**Henry Gardiner Adams (1812-1881)**

**Canterbury, Chatham, Deal, Rochester.**

Many fair spots of sylvan beauty lie

Around thee, many old historic sites,

Sacred to legend and to poesy,

And all wherein the fancy most delights,

There the clear Medway glideth gently by,

And with a murmur sweet, the shading bough requites.

**H. G. Adams. Sonnet to Tennyson.**

Henry Gardiner Adams was born in Deal and must have left school by 1826, when he was apprenticed to a Canterbury firm of chemists at the age of 14. He appears as a stationer in local directories in 1832[[1]](#footnote-1) (not necessarily an unusual combination at the time) and married in 1842. An ambitious, self-made man, his literary work includes \_*The Ocean Queen, and Other Poems\_* (1836) and the 1854 \_*God’s Image in Ebony\_*, an edited anthology which ‘aims at disabusing a certain portion of the public mind of what we conceive to be a pernicious error, by shewing that the Negro is morally and intellectually, as well as physically, the equal of the white man.’[[2]](#footnote-2)

By 1839 he was living in Chatham, and his poetry was appearing regularly in the \_*Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser\_.*[[3]](#footnote-3) In 1840 he set about establishing a new periodical of his own, to be called the \_*Kentish Coronal\_*. The periodical idea seems to have been short-lived, although it resulted in the publication of an attractive, gilt-edged volume of the same name in 1841 (with a frontispiece by up and coming artist Richard Dadd). More importantly, the scheme brought Adams into contact with local authors such as the [Canterbury]( /19c/19c-canterbury) antiquarian and political campaigner John Brent; also more illustrious figures such as Tennyson (who was staying in Boxley at the time) and [[Dickens](<https://kent-maps.online/dickens/>). Brent duly contributed two poems to the volume. While Tennyson was pleased enough by ‘two friendly sonnets’[[4]](#footnote-4) in the \_Maidstone Journal\_, and agreed to subscribe, he slightly ruined the effect by saying, ‘I hope the publication will not be a very expensive one, as I am poorer than a church mouse.’[[5]](#footnote-5)

[Dickens]( https://kent-maps.online/dickens/) cried off any personal contribution, but was happy to subscribe on the basis of his ‘many happy recollections connected with Kent’.[[6]](#footnote-6) In 1845 Adams duly wrote him a sonnet. Their correspondence continued almost until the end of [Dickens]( https://kent-maps.online/dickens/)’s life, and he agreed to read twice (in 1858 and 1861) for the benefit of the Chatham Mechanics’ Institute, of which Adams was Hon. Secretary.[[7]](#footnote-7)

But by the mid-1860s Adams’s position was becoming precarious and he may well have become an embarrassment to the more famous author. He seems to have enquired about a position at \_*All the Year Round\_* in 1866, a request Dickens politely turned down.[[8]](#footnote-8) Rather poignantly, Adams apparently preserved this letter in a first edition copy of \_*The Pickwick Papers*.\_[[9]](#footnote-9) In June 1868 Dickens declined to give a final reading at the end of his farewell tour, a suggestion he deemed ‘quite impracticable’;[[10]](#footnote-10) in August he seems to have fended off a request for an introduction to the American poet Longfellow.[[11]](#footnote-11) Whatever their final relations, Dickens kept his copy of the \_*Kentish Coronal\_*, which was included in his library at [Gad’s Hill](/dickens/dickens-gads-hill) at the time of his death in June 1870.

By 1872 Adams, now operating as a chemist in Canterbury, was in trouble with creditors and his business went into liquidation. He applied for relief to the Royal Literary Fund in 1874, 1876 and 1880. He died a few miles from the more famous self-made man of letters whose birth year he shared, in Rochester in 1881.

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1. Goulden 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. ii [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. *Maidstone Journal and Kentish Advertiser.* Tuesday 14 January 1840. 4. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Alfred Tennyson to Henry Gardiner Adams. [Mid-August 1842]. 209. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Alfred Tennyson to Henry Gardiner Adams. 1 May 1843. 218. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Letter from Dickens to H. G. Adams. 18 January 1840. PAGE [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Letter from Dickens to H. G. Adams. 30 November 1858. [PAGE]. Letter from Dickens to H. G. Adams. 6 October 1861. [PAGE] [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Letter from Dickens to H. G. Adams. 19 February 1866. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Letter from Dickens to H. G. Adams. 21 June 1868. Pilgrim 12. 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Letter from Dickens to H. G. Adams. 25 August 1868. Pilgrim 12. 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)