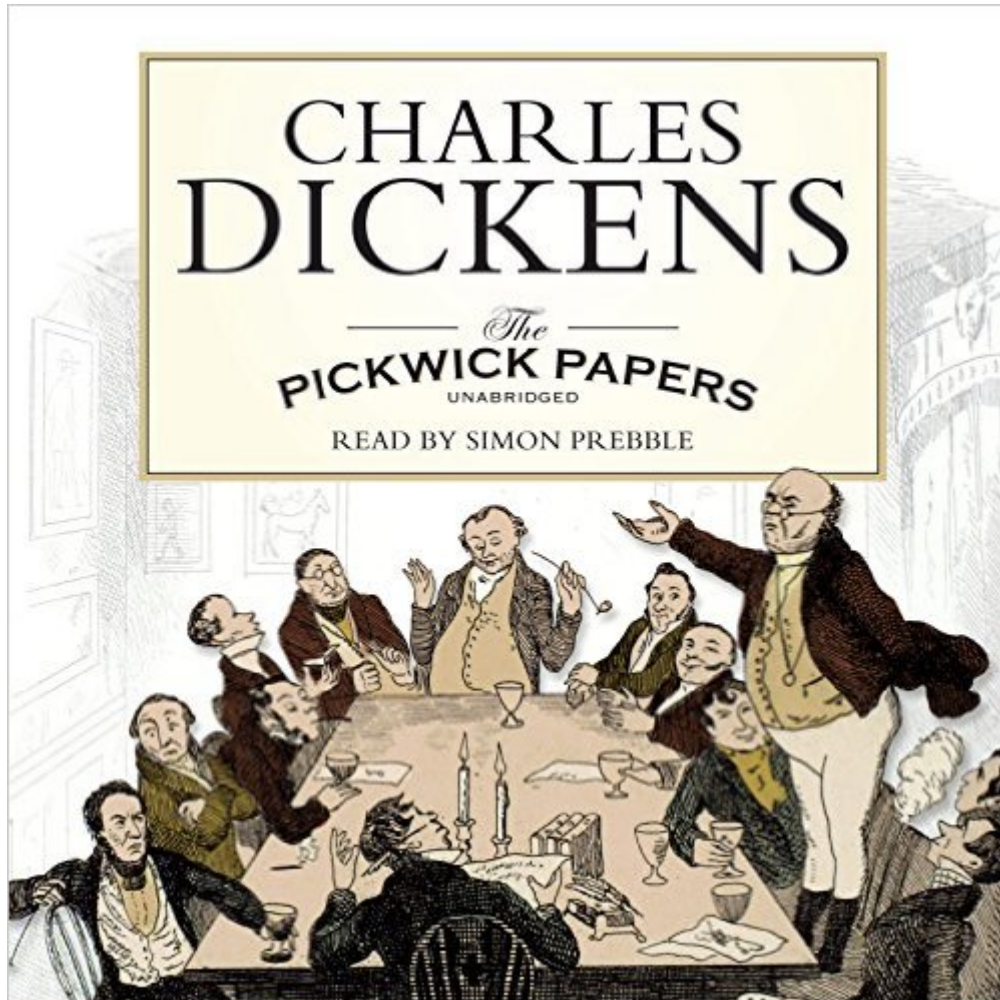


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The Pickwick Papers



Synopsis

[Read by Simon Prebble] When a twenty-four-year-old writer named Charles Dickens was asked to write a serialized story about English country life, no one anticipated that he was about to become one of the most famous authors of all time. The Pickwick Papers, as it came to be called, enchanted readers with its lively humor and delightfully drawn characters. The members of the Pickwick Club (aka Pickwickians) (Mr. Nathaniel Winkle, Mr. Augustus Snodgrass, and Mr. Tracy Tupman) presided over by the kindly old Mr. Samuel Pickwick, Esquire, agree to make a series of separate journeys into the English countryside and report back to the other club members on their adventures and observations, resulting in an abundance of entertaining anecdotes. Their travels throughout the English countryside provide the chief theme of the novel. When The Pickwick Papers was finally released as a complete novel, it became the first real publishing phenomenon, inspiring bootleg copies, theatrical performances, and merchandise based on the popular characters.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Charles Dickens wrote The Pickwick Papers in his early 20s, but the writing is first rate and as witty as any seasoned author could have done in his place! Like many of Dickens's works, Pickwick was published in monthly installments, or "numbers" as they were called then. Although Dickens originally intended to end the story at the twentieth number, the popularity of the series (and the resultant income) convinced Dickens to double the length to forty numbers. The end result is a large offering that'll take you a while to get through (~750 pages in the excellent Penguin edition, which I read). Despite its length, Pickwick never tries your patience. It's delightfully humorous from

beginning to end. Samuel Pickwick is the bumbling, middle-aged, wealthy namesake of this novel. He's the leader of a small group of single men that gets into all sorts of mischief, both physical and social. Booze is rampant. Apparently liquor back then was much more a part of daily life than today; everywhere these guys go they party and get drunk. They get into trouble with the law, women, unsavory characters, and more. Characterization is superb. This is one of the few novels I've read for which I can actually say that I got to know the characters. In most books I've read, the characters remain two-dimensional and the plot is what carries the story. In Pickwick, the *characters* are the essence of the story and the novel wouldn't be memorable at all if a lesser author were attempting to breathe life into these people. The Penguin edition includes a decent collection of endnotes to help explain unfamiliar portions of the text. Nevertheless, there were still quite a few words and concepts peculiar to early 19th century England that I didn't grasp.

I have absolutely no doubts whatsoever that Charles Dickens, if he lived today, would still classify as an author's author. He's a master of all the things that make for great writing and storytelling. Dickens has an ear for dialogue most authors would kill their own mothers to possess. He also is a master of creating vivid scenery, another sign of excellence essential to great writing and one which many authors lack. Finally, but not least in importance, Dickens knows character development. He REALLY knows how to develop intriguing characters, to the point where many of his books spawned figures that have become literary archetypes. Not bad for a guy who grew up in extremely adverse circumstances. He even spent some time in a factory sticking labels on bottles after his father's imprisonment for debt. Most people wouldn't recover from such poverty, but Dickens did. He went on to a successful career in journalism before settling down as an author of serial novels. This format, which allowed Dickens to write and release his stories piecemeal, made him a great success with the public. The anticipation for the latest chapter or two of his stories often led to near riots. Not many writers can duplicate this feat today. "The Pickwick Papers" is one of Dickens's earliest works, written when the author was a mere twenty-four years old. You wouldn't know his age by reading the story, though. "Pickwick" is a work that delivers healthy doses of sophisticated humor, keen observations on pressing social issues, romance, and a mature knowledge of human behavior. It's of course fiction, although Dickens presents the story as a true series of events documented by the "Pickwick Club," a social organization founded by retired businessman and all around merry fellow Samuel Pickwick.

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