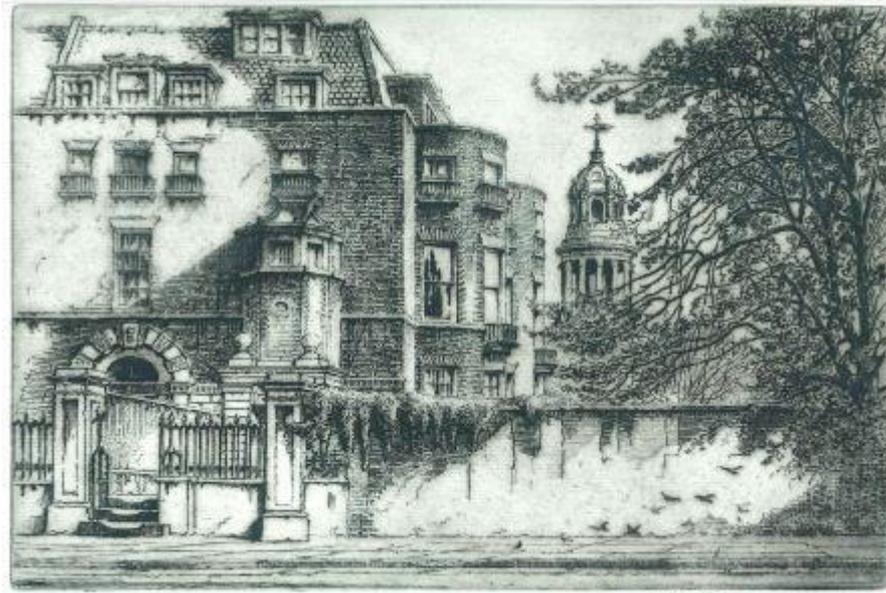


Charles Dickens (1812-1870)



Charles Dickens, perhaps the greatest of English story tellers, lived in Marylebone for many years, within a stone's throw of the church. It was in his house, 1 Devonshire Terrace, that some of his books were written: *The Old Curiosity Shop*, *Barnaby Rudge*, *American Notes*, *Martin Chuzzlewit*, *The Christmas Carol*, *The Chimes*, *The Cricket on the Hearth*, *Dombey & Son* and *David Copperfield*. The raven in *Barnaby Rudge*, whose real name was Grip, lived and died in the gardens of the Devonshire Terrace house. To quote from Mrs Baillie Saunders in *The Great Folk of Old Marylebone* (1904):- It is, perhaps, in *Dombey and Son* that Marylebone takes an especially important part. The church mentioned there, both at the christening of Paul Dombey and the wedding of Mr Dombey, is the parish church, which, as it then was, is faithfully described. Mr Dombey himself was a gentleman well known to Dickens and alluded to by him in letters by the familiar initial 'A' and constantly mentioned in the directions to Cruikshank, his artist, and others. Florence Dombey is his own sweet daughter Kate; Paul his own little boy; Mr Dombey's 'corner house', so disapproved by Towlinson, is a description of the house in which Dickens himself lived, in Devonshire Terrace. The church clock, which wistful little Florence thought so solemn at nights, was Marylebone Parish Church clock; while the christening of Paul Dombey is a description of the christening of Dickens' own little boy. The clerk in this scene, of which the author says, 'the clerk was the only cheerful person present, and he was an undertaker', is a portrait of a gentleman whose name is still affectionately remembered in Marylebone, and who was a friend of Dickens. I allude to Mr William Tookey, the undertaker and Crown Clerk. Delightful, philosophic, humorous, Mr Chick is the great Macready, the actor, who lived at York Gate at the time the book was written, and who was also a very dear friend.



Dickens' House at 1 Devonshire Terrace, St Marylebone

When 'Dombey and Son' first came out in 'Household Words' and Macready saw himself stand revealed in it, he came running round to Mr Tookey's offices in High Street, roaring with laughter, and seized him by the hand and shook it violently in congratulation of their mutual immortality as the clerk and sponsor in 'Dombey and Son'. Mrs Miff, the pew-opener in the same work, who wore a 'mortified bonnet' and 'crackled' when she curtsied, and who attended at Mr Dombey's melancholy wedding, is an exact portrait of the old lady who then occupied that post at the parish church; while Mr Sowndes, the beadle, is also a portrait of the beadle then existing. Miss Tox was a lady Dickens met at Lausanne during a long stay there, but the remembrance of whom he brought back to Marylebone; Major Bagstock was a gentleman who lived close to Regent's Park and who Dickens knew through Macready; and the poor little Charitable Grinder, in the tight leather smalls, who used to be sat up in the roof of the church close to a great organ which 'snorted' at him, was one of the small boys from Marylebone Charity School, which in those days included boys as well as girls.

'David Copperfield' – as everyone knows, David was Dickens himself when young – was written here; and Miss Mowcher, the dwarf, was a celebrated little Marylebone lady, a corn-cutter or chiropodist, who lived in a street off Regent's Park, where she had a large connection. Her real name was Miss Hall. So irate was this tiny little person at her portraiture that she nearly dragged poor Dickens into a libel action, but he managed to pacify her with the ready tact he knew so well how to use. Agnes Wickfield was his own sweet sister-in-law, beautiful Georgina Hogarth. Dora, according to many people, is a portrait of his wife in her early days, a very pretty but singularly vague and helpless little lady; from Dickens' own letters there are strong hints and immortal Mrs Nickleby in 'Nicholas Nickleby' is also a portrait of Mrs Dickens in later life. Whatever may

be the truth of the former assertion, it is quite possible that sweet Dora, charming as she was, would have been quite likely to mature in time into the amiable, fatuous and useless babbler, Mrs Nickleby. Dora in later life, without the charm of youth and an angel's face would, indeed, have been a horror, and is it not quite possible that Mrs Nickleby shows us the particular kind of horror? There is no doubt that Dickens was unhappy in his marriage, and if the above surmise be true he had reason enough.

In the 'Uncommercial Traveller' he mentions the Parish Chapel, in connection with Hogarth's painting of the wedding-scene of 'the Rake's Progress'. The allusion occurs in a chapter of that work called 'The City of the Absent' and the author relates a humorous and pathetic incident of a charity boy and girl making love in the graveyard, and how he rescued them from the wrath of the beadle.

Charles Dickens was writing Dombey and Son during the year of the Browning marriage.

WHILE LIVING IN A HOUSE ON THIS SITE
CHARLES DICKENS
WROTE SIX OF HIS PRINCIPAL WORKS,
CHARACTERS FROM WHICH APPEAR
IN THIS SCULPTURED PANEL



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