**Dickens and Friends**

**Prof Carolyn Oulton**

The study at [Gad’s Hill](/dickens/dickens-gads-hill) still features a wall of Dickens’s famous fake books. But his own visitors’ book would have included genuine contributions by some of the most famous figures of the nineteenth century.

Gad’s caught the imagination of writers from Dickens’s friend and biographer John Forster to controversial journalist and novelist Eliza Lynn Linton (who was never asked to visit after selling the house to [Dickens](/dickens) in the first place). The American poet Henry Wardsworth Longfellow ‘traded amicable visits’[[1]](#footnote-1) with Dickens and [Hans Christian Andersen](/19c/19c-christian-andersen) whose five week stay ‘seemed to the family AGES’,[[2]](#footnote-2) described the countryside as ‘Danish scenery, but richer and more highly cultivated’[[3]](#footnote-3).

While he lived within a few miles of the famous author and successfully solicited his time as a public speaker, the opportunist poet and journalist [Henry Gardener Adams](/19c/19c-gardiner-adams-biography) seems not to have been invited to the house. But other minor writers such as H. F. Chorley and a number of the journalists known as ‘Dickens’s Young Men’, including Percy Fitzgerald and Edmund Yates, were asked for weekends. So of course was the faithful W. H. Wills (sub-editor of *Household Words* and subsequently private secretary to [Angela Burdett Coutts]( /19c/19c-burdett-coutts-biography)). [G. A. Sala](/19c/19c-sala-biography) described the ‘military time’ of meals and the expectation that guests would spend designated hours at work – during one visit with [Wilkie Collins]( /19c/19c-collins-biography) Sala apparently doodled with a spare set of proofs to avoid offending his host.[[4]](#footnote-4)

Collins himself was a regular visitor, as was his artist brother Charles, who married Dickens’s daughter (and later artist) Kate in 1860. Other artist friends included Marcus Stone, Holman Hunt and W. P. Frith. It was John Everett Millais who painted the famous death mask of Dickens in 1870.

Kate’s godfather the actor William Macready stayed even during his later, reclusive years. It was another actor, Charles Fechter, who gave [Dickens](/dickens) the iconic [Swiss Chalet](/dickens/dickens-swiss-chalet) as a Christmas present in 1864.

Friends from Dickens’s last years included George Dolby, the manager of his reading tours and his American publisher James Fields, whose wife Annie left a vivid account of their visit. After the breakdown of the Dickens marriage Catherine remained in London and would not set foot in the house again during her husband’s lifetime. [Ellen Ternan](/19c/19c-ternan-biography) visited Georgina Hogarth here, probably only after Dickens’s death.

Gad would ultimately become a focus for literary pilgrims such as [Thomas Frost](/19c/19c-frost-biography) and of course the writer of this article.[[5]](#footnote-5)

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1. Booth para 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. I need to find a source for this! [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Andersen 31. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. [Dicken’s Life at Gadshill](<https://www.google.co.uk/books/edition/Pitman_s_Journal_of_Commercial_Education/U64UAAAAYAAJ?hl=en&gbpv=1&dq=%22G.+A.+SALA%22+AND+%22GAD%27S+HILL%22+AND++WILKIE&pg=PA542&printsec=frontcover>). [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See [‘Mobile Landscapes’](/dickens/mobile-landscapes) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)