about Lant Street,’ writes Dickens in *The Pickwick Papers*, ‘which sheds a gentle melancholy upon the soul.’



John Harvard Library



John Harvard bequeathed £800 and his extensive library to the new college at Cambridge, Massachusetts. A fire in 1764 destroyed all but one of the books.



Little Dorrit



A quotation from Dickens's preface to *Little Dorrit*. The design makes it tricky to read.



Newcomen Street



This building stands on Newcomen Street, which is something of a rat run, the kind of street one tends to walk along with one's head down.

In 1627 John Marshall founded the charity that to this day bears his name. The charity continues to fund the restoration of Anglican churches, as well as supporting parsonages; in 2011 roughly £750,000 of grants were made. The street takes its name from another seventeenth-century philanthropist, Elizabeth Newcomen.



The Shard from the George Inn



The Shard of Glass, from the yard outside the George Inn. From any angle, the Shard looks unfinished. Originally signifying a gap in a hedge, shard was until the nineteenth century a term for a patch of cow-dung.



Borough High Street



One of a series of tablets set into the pavement on Borough High Street identifying what the adjacent shop was in 1997. In most cases, the premises have changed hands, and the tablets are mementoes of a different kind of high street, or markers of the disposable nature of commerce.



Thomas Guy



On his death in 1724, Thomas Guy, who made his fortune in the South Sea Bubble, left around £200,000 to create a hospital for 400 incurables (to include 20 lunatics).



Borough Market



The new Borough Market, created as part of the Thameslink Programme, which has involved the demolition of a large number of Grade II listed buildings nearby.



Oddbins clock



Initially I assumed that the clock above Oddbins had long ago stopped. But then I noticed that it was telling the right time. True, even a stopped clock tells the right time twice a day, but it did appear that this clock – against the odds – was working. For how much longer, given what's happening all around it?



Wagamama



Outside Wagamama on Clink Street, this arrangement of slabs seems intended to discourage passers-by from loitering and gawping at the diners.

Mudlark



A twenty-first-century mudlark scavenging on the foreshore of the Thames... or so it seems. The word mudlark, formed on the model of skylark, gives the misleading impression that there may be some pleasure in a life spent sifting other people's detritus. It gained popularity in Dickens's time; an item in Chambers's Edinburgh Journal in 1845 noted that mudlarks 'bear generally a bad character' and 'their functions do not end with the shore, but in the sewer'.

Guildhall



Here we are looking towards the Guildhall, long associated with the giants Gog and Magog. In 2012 the Olympic marathon passed through the yard in front of the Guildhall.

To the left is Gresham Street, which takes its name from Thomas Gresham, the merchant who rescued the pound in 1551. Gresham founded the Royal Exchange, and after his death the rents earned there were used to set up Gresham College. When it was created, in 1597, Gresham College was London's first institution of higher education.



Why can't Friday just be Friday?



Why can't Friday just be Friday?



Statue and vent

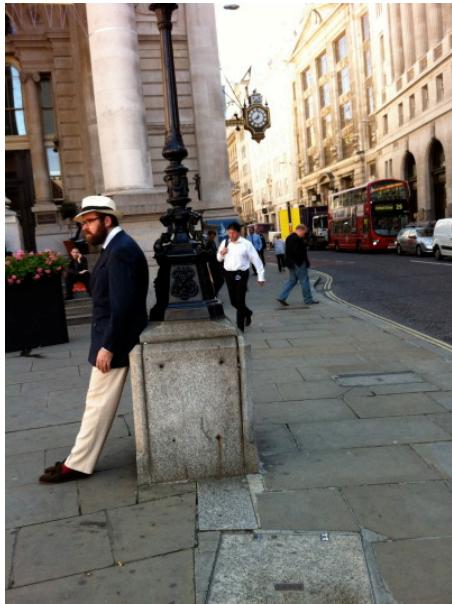


This statue commemorates the civil engineer James Henry Greathead, who developed a protective shield for use in underground tunnelling. To be precise, Greathead improved on an existing design by Peter Barlow, which was itself an improvement of a design by Brunel. The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography explains: 'In 1886 ... work began on the long-delayed City and Southwark subway, the beginning of a line that became the City and South London Railway, the world's first underground electric railway. For the excavation of the twin tunnels through water-bearing strata, compressed air had to be used in conjunction with a much-improved design of the Greathead shield, which enabled the first of the tunnels under the Thames to be completed in only fifteen weeks.'

Air ducts are visible beneath the statue, and the plinth is hollow, containing a ventilation shaft for the Underground line below.



Dress down Friday?



An expensively dressed man waiting outside the Royal Exchange. This surely isn't what is meant by 'dress-down Friday'.



Rubbish

The arrow feels like an invitation, proposing just how suitable this spot is for the depositing of rubbish.



End of walk