The Vann Victorian Collection

AN EXHIBIT AT
UNT LIBRARIES SPECIAL COLLECTIONS

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The Vann Victorian Collection is a treasure of the University of North Texas Libraries and an exceptional resource for the study of Victorian literature. This exhibit showcases some pieces from the collection, including rare first editions, part-issue editions, and association copies. Dr. J. Don Vann, Professor Emeritus at UNT, curated this exhibit.

Don and Dolores Vann began collecting Victorian books in 1962, when they acquired a first edition of Dickens’s *Bleak House*. They spent the summer of 1965 in London, conducting research in the British Library and buying first editions of works by Charles Dickens and William Makepeace Thackeray. During their subsequent trips to London, the Vanns came to know many of the city’s booksellers and were offered first editions they kept hidden from all but their most favorite customers.

In 2004 Don and Dolores established the Vann Victorian Endowment to provide a permanent fund to purchase Victorian books for the Vann Victorian Collection in Special Collections at the University of North Texas Libraries. Since 2004 the Vanns have made additional contributions to the collection, most recently in 2014.
INTRODUCTION

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DICKEYS AND VICTORIAN BRITAIN

The Victorian era in Britain was a period of unprecedented population growth, urbanization, and industrialization. It was also a period of deep division between the rich and poor. While the wealthy and growing middle-class populations were entertained by spectacular exhibitions of art and natural history, times were much harder for the poor and working classes.

Rapid industrialization and urbanization resulted in high unemployment and housing shortages. Many people were forced into tenement houses and lived in deplorable conditions. It was in this atmosphere that a young Charles Dickens grew up, in a slum he described as “as shabby, dingy, damp, and mean a neighborhood, as one would desire not to see.”

Shortly after his twelfth birthday Dickens was sent by his debt-ridden family to work in a shoe-blacking factory alongside other children, some as young as four years old. Dickens’ family could only afford to keep him in school for a few short years. His father served time in a debtors’ prison.

The experiences of Dickens’ childhood left him with a lifelong concern for the most helpless and neglected members of society. His experiences in early life provided him with much inspiration for his later novels. Dickens especially had sympathy for children, whom he compassionately portrayed again and again in characters like Tiny Tim Cratchit, David Copperfield, and Oliver Twist.

The Life of Charles Dickens


At Dickens’s request, his best friend, literary and legal advisor, and executor of his estate, John Forster (1812–1876), wrote the first authorized biography. The novelist left Forster all his papers—manuscripts, corrected proofs and letters—to use as sources. Forster began work shortly after Dickens’s death in 1870. The first volume appeared in 1872 and two further volumes in 1873 and 1874. Forster’s Life has remained the classic, essential source for all subsequent biographies despite Forster’s reticence about details of Dickens’s private life.

Forster gave all of Dickens’s papers to the Victoria and Albert Museum in London, where they are gathered in the Forster Collection, a treasure trove for scholars.
PART ISSUE PUBLISHING

THE PART-ISSUE FORMAT

Beginning with his first novel, *The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club*, Dickens used a “part issue” format, with each part containing thirty-two pages of text with two engraved illustrations bound in green paper. There were twenty monthly parts appearing on the last day of the month, the last part a double issue containing both parts XIX and XX. Each part contained several pages of advertisements. The last part contained a title page, preface, dedication, and table of contents, so the purchaser could take the entire thing to a binder and have it made into a bound volume.

Until Dickens began publishing, the part issue had been used almost exclusively for reprinting popular works, such as encyclopedias and the Bible. Nine of his novels were published in this format, with the unfinished work *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* projected for twelve parts. His other six novels were published in magazines. After serialization the novels were offered on sale as bound volumes.

Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club


In a matter of months, *The Pickwick Papers* skyrocketed the young Dickens from obscurity to the position of the best-selling novelist of his time. While the first three monthly parts sold only a few hundred copies, his final installments sold approximately 40,000 copies, as everyone seemed to be reading the novel. Published in twenty parts, *Pickwick* was the publishing sensation of the century. All sorts of association merchandise could be found for sale in shops: plates, mugs, teapots, pitchers, spoons, many with images of the *Pickwick* characters.

Pickwick Abroad

Reynolds, George W. M. *Pickwick Abroad: Or, the Tour in France*. London, 1839. Print.

Because of lax enforcement of copyright law, Dickens was the victim of plagiarism from the beginning, with artists selling “extra” sets of illustrations (not authorized by Dickens) to the novel. When the serialization was complete, George Reynolds began a new serial, *Pickwick Abroad*, purported to be a continuation of Dickens’s novel.
**Our Mutual Friend**


*Our Mutual Friend* was Dickens fourteenth novel, the first part published in May 1864 and the last part in November 1865. The novel is a parable of the corruption brought by money. Characters inhabit a hollow, middle-class existence characterized by greed and pretense.

The novel was illustrated by Marcus Stone. This illustration, sarcastically titled “The Happy Pair,” shows two characters from the novel, Mr. and Mrs. Lammle, walking moodily on the beach. They are walking several steps apart and Mr. Lammle’s face is downcast as he drags his cane behind him.

**One of Our Conquerors**


George Meredith (1828–1909) was a poet and novelist. Since income from the sale of books was irregular, Meredith supplemented it by working as a publisher’s reader for Chapman & Hall, Dickens’s first publisher decades earlier.

*One of Our Conquerors* is an example of the Victorian “triple decker,” a three-volume format that had been the standard for the publication of respectable novels since the time of Sir Walter Scott in the early 1800s. The typical length of the triple decker was around 900 pages (150,000 to 200,000 words). The price was half a guinea (10s 6d) per volume or a guinea and a half for the entire work—perhaps the equivalent of a week’s wages for a typical working person. Thus, when Dickens began his serialized novels in part issue at 2s per installment, a mode that was immediately widely copied, many more people could afford to buy literary works.

These three volumes are bound in blue cloth over boards with black stamped decorations on the front covers, a blind-stamped publisher’s device on the back covers, and gilt lettering on the spines.

**The History of Pendennis**


William Makepeace Thackeray (1811–1863) was a friend of Dickens as well as his chief rival for
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Pendennis (November 1848–December 1849) was published serially at about the same time as Dickens’s David Copperfield (May 1849–November 1950). The public was unaware that both were autobiographical novels.

This first edition of Pendennis is complete in two volumes; both are bound in ¾ green leather and marbled paper-covered boards. The spines are divided into six major sections with ornate gilt floral designs and applied dark red/maroon spine labels with gilt titles. Both volumes show evidence of stab holes in pages, suggesting that either the original part issues were rebound by the customer or were sold as the first bound edition produced by the publisher from unsold part issues.

Dickens called David Copperfield “my favorite child,” perhaps because the author was able to fictionalize many of the events of his life: like Dickens, David worked in a factory in London as a child, worked as a law clerk, learned shorthand in order to become a court reporter, and was a successful novelist. Later Dickens revisited his childhood in creating some of the events in the life of Pip in Great Expectations.

This volume of David Copperfield is a first edition; later editions of the same year omit the date. The contents of the book were issued in twenty monthly parts, from May 1849 to November 1850. This copy bound without wrappers and advertisements in ¾ brown leather and brown moire-marbled paper-covered boards. The spine is divided into seven compartments by single gilt rules.

The Personal History of David Copperfield


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MAGAZINES

Master Humphrey’s Clock

*Master Humphrey’s Clock* was a weekly magazine (April 4, 1840—December 4, 1841) edited and completely written by Dickens. In it he published two of his novels, *The Old Curiosity Shop* and *Barnaby Rudge*.

In *The Old Curiosity Shop*, with the death of the character Little Nell, Dickens recreated, and relived, the death of his sister-in-law, Mary Hogarth, who died in 1837 at age seventeen in his arms, an event that traumatized him. Readers of the serial could sense that Nell was dying. Many wrote to beg him to let her live. In Boston Harbor as a clipper ship bringing the latest installment of the novel approached the wharf, eager readers crowded onto it and shouted out to sailors on deck, “Is Little Nell dead?”

This illustration from *The Old Curiosity Shop* pictures the villain Daniel Quilp, a moneylender set to cheat and ruin the lives of others.

Household Words

Dickens edited the weekly magazine *Household Words* from March 1850 until May 1859. The price, a mere 2p, insured it a vast audience. Dickens serialized the novels of many writers but only one of his own, *Hard Times*, in the magazine, although his *A Child’s History of England* appeared there as well. He had intended to publish *Hard Times* in part issue in twenty monthly installments but published it in the magazine to bolster slumping sales.
All the Year Round


Dickens edited the weekly magazine *Household Words* from its inception in May 1850 to November 1859, leaving the editorship over a dispute with the publishers, Bradbury and Evans. He then founded another magazine, *All the Year Round*, which began publication in January 1860. He continued as editor until his death in June 1870.

Two of his novels, *A Tale of Two Cities* and *Great Expectations*, were published in *All the Year Round*.

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**DICKENS AND CHRISTMAS**

A Christmas Carol


In 1843, with his fifth child on the way, Dickens was short of money and hit upon the idea of writing a short Christmas novel as a quick way to increase the balance of his bank account, writing the book in only six weeks. Because he lavished care on it, even insisting on hand-colored plates, it brought in only a fraction of the profit he had hoped despite many copies being sold.

Appearing on December 19, 1843, it was an instant success, going through many re-printings in the following months, and has never been out of print. The *Carol* has been described as “the most perfect work Dickens ever wrote.” Ebenezer Scrooge is far and away Dickens’s best-known character, even among people who have never read Dickens.

There are some over-enthusiastic fans who say that Dickens invented Christmas. The fact is that among the upper classes of Victorian Britain, the celebration of Christmas had been muted since the Puritans’ “war on Christmas” during their rule (1642-1660). What Dickens did was to make Christmas celebrations respectable again and restore the joy and warmth of the season.
This first edition is bound in a publisher’s embossed and textured brown cloth with a gilt wreath and titles on the cover and with gilt titles and decorations on the spine. The title page incorrectly identifies this as a fourth edition; it was likely the fourth printing of the first edition from the original form.

“Fezziwig’s Ball”

Of the eight illustrations in the first edition of *A Christmas Carol* none is better known than “Fezziwig’s Ball,” considered to be the most popular non-secular image of the holiday.

**Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions**


With the tremendous success of *A Christmas Carol*, Dickens saw the potential of offering Christmas stories during the holiday season. Each year he produced a special “extra Christmas number” of *Household Words*, employing a frame plot to bring together a series of stories by a variety of writers. The Christmas number typically sold around 300,000 copies.

This 48-page volume is bound in blue paper wrappers and contains a tipped-in notice of the completion of *Our Mutual Friend*, with other works advertised on the reverse of the notice. *Doctor Marigold’s Prescriptions* was written in collaboration with other writers; of the eight chapters, chapters I, VI, and VII are by Dickens.

**Idylls of the King**


Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–1892), published *Idylls of the King*, a cycle of twelve narrative poems about King Arthur between 1859 and 1885. They were dedicated to Prince Albert, the deceased husband of Queen Victoria.

This first edition contains the first four of the idylls: “Enid,” “Vivien,” “Elaine,” and “Guinevere.” The volume is complete with publisher’s advertisements in the beginning of the volume and is bound in the publisher’s embossed, green cloth with gilt spine titles.

Tennyson served as Poet Laureate of Great Britain from 1850 until his death.
The Strayed Reveller

In 1849 Matthew Arnold (1822–1888) published his first book of poems, *The Strayed Reveller*, but because he did not want to trade on the fame of his father, Thomas Arnold, he signed the book with the initial “A.” Thomas Arnold was a historian who became the headmaster of the Rugby School, celebrated by Thomas Hughes in *Tom Brown’s School Days*. Matthew Arnold soon achieved fame on his own, becoming a major voice of Victorian skepticism.

This very rare first edition is bound in the publisher’s embossed and textured dark green cloth with gilt spine titles. Only 500 copies of this edition were printed.

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**Writing for Social Reform**

**Mary Barton**


Elizabeth Gaskell was a successful novelist who serialized three of her novels in Dickens’s *Household Words*. This volume has an interesting provenance, for it belonged to Anne Thackeray (1837–1919), whose initials “A.I.P” are found gilt-stamped into the first spine compartment from the head and whose signature appears at the top of the title page. The eldest daughter of the novelist William Makepeace Thackeray, Anne was a lifelong friend of the Dickens children.

She published half a dozen novels as well as many short stories. Many of Gaskell’s observations on the hardships of the working class—sickness, hunger, and poverty—are found in *Mary Barton*.

This volume is 400 pages (later editions were 423 pages), ¾ bound with marbled paper over boards. The spine is in six compartments with a gilt-stamped title in the second compartment from the head.
Sunday Under Three Heads

This pamphlet, which Dickens published under the pseudonym Timothy Sparks, is a critique on advocates of a rigid adherence to the Sabbath. Dickens believed that the working class, who typically only had one day off from work, should be allowed to enjoy their day off in any way they wished. This pamphlet is one of Dickens’s earliest published works.

Lloyd’s Sixpenny Dickens

This very inexpensive edition of the works of Dickens shows how enterprising publishers could cash in on the popularity of Dickens. For a very small sum one could assemble a collection of Dickens’s works. Volume 18 (*Little Dorrit*) and Volume 21 (*Nicholas Nickleby*) are shown here.
DON AND DOLORES VANN

Dr. J. Don Vann

J. Don Vann is a retired University of North Texas Regent’s Professor and Professor Emeritus in English. He received his B.A. and M.A. degrees from TCU and his Ph.D. from Texas Tech, then joined the faculty of UNT in 1964. He taught courses in Victorian literature, particularly Dickens, Tennyson, and Browning. His doctoral dissertation on the critical reception of David Copperfield in London newspapers led him to be a founding member of the Research Society for Victorian Periodicals in which he held various offices. He is also a member of and regularly attends the annual meeting of the London Pickwick Club, founded by Cedric Dickens, a great-grandson of the novelist. Don is the author or editor of eight books and dozens of articles. A ninth book, Tennyson's Theory of Poetry is underway.

A confirmed Anglophile, he made his first visit to England in 1965 to conduct research at the British Library, felt immediately at home, and has made many trips since (he does not know the exact number, but estimates it at somewhere around forty). Several of these trips have been for five-month stays while on research grants. In 1984–85 he taught at Christ’s Hospital, an English Boy’s school founded in 1553, the first American ever to have taught there. Also, he taught in the UNT London program in the fall of 1993 and has taken classes of UNT students for summer courses in London on three occasions.

Having been members of the London Dickens Fellowship for many years, Don and his wife, Dolores, founded the Denton Dickens Fellowship in 1987. The branch received a charter from the international Dickens Fellowship the following year. On two occasions he was given the honor of delivering the eulogy at the annual wreath-laying ceremony at Dickens’s grave in Poet’s Corner, Westminster Abbey.

Dr. J. Don Van biography taken from Denton Dickens Fellowship website.
AN INTERVIEW WITH DR. VANN

In this series of short videos you may hear Dr. Vann discuss his research in Victorian literature, his membership in the Pickwick Club, and his philosophy on book collecting.

Access the videos now using your smart phone or mobile device using the QR code below:

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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