

Institution: Queen's University Belfast		
Unit of Assessment: 27 English Language & Literature		
Title of case study: The Letters and Photographs of Charles Dickens: Private and Public Exposure of the Celebrity Persona		
Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2002-2020		
Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:		
Name(s): Dr Leon Litvack	Role(s) (e.g. job title): Reader in Victorian Studies	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI: Aug 1991-present
Period when the claimed impact occurred: January 2019-December 2020		
Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N		
<p>Summary of the impact</p> <p>Litvack's research on the letters and photographs of Charles Dickens has had an impact on public perceptions of and knowledge about the author in the UK and worldwide. Media coverage of Litvack's research has reached millions of people and has prompted a public apology by <i>The Times</i>. His research has benefited Dickens's descendants by aiding their understanding of the author's death and burial. It has also played a central role in the development of a key exhibition about Dickens at The Charles Dickens Museum in London. Litvack's expertise, as Principal Editor of the Charles Dickens letters website, has been used by a major UK auction house to verify the authenticity of a letter purportedly by Dickens. Litvack's research has also had demonstrable impact on curatorial and archival practices at The Charles Dickens Museum.</p>		
<p>2. Underpinning research</p> <p>Litvack has developed two complementary fields of scholarship; an analysis of the images, principally photographic, of Charles Dickens, and the collation and examination of more than 500 newly discovered letters written by the author. Litvack's original research on the photographs of Dickens represents the first systematic cataloguing and analysis of all the photographic images of the author. Litvack has produced a series of illustrated studies on the images, the circumstances under which they were produced, the technologies employed, and the roles these photographs have had in transforming Dickens into one of the most famous figures in nineteenth-century Britain (1, 2, 3). Litvack explores the relationship Dickens formed with the many photographers who recorded his image, and the extent to which a particular public persona was consciously created (2, 3).</p> <p>Litvack's research on the author's correspondence has taken place during the course of two connected projects that follow on from the authoritative 12-volume Pilgrim Edition of <i>The Letters of Charles Dickens</i> (Oxford University Press, 1965-2002). Firstly, Litvack co-edited nineteen supplements in the specialist journal, <i>The Dickensian</i>, in which a series of new letters, discovered between 2002 and 2012, were published, with scholarly annotations.</p> <p>Secondly, since 2013, Litvack has been the Principal Editor of the Charles Dickens Letters Project (Dickensletters.com): a unique online archive which makes available all Dickens letters discovered since 2002. The project team also includes Emily Bell (University of Leeds), Editor, and has in the past included two other scholars: Paul Schlicke (University of Aberdeen) [Editor, 2017-19, now retired], and Jenny Hartley (University of Roehampton) [Editor, 2017-19, now retired]. The total number of annotated letters now stands at more than 550 (4). These online letters are edited to the same standard as the printed outputs. They reveal details of Dickens's negotiations with his publishers; his writing processes; his travels to Britain, Ireland, America, and the European continent; his views on his fellow authors; his engagement with important public figures; and details of his private life. They also shed light on his relations with his family, as well as his personal challenges and anxieties.</p>		

Litvack has co-edited (with Nathalie Vanfasse, Aix-Marseille Université) a collection of essays entitled *Reading Dickens Differently* which features contributions (including his own, on Dickens's death and burial), that open up new areas of research on Dickens and his work for the 21st century (5). Litvack's expertise in scrutinising primary materials forms the basis of an essay for this collection; the chapter uses a micro-historical approach to demonstrate how previously unseen archival evidence can overturn canonical details which have been the basis of almost every account of the circumstances surrounding Dickens's last moments and interment in Poets' Corner at Westminster Abbey (5). Litvack outlines the results of his own research which strongly indicates that Dickens' best friend, John Forster, together with then the Dean of Westminster, Arthur Penrhyn Stanley, conspired to ensure that Dickens was buried in Poets' Corner rather than in his country home in Kent, as Dickens himself and his family would have preferred (5, 6).

This new theory is based, in part, on Litvack's analysis of a letter from the Dean which was written on the day of Dickens's death. Litvack contends that the 'will of the people' argument, promulgated by *The Times* newspaper and others to support an Abbey burial, was largely a fiction created by Forster and Stanley to suit their own ends. Stanley wished to preside over Dickens' funeral service while, for Forster, an Abbey interment would make a more fitting conclusion to the authorised biography of Dickens that he was writing. Their actions would help to secure Dickens's place in history as a major national figure, but it would also assist their own careers (5, 6).

3. References to the research

1. **Leon Litvack**, 'A Dickens Photographer Identified: Adolphe Naudin.' *Dickensian*, 111:2 (2015), pp.130-141. Refereed journal article. Available from HEI on request.
2. **Leon Litvack**, 'Dickens in the Eye of the Beholder: The Photographs of Robert Hindry Mason.' *Dickens Studies Annual*, 47 (2016), pp.165-99. Refereed journal article. DOI: 10.7756/dsa.047.009/165-199
3. **Leon Litvack**, 'Dickens Posing for Posterity: The Photographs of Herbert Watkins.' *Dickens Quarterly* 34:2 (2017), pp.96-158. Refereed journal article. DOI: 10.1353/dqt.2017.0014
4. **Leon Litvack**, et al, *The Charles Dickens Letters Project* (Website): Dickensletters.com Output in REF2. **Quality:** 'As an extremely accessible and even collaborative work-in-progress, The Charles Dickens Letters Project constitutes a valuable digital resource for studying Dickens and the times in which he lived' (*Dickens Quarterly*, 37:4 [December 2020, p.457]. 'Quickly loading, searchable transcriptions are accompanied by detailed annotations that draw upon an extensive, extensible prosopography. . . . The CDLP sheds light on angles of Dickens and his world that are both central and not immediately apparent from other sources' (*Journal of Victorian Culture* 26.1, [2021], p.142).
5. **Leon Litvack and Nathalie Vanfasse, eds.**, *Reading Dickens Differently* (Chichester: Wiley, 2020), 280p. Including a chapter by Litvack entitled 'Dickens's Burial in Westminster Abbey: The Untold Story', pp.1-37. Edited book. ISBN: 978-1-119-60222-4. Available from HEI on request. **Quality:** review by Lydia Craig in *Dickens Quarterly*, 37:2 (June 2020), pp.192-195. '[A] well-timed and accessible collection' and (on Litvack's own chapter) 'Litvack makes a strong case for questioning established accounts concerning circumstances of the author's life and death.' <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/756617>
6. **Leon Litvack** '[Charles Dickens: newly discovered documents reveal truth about his death and burial](#)' in *The Conversation*, 3.2.20.

4. Details of the impact

Impact on public perceptions and knowledge

Litvack's research has had an impact on the public's perceptions of, and knowledge about, Charles Dickens in the UK and beyond, reaching millions of people in the UK and hundreds

of thousands in other countries, including the United States, Italy and Germany. It has also led to the publication of a public apology by a leading UK national newspaper for its part in the apparent burial conspiracy uncovered by Litvack.

Media coverage

The specific theory regarding Dickens's burial, emerging from Litvack's research, became the subject of an editorial leader and feature article in *The Times* (369,000 readers) on 4 February 2020 [A]. This resulted in a public apology by the newspaper and an acknowledgment of Litvack's key role in changing its account of the events leading up to the burial. In the editorial leader, *The Times* admits that it played a part in furthering the apparent conspiracy to have Dickens buried in Westminster Abbey:

It is time to set the record straight. We can now reveal that popular pressure to inter Dickens in Poets' Corner was largely an invention, in which this paper connived, and it is time to show due contrition. Research by Leon Litvack of Queen's University Belfast reveals that Dickens's final resting place in Westminster Abbey was engineered by Arthur Stanley, dean of Westminster Abbey, and John Forster, the novelist's confidant. [A]

The story was also covered in a prominent feature article in *la Repubblica*, Italy's second largest national newspaper (circulation: 230,000) [B], and in Northern Ireland's largest newspaper, the *Belfast Telegraph* (circulation: 32,500) [B]. An article by Litvack in *The Conversation* which first prompted this media coverage [C] was the subject of a tweet by the Westminster Abbey Twitter account (then 81,700 followers). The tweet stated:

This fascinating article by Leon Litvack explains how Charles #Dickens came to be buried in Westminster Abbey following his death 150 years ago. [B]

In total, Litvack's *The Conversation* article has been read 334,000 times (111,000 reads as reported in Conversation dashboard plus 223,000 reads from Yahoo News UK) [C], and has been republished in 16 different partner publications, including the US-based *Smithsonian Magazine* (56,117 reads) [B, C].

Litvack's knowledge, accrued through his research, has been drawn on by media outlets in a number of other ways. His research informed an estimated 3,750,000 viewers (Feb 2021 viewing figures) through his contribution to a film on BBC1's *One Show*, in which he discussed Dickens' letters concerning Queen Victoria (broadcast in June 2020) [B]. In addition, Litvack's authority, derived from his expertise on Dickens's correspondence, has challenged the controversial practice of using Dickens's letters to decorate high-fashion handbags. Litvack's strong objection to the unlicensed commercialisation of the author's words was reported in *The Times* (22 February 2020, 369,000 readers) [A], *The Washington Post's* Book Club column (28 February 2020, 207,000 readers), and on a political blog in Germany, Deutschland geliebte Bananenrepublik (25 Feb 2020) [B].

Further amending and adding to the public perception of Dickens, Litvack's discovery of a new Dickens letter, concerning the author's anxiety over a diphtheria epidemic in France in 1856, resulted in an article in the *Times* on 28 December 2020 (369,000 readers), which highlighted the parallels with the present COVID crisis [A]. Reader responses to the online version of the article included 'All these pertinent comments regarding the importance of vaccination have absolutely understood why this very interesting article is so timely' (Llandough reader), and 'Very interesting and a timely reminder of the scourge of diphtheria which was eradicated by vaccination' (P. Cullen). [A]

Impact on the Dickens's family understanding and knowledge

The transformative impact of Litvack's research into Dickens's death and burial, notably in *Reading Dickens Differently*, has been further validated by the Head of the Dickens Family

and great-great grandson of the novelist: 'This logical, well-referenced, readable and persuasive article has led to a new understanding of this important event for the family' [D].

'Technicolour Dickens' exhibition

The impact of Litvack's research was further extended through a major exhibition, for which Litvack served as associate co-curator and co-lead academic advisor (with Julian North, University of Leicester). 'Technicolor Dickens: The Living Image of Charles Dickens' was originally due to run from 19 May to 1 November 2020 at the Charles Dickens Museum in London. Due to the COVID pandemic, the exhibition in fact opened on 25 July 2020 and ran in a more limited capacity, with appropriate safety measures, until the closure of the museum in November 2020 due to new public health restrictions. There was another short period of reopening between 3 and 16 December 2020 [E].

The Museum, housed in one of Dickens's family homes, is the world's leading centre for the study, appreciation and enjoyment of Charles Dickens's life and work, and attracts visitors from around the world. The exhibition formed a key part of a special series of Museum events to mark the 150th anniversary of Dickens's death. In the 53 days on which the exhibition was open (as a result of the temporary lifting of COVID restrictions), it was seen in person by 4,542 visitors. (By comparison, 27,919 people visited the Museum during the same period in 2019, i.e. 25 July – 31 December) [E]. The Museum's Director notes that, during the time the 'Technicolour Dickens' exhibition ran, the Museum 'bench-marked well against other museums in central London, achieving between 30% and 73% of normal footfall for the days we were open' and that, despite the pandemic, they were 'achieving...admission targets when open and were on track to sell out in December' [E].

The aim of the exhibition was to convey how Dickens's image was used by the author, the public, and others to represent his work and himself, drawing on the Museum's significant collection of Dickens photographic portraits as its base. Litvack's research served as the basis for the centrepieces of the exhibition: eight brand new large-scale colourised photographs of Dickens, created by the photographer, Oliver Clyde [F].

Litvack's underpinning research on the photographic portraits served as the foundation for the descriptions of these objects. The creation of these exhibits drew on Litvack's expertise regarding the identities of the individual photographers, the circumstances under which the individual poses were conceived and other key elements including choices of colour, lighting, and retouching. The Museum's Curator of Special Projects confirms that Litvack 'was the lead academic working on the technical aspect of the coloured images and his research and advice fed significantly into the final versions of the coloured portraits'. She notes the particular impact that the colourisations had on visitors, 'with many exclaiming "wow" on viewing the images' for the first time 'and stating how these images have made them start to think about Dickens differently' [F].

The impact of the exhibition was measured by a follow-up online visitor survey. Of the 195 people who completed it, **almost all (98%) were non-academics**. Nearly four-fifths (79%) of respondents said they found the 'Technicolour Dickens' exhibition as a whole 'really' or 'quite' interesting, while three-quarters (75%) said they found the colourised photographs 'really' or 'quite' interesting. The survey findings indicate that the exhibition enhanced the understanding and awareness of many visitors. Having visited the exhibition, more than half (55%) said they now had a 'better understanding of Dickens', while 62% said they had a 'better understanding of Dickens as a celebrity in his time'. Moreover, 35% of the respondents said that the exhibition had made them 'look at Dickens in a different light'. One respondent commented 'the impact of colourisation was greater than expected'. Another said that the exhibition 'made me see Dickens and the Victorians generally in a new light' (I).

Ongoing impact on curatorial practice

Litvack's research was used as the basis for the cataloguing of the photographic collection at the Charles Dickens Museum, which is housed in one of Dickens's former London residences

and which normally has 56,000 visitors annually, including a large proportion of tourists from across the world. [F]

The advice which Litvack provided, as co-curator for the 'Technicolour Dickens' exhibition, has further assisted the Museum's curators in better understanding and gaining new insights into their collection. The Curator of Special Projects stated that 'the project and research contributed by Dr Litvack will have an important legacy on the museum database and wider impact on the collection...The labels he contributed to the project will be added to the Museum's database and collections online' and 'His research will continue to shape ongoing information requests from visitors' [F].

Auction houses

Litvack's authority in the field of Dickens letters beyond the academic sphere is demonstrated by the fact that his expertise has been sought by auction houses, museums and libraries in authenticating new letters and manuscripts which appear on the market, and by his ability to spot 'not genuine' examples of the author's correspondence. In one instance, Litvack investigated the authenticity of a letter, which appeared to have been written by Dickens, which was to have been sold by a major UK action house in January 2019 [G]. The head of the firm's rare books and manuscripts department confirms the importance of drawing on Litvack's expertise: 'Following Dr. Litvack's arguments and agreeing with his conclusions we withdrew the item from the sale and returned it to its owner. This saved us the embarrassment of having the item returned to us after the sale by a potentially irate buyer. It also helped preserve [the auction house's] reputation for only offering bona-fide items for sale' [H].'

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

- A. Impact source document A: *The Times* articles and leader and circulation data.
- B. Impact source document B: Other Media (*Belfast Telegraph*; *la Repubblica*; Westminster Abbey tweet; *Smithsonian*; One Show; Deutschland geliebte Bananenrepublik; *Washington Post*). Includes circulation data.
- C. Impact source document C: *The Conversation* article and data.
- D. Testimonial, dated 1 January 2021, from a great-great grandson of Charles Dickens and current Head of the Dickens family on the family's new understanding of Dickens's death and burial, as a result of Litvack's research.
- E. Response to data request for 'Technicolour Dickens' exhibition provided by Director, Charles Dickens Museum, 18 January 2021.
- F. Testimonial, dated 12 January 2021, from Curator, Charles Dickens Museum, on the value of Litvack's scholarship to the 'Technicolour Dickens' exhibition and the verification of new Dickens letters and manuscripts that come to the attention of the Museum. Litvack's wider contribution to the Museum's photographic collection can be corroborated by the Curator.
- G. The auction house in question can provide corroboration on the following matter, if requested (i.e. confidential report written by Litvack on the veracity of a letter purportedly written by Dickens to WH Wills).
- H. The auction house in question can provide corroboration on the following matter, if requested (i.e. confirmation that Litvack's report resulted in the withdrawal of the item from sale, and that his expertise helped the firm to preserve its reputation).
- I. Survey data from 'Technicolour Dickens' exhibition visitor survey, Charles Dickens Museum. The survey was co-designed by the Charles Dickens Museum and Queen's University Belfast, and administered by the Museum. Following their visit, exhibition visitors who had provided the Museum with an email address were invited to take part in the survey.