

The

Charles Dickens

Connection



1812 - 1870



Trail Number Eleven
Written at The Canterbury Environment Centre
St Alphege Lane
Canterbury
01227 457009 c1998

CHAS SCANS

Between 1977 and 2002 Canterbury Urban Studies Centre and Canterbury Environment Centre published around 30 guides and city trails describing various aspects of Canterbury's past. Both organisations were based in St Alphege church.

Between them they produced 14 titles in the 'Trails' series, and a further 16 titles outside the main series. All are now out of print and many are difficult (a few impossible) to find through normal second hand sources. Many contain information that is not readily available in other printed or on line sources.

CHAS (Canterbury Historical and Archaeological Society) is scanning a selection of these publications for uploading to the CHAS website as PDFs. In this way a new generation of readers and researchers can have access to this unique resource.

A full list of these publications appears on the CHAS website:

<http://www.canterbury-archaeology.org.uk>

Introduction

Charles Dickens, one of England's best loved novelists, was born in Landport near Portsmouth in 1812. The family moved to London in 1814 and Chatham in 1817.

Returning to London in 1822, the family fell upon hard times and Charles was withdrawn from school in 1823 and sent to work in a blacking warehouse, managed by a relative. His father was imprisoned for debt in Feb 1824.

As things improved in the family, Charles was able to complete his education. He got a job at the age of fifteen as a solicitor's clerk.

All of these early childhood trials are reflected in much of Dicken's fiction. In 1833 Dickens began to contribute stories to newspapers and magazines, and in 1836 started the serial publication of *Pickwick Papers*.

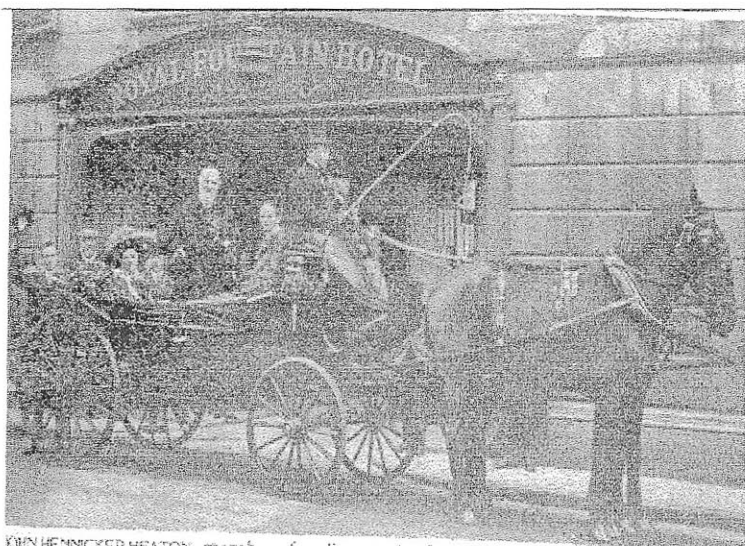
In April 1836 Charles married Catherine Hogarth. Together they had ten children.

Dickens wrote the semi-autobiographical *David Copperfield* in 1849/50. This book was his favourite and was based on characters who lived and worked in and around the City of Canterbury.



Dickens and Canterbury

Dickens spent a great deal of his life living in various parts of Kent: Rochester, Chatham and Broadstairs.




He often visited Canterbury with his family and friends for day trips.

He would often arrive by horse and carriage, which would be left at the Royal Fountain Hotel Livery Stables in St. Margaret's Street. This Hotel appeared in *David Copperfield* as the County Inn, where Mr. Dick stays on his fortnightly visits to see David.

Sadly this building was destroyed in the Blitz.

A. GREENSTEAD,

Royal Fountain Livery Stables,
S. Margaret's Street, Canterbury.

Close and Open Garrages.		GOOD STABLING, LARGE
Waggonettes, Dog Carts, Large Brakes, and Saddle Horses on Hire.		LOOSE BOXES, and LOCK-UP COACH HOUSES.

POST AND JOB MASTER.

TELEPHONE No. 54. AGENT TO L.C.D. RAILWAY CO.

The Royal Fountain Hotel was the second oldest coaching Inn in England, having lodged Earl Godwin's wife in 1029 and Archbishop Lanfranc in 1070. Some say the knights who murdered Becket also lodged there.

The whole site was destroyed by a bomb during the Blitz of June 1942.

Lady Wootton's Green

The illustration below claims to show the house where Dickens wrote *David Copperfield*. There is no evidence to support this theory.



However the house next door, on Broad Street, is reputed to be the model for Doctor Strong's private residence.

"The house on Lady Wootton's Green, the original of Doctor Strong's House where some of the higher scholars boarded and where David became a frequent visitor and intimate with the personages therein connected".....

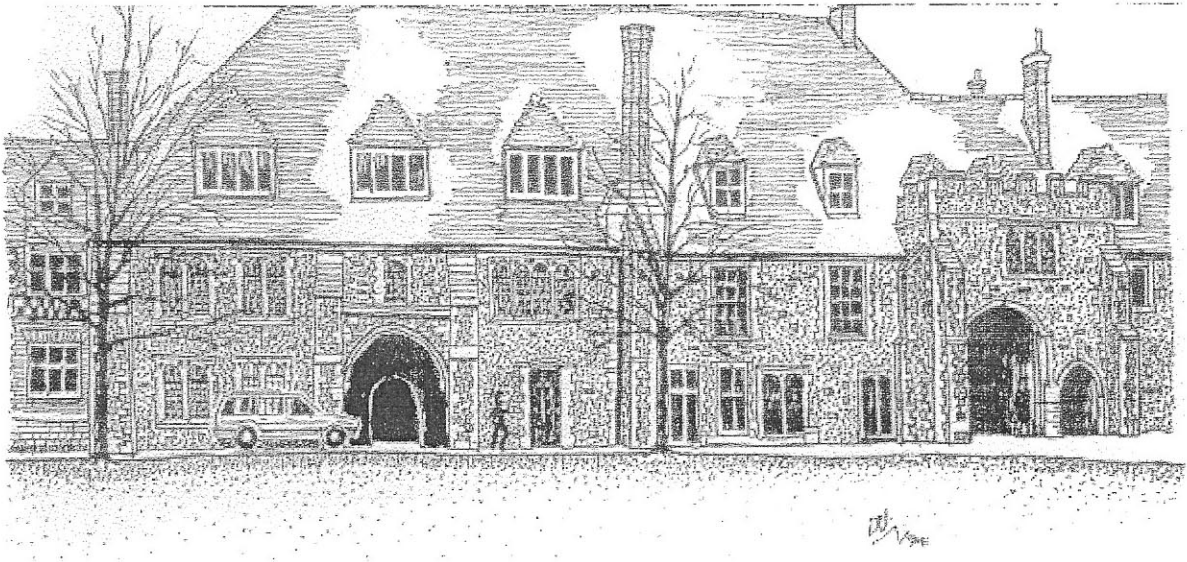


The original house disappeared during the Blitz of June 1942.

Kings School

David Copperfield was educated in Canterbury.

In 1860 there were 44 private day schools in the city. However, from the evidence in the novel it is very likely that Doctor Strong's Academy was suggested by the King's School in the Cathedral precincts.



Dr. Strong is thought to be modelled on Dr. John Birt, Headmaster of Kings . Dr. Birt's wife deserted him in similar circumstances to those of Mrs.Strong in the novel.

Dr. Strong was ".....the idol of the whole school".....

The precincts can be visited at most times daily.

St. Alphege Church

It is mentioned in the novel that Dr. Strong married Anne Markham in St. Alphege Church.

The church of St. Alphege, now used as the Canterbury Environment Centre, is open to the public each day between 10.00am and 5.00pm (except Sunday and Monday).



The church is thought to date back to 1070, when Archbishop Lanfranc established a church on the site.

An entirely new church was erected in the twelfth century, following the great fire in 1198. The church underwent a major overhaul in the late fourteenth century.

In the early sixteenth century a new northwest door was added, and at the same time the tower was modernised.

In 1540 the rood screen and statues were removed by Act of Parliament.

Mary I replaced them in 1550, only to have them removed again by Elizabeth I after 1559. In 1575 the Dean and Chapter offered the Huguenots the shared use of the church. The parishioners were not happy with this idea.

In 1888 the church was thoroughly restored and used as a parish church until 1972 when it was converted into The Canterbury Urban Studies Centre, now The Canterbury Environment Centre.



The house of Mr. Wickfield

The original of Mr. Wickfield's residence is very difficult to place with any accuracy from the description in the novel.



However, its interior is thought to have been based on that of a house in Burgate, almost opposite the tower of St. Mary Magdalen and the church of St. Thomas.

The house of Agnes

The original home occupied by the Wickfield family can still be seen in St. Dunstan's Street. Known as the House of Agnes Hotel, it's identification rests chiefly on local tradition.



The description in the novel could have fitted any number of properties in Canterbury at the time:-

“At length we stopped before a very old house bulging out over the road; a house with long low lattice windows bulging out still farther, and beams with carved heads on the ends, bulging out too.....”

Many other locations have been suggested for this property. A possible model is the Elizabethan Tea Rooms in the High Street.

This property dates back to around 1454 and would have been an obvious place for Dickens to be very familiar with during his visits to the City.

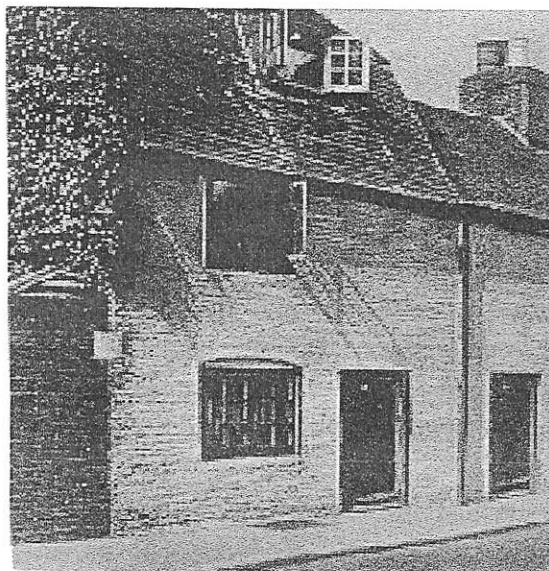
It is also much closer to the Cathedral and the other sites in Burgate and Lady Wootton’s Green.



The “umble ome” of Uriah Heep

Old official guides to the city differ as to the supposed location of Uriah Heep’s house.

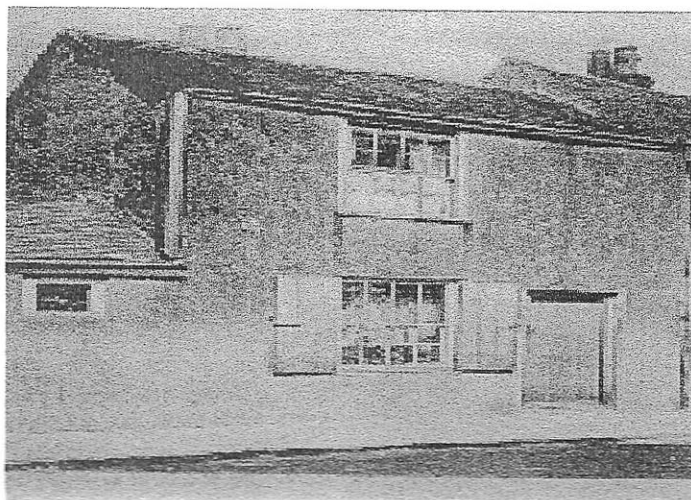
One suggestion is 4 Lower Chantry Lane, the site currently occupied by the Safeway Store.



The house was demolished after the bombing of June 1942, but until then, had always displayed a notice on the wall proudly proclaiming its connection.

The other house proposed as the original of Uriah Heep’s home was in North Lane on the site currently occupied by the car park.

It is likely that he could have lived at both addresses during his life, especially as his circumstances changed.



Other Locations

Fleur-de-Lys Hotel



This was the second oldest hotel in the city, and was situated on the High Street. It had many original features, for example, thirteenth century windows and a fine Tudor staircase. It retained a livery stable and motor garage. Dickens is thought to have stayed here on his frequent visits to Canterbury.

The hotel closed in May 1955 and stayed empty for many years. Sadly the property became so neglected that it was demolished sometime later.

Today all that remains is a plaque on the wall of the current occupier of the site, Hargreaves Inter-sport.

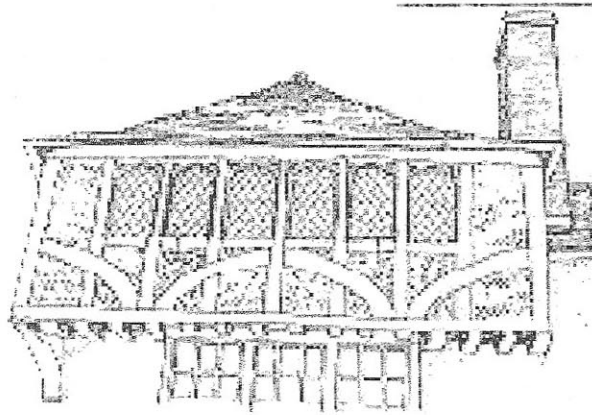


The Little Inn

The Little Inn where David saw Mr. Micawber sitting, waiting for something to turn up, is thought to be in Sun Street.



On the wall above the *Little Inn*, now a jewellers you can see a plaque, detailing the history of the building.



However, the original Sun Hotel was at the back of Christ Church gate in the Buttermarket, and for that reason many people suggest that the actual Little Inn was more likely to have been the Cathedral Gate Hotel on the Buttermarket itself.



Theatre Royal, Guildhall Street

Little evidence remains regarding the Theatre Royal in Guildhall Street. The site is currently occupied by Debenhams Department store. The foundation stone was laid by the artist, T.S. Cooper on October 30th 1860 and was completed by November 4th 1861 when Charles Dickens gave a reading of David Copperfield at the theatre. The experience lasted for two hours and tickets cost four shillings for a box, and one shilling in the gallery.

Dickens was impressed with the acoustics of this new theatre and thought his audience....

"The most delicate... I have seen in any provincial place"....



The Market

David and his aunt arrived in Canterbury on market day;

".....we came to Canterbury, where, as it was market day, my aunt had a great opportunity of insinuating the grey pony among carts, baskets, vegetables and hucksters goods....."

The site of the market in question is difficult to pinpoint as Canterbury had so many markets throughout the town. The cattle market and general goods fair, stood just outside the city walls, near where the bus station is today. The other, more likely market, was that in the Buttermarket itself. This was a general market and was near the other locations.



Dicken's Canterbury

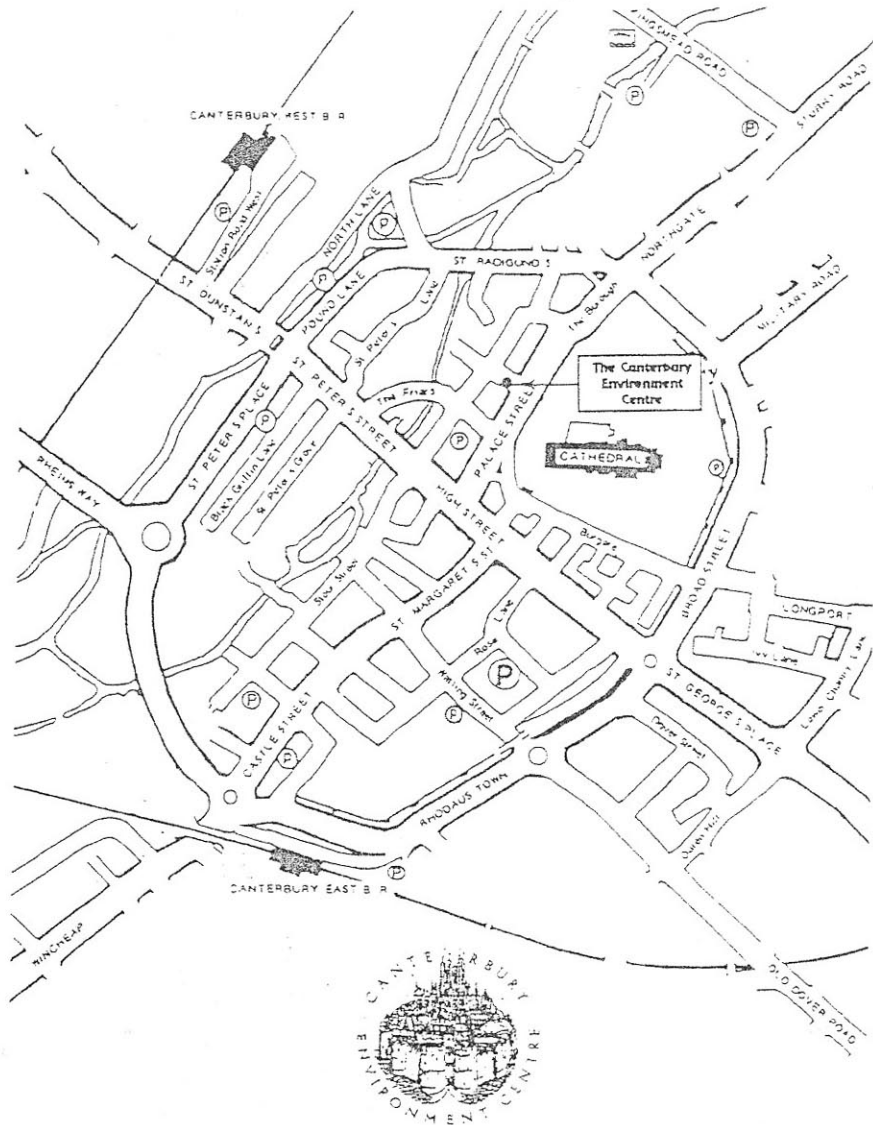
Very little of the Canterbury that Dickens knew remains today, thanks largely to the Blitz in June 1942.

A visit to the Cathedral, where David attended services in the Quire and where Mr. Micawber had hopes of his son becoming a chorister, would be a fitting end to your tour.

The descriptions in David Copperfield of Canterbury, can still be enjoyed today.....

*"The sunny streets of Canterbury.....
with the sights of its old
houses and gateways, and stately
grey cathedral with the rooks sailing round the towers...."*





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