

# *THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP*

## *From The President*

33. Adam Close,  
High Wycombe.  
Bucks. HP13 6BY.

Kate Phillips,  
Regeneration and Planning Development Management,  
London Borough of Camden,  
Town Hall,  
Judd Street,  
London WC1H 8ND.

23<sup>rd</sup> April, 2016.

Dear Ms Phillips,

### **Planning Application ref 2016/1027/P 47 Doughty Street**

The Dickens Fellowship (founded 1902) is an organisation of enthusiasts for the life, works and times of Charles Dickens. It includes amongst its membership some of the most significant literary scholars from throughout the world, a wide range of descendants of the Dickens family, and members of some fifty-four autonomous branches as well as a large international central membership. The relationship between the Fellowship and the Charles Dickens Museum has developed and modified over the years but it remains true that the current relationship is extremely strong and members of the Fellowship continue to have a deep and abiding interest in the Museum and its work.

This year marks the ninety-first anniversary of the establishment of an independent, self-funded museum at 48 Doughty Street in the house where Charles and Catherine Dickens and their first three children lived during 1837 to 1839, two of those children being born in the house. This property is the one adjacent to that which is the subject of this planning application. Those ninety-one years have seen a long association with The Dickens Fellowship in many and varied ways, not least because it was The Dickens Fellowship which successfully appealed to its world-wide membership to raise funds to save the property from demolition in 1922. Sufficient money was raised by means of a strenuous appeal to purchase both 48 and 49 Doughty Street and to open a Museum and Library in those premises from 9<sup>th</sup> June 1925, governed by an independent trust, also established by the Fellowship. In his speech at the formal opening ceremony Lord Birkenhead described the property as 'a shrine in London to which his (Dickens's) admirers from all over the world can come'.

Indeed for Dickens Fellowship members throughout the world, The Charles Dickens Museum is a very special place. Members of the Fellowship, when coming to London, from as far afield as Australia, New Zealand, India, Japan and North America as well as Europe and the United Kingdom, regard a visit to Camden in order to go to the Museum as an essential part of their

experience, and those who are unlikely to be able to make such a visit, also hold it in great veneration and affection and remain committed to its future development and continuing success. The Museum's centrality for scholarship, and its vivid evocation of aspects of nineteenth-century life, combine to maintain its status as an essential and inspirational element in our continuing relationship with one of our greatest writers. All of these aspects have been much enhanced by the Museum's recent refurbishment and redesign as part of the bicentenary of Dickens's birth in 2012.

It therefore becomes a matter of serious concern for members of the Dickens Fellowship should anything be proposed which has the potential to damage in any way either the fabric of the property or the Museum's ability to carry out its wide range of functions as a visitor attraction, a centre for research and scholarship (recently emphasised by the establishment of a relationship with a U.K. university in establishing a higher degree course based in London) and its very wide educational remit.

The correspondence you have received from Dr Cindy Sughrue OBE, the current Director of the Museum, explains precisely and accurately the difficulties and possible dangers which are likely to ensue from various aspects of the works proposed. In particular, concerns expressed by Dr Sughrue about the impact on the Museum gardens will strike Fellowship members very closely since many of them, individually and collectively as branches, contributed considerable sums to the improvement and maintenance of the garden space.

As President of the Dickens Fellowship I write to endorse wholeheartedly the objections and observations made in Dr Sughrue's letter.

Yours sincerely,



Dr Tony Williams  
President of The Dickens Fellowship,  
Associate Editor of *The Dickensian*,  
Senior Honorary Research Fellow in Humanities, University of Buckingham.