

NOTES OF A MEETING OF CANTERBURY ROTARY BOOK CLUB

held on 30th June 2016 at the home of Colin and Jennifer McKone

1. **Present:** Viv, Georges, Caroline, Jennifer, Alan, Brian
2. **Apologies:** Tony, Gill
3. **Book: “Barnaby Rudge ” by Charles Dickens.** This story is said to be one of the least read of Dickens’ works, although its title is well known. It starts with a vivid description of the “Maypole”, a charismatic pub in Chigwell, then in the country, and includes the love lives of mine host’s son and the daughter of a worthy locksmith and his difficult wife, the niece of the Roman Catholic local estate owner (and landlord of the pub) and the honest son of a pretentious and scheming scoundrel.

Hugh, the illegitimate son whose mother was hanged when he was an infant , has never known any home but a stable, any education, kindness or love - though love is something he craves. Barnaby is a simpleton, living with his mother, his companion Gyp, a raven who has learned to talk.

He connects with the other characters by running errands between them, but he dreams of doing something important. These, and many other characters, are set against the background of the “anti-popery” riots fomented in 1780 by Lord George Gordon in response to a Catholic Emancipation Bill which proposed quite modest relaxations in the restrictions on them.

Viv thought the story plausible and well told, but its glory was in the descriptions and its humour.

Georges had read it 3 times and thought the story fantastic with richly drawn characters.

Jennifer said she had never been a lover of Dickens, but loved this book for its humour - she read us a hilarious passage about Miggs, the servant of the locksmith’s wife, and we enjoyed another which pictured Simon Tappertit, the apprentice, returning from a nocturnal meeting of his secret apprentices’ league to find that Miggs had deliberately locked him out, and now lay in wait for him

Colin felt the book offered a good social picture of a level of society but felt there was a lack of colour or colour adjectives, except those describing the fires started by the rioters. There were incredibly detailed descriptions but, overall, the book was too long (650pp).

Alan got to p 260 and then skipped, but had read the tremendous scene of the attack on, and burning of, Newgate Prison where Mr Dennis, the hangman turned rioter, sought to protect from the fire and the mob the prisoners on death row so that they could be executed the next day - perhaps shades of the scene in the film “The Reader” where concentration camp guards having taken their charges out of the camp before the advancing Allies, and having lodged them in a church overnight, lock them in when the building is set alight by allied bombers because otherwise “there would be chaos”.

Tony, having spurned our company for “Guys and Dolls”, wrote to say he had enjoyed the book very much - a good mix of historical and political background with a Dickensian villain, liked the descriptions of the riots and resolution of an old murder. It was just a pity Gordon didn’t get his comeuppance.

Caroline had reached p 200. She had enjoyed the descriptions the old map of London and the cartoons , but she had been very busy at work and doing her reading sitting up ,in bed made it hard work. Compared with the violence and chaos, the contemporary descriptions of life in the Carlisle area in Jenny Uglow’s book “The Pinecone” showed a totally different scene, though there resentment of migrants touched a chord.

For **Georges** the apprentices bore comparison with Northern Ireland. All in all, a very good read - so much so that Jennifer had taken up "Hard Times"

Other reads:

Viv - "**Even Dogs in the wild**" - a rebus story by Ian Rankin. "**Black List**" Samuel Paretsky ? - detective story set against the backdrop of McCarthy USA, "**The Little Paris Bookshop**" - Nina George ? concerning a middle aged man living on a barge on the Seine and selling books - romantic but pretentious which Pauline didn't think he would like.

Georges - "**Cats Cradle**" where the author purports to be an author writing about the people who had been involved in the atomic attack on Hiroshima, but it sounded as though there were too many people looking over other people's shoulders. A satire on Cuba with "**Ice 9**" which turns all other water to ice. Also "**The girl with all the gifts**" by M Carey about zombie ants targeted by a virus.

Jennifer - "**Hard Times**".

Colin - **the newspapers**. (in our tumultuous times we had all read and watched a lot of news)

Alan - had been too busy canvassing.

Caroline - **The Romanovs** by Simon Sebag Monefiore - just started.

Tony - "**The Affair**" - C P Snow - about Dreyfus.

Brian - The Pinecone, "Mothering Sunday" Graham Swift - avoid. "The Silk Roads" Peter Francopan - history of eurasia - started - sounds excellent.

4. **Things done: Tony** - Hamlet at Stratford - Paapa Essiedu - fine acting , all black cast, violent ending (what else?) and film "Love & Friendship" recommended.

Viv - to and fro to Wales. **Georges** - had learned to weld but not to re-assemble the stern gland of his yacht (but luckily someone noticed it was sinking).

Jennifer and Colin had been to Lyme Regis - lovely old English seaside - and met friend for an idyllic time in Woodstock. They had stayed at the Royal Lion - an old coaching inn, and had a rosy discussion with a fisherman about the referendum (I should have said that this subject intruded in all our discussions). Back in fortress Britain, , trips to the Mustard Seed and Sally choirs, and "The Audience" with Helen Mirren cheered things up a bit.

Alan gave notice about the expansion of Tate Modern and had been to the British Museum to see the sculptures recently recovered from drowned cities in the Nile delta. They had been wonderfully preserved when the land turned to water. There were also preserved bird mummies.

Caroline had been to see the Parliamentarium in Brussels, Love & Friendship (not liked much) , Stour festival - Fretwork and Stile Antico.

Brian - sailing trip to the Broads and visit to Hay festival..

5. **NEXT MEETING:** Thursday 18th August 7.30pm Book - "The Road to Little Dribbling - Bill Bryson