

Document of the Month – May 2012

Visitors Record Book for *The Regent Hotel*, Leamington Spa, showing Charles Dickens visiting the town on November 19th 1858 (CR4017/2)

This document records the visit of Charles Dickens to the Regent Hotel in 1858, as part of a reading tour. There is nothing particularly significant about the entry, Dickens sits among the other guests of the hotel at the time, this document is a record of the great author going about his everyday life.

DATE.	NAME.	WHERE FROM.
1858		
Oct 30	Mr. Wilde	London
	Mr. J. B. Smith	do
	Mr. D. M. Lazen	Edinburgh
Nov 1	Mr. H. H. Roy & Family	
"	Capt. Ashton	
"	Mr. Murphy	
" 2	Mr. Flint	
"	Mr & Mrs Browne	
"	Lord & Lady John Scott	
"	Mr Charles Dickens	
"	Mr Arthur Smith	
"	Mr & Mrs Shave	
" 3	Honble Mr Stapleton	
"	Mr & Mrs Price	
"	Rev. Mr. Parker & Mr. Magran	
"	Mr. Mrs & Miss Giff	Moreton in Marsh
" 4	Major Genl. Bell	
"	Capt. Greenwood	
"	Mrs Geo Mayall	
" 5	Mr Geo Mayall jun	Moreton in Marsh

Leamington in *Dombey and Son*

Dickens had visited Leamington previously, and indeed the town featured in many scenes within his novel *Dombey and Son*. Among them is the following excerpt.

The Major continued all day: so that when evening came on, and found them trotting through the green and leafy road near Leamington, the Major's voice, what with talking and eating and chuckling and choking, appeared to be in the box under the rumble, or in some neighbouring hay-stack.

Charles Dickens, Leamington, and Literature

2012 is the 200th anniversary of Charles Dickens's birth, an event of great significance as to many, he holds a cultural status second only to Shakespeare in the literary canon. His popularity, then as now, stemmed from his ability to straddle cultural boundaries. Although books like *Dombey and Son* now hold a place in the literary canon, Dickens serialised his novels, making them accessible to a general readership.

The entry in the visitor's book for the Regent Hotel helps us sate our desire to know the reality behind the legend. Here, we see a tantalising peek into the background of Dickens the man, and the success of Dickens the persona went some way to popularising his novels. Dickens was visiting Leamington as part of an authorial tour, and the lecture circuit was one way in which authors built up a persona and increased awareness of their work.

The Regent Hotel

The Regent Hotel was officially opened on 19th August 1819. Proving itself to be a popular place for visitors taking the Spa waters, Dickens was not the only famous guest at the hotel. Among the people to have stayed include Princess (later Queen) Victoria, Hollywood star Douglas Fairbanks, and critic John Ruskin. The Hotel was owned by the Cridlan family from its opening until closure in 1998. After vigorous debate about its future, the hotel was refurbished and re-opened in 2005.

Document CR4017/2 is on display in our public searchroom until 12th May 2012