

"the ideal was not there": Making Peace with Dickensian Kent'

The population of Kentish 'Dickens Country' or 'Dickens Land' exploded after the author's death, as the 'old salt' who mends a child's boat in 'Our Watering Place' came forward to identify himself, and Betsey Trotwood's domicile was discovered in different parts of Dover (in fact it is based on what is now the Dickens House Museum in Broadstairs).

The desire to find 'originals' is a familiar aspect of nineteenth century reading culture. But Dickens's portrayal of Folkestone and Broadstairs and the seaside setting in *David Copperfield* interact with the always contested status of holiday reading, in ways that he may not have foreseen.

Place has a way of following David around, insofar as his memories of one location are used to frame or negotiate his standing in another. This habit of transposition anticipates the sense in which later visitors could make themselves 'at home' in Kent, as heritage guides encouraged them to stake their claim through the fictional scenes they had already encountered. This portable heritage demanded active reading practices, quite literally as readers were reconfigured as walkers or tramps who would cover the terrain 'with Dickens'. For greater practicality excerpts from the novels were helpfully provided to avoid encumbering the reader / walker with the weight of a *David Copperfield*.

Dickens was a safe bet for both public and circulating libraries, reinforcing his association with the county. So it is ironic that one Folkestone resident recalls his appearance as initially disappointing, while his son Charlie attracted indifferent audiences when he read in the town in the 1880s. Equally ambiguous is the fate of Gladys Waterer, a twentieth century owner of Aunt Betsey's cottage. A successful novelist and dramatist, she is remembered solely as the inaugurator of the Dickens Festival.