

Charles Dickens, Cockney and the Storytelling Tradition

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'Charles Dickens by Don', © Garry Knight, 2011.

"He do the police in different voices"

My research investigates the way in which Charles Dickens represents cockney dialect in his novels. This chapter focuses on the *Pickwick Papers* and *Master Humphrey's Clock* and how Dickens uses cockney as an alternative, storytelling voice. I examine how Dickens promotes 'non-standard' English in the novel, particularly through the heroic character of Samuel Weller, whilst at the same time exploiting cockney dialect as it becomes a popular and marketable selling point. Dickens's background as a short-hand reporter, combined with his interest in the theatre, meant that he had a keen ear for variations of speech and was able to represent speech well through writing.

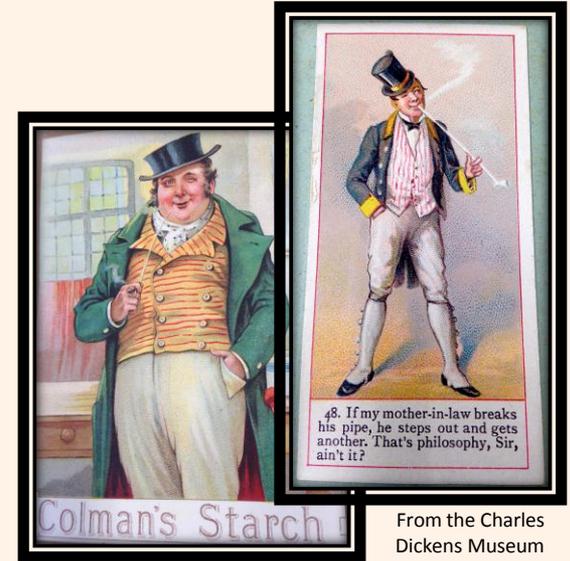
Pickwick and the Wellers

Sam and Tony Weller were instantly popular when they were introduced in the 4th issue of the *Pickwick Papers* in June 1836. The Wellers' literary dialects feature markers associated with cockney, for example swapping 'v' and 'w' and using double negatives. Sam Weller's numerous anecdotes in the novel showcase his language. Sam Weller has a linguistic dexterity which outwits his adversaries. His storytelling role in the novel is not only to entertain, but to expose hypocrisy and provide Dickens with an alternative, working-class voice, which meant that his novel appealed to a wider audience.



From the Charles Dickens Museum

'He wants you partickler; and no one else 'll do, as the devil's private secretary said ven he fetched away Doctor Faustus,' replied Mr. Weller.'
(*Pickwick Papers*, Chapter, XV.)



From the Charles Dickens Museum

Master Humphrey and Beyond

The popularity of the Wellers was reflected in an almost instantaneous explosion of merchandising, adaptations and plagiarisms, in which the Wellers' characteristic, cockney speech was nearly always an important feature. In 1840, Dickens attempted to resurrect the Wellers, by including them as guests in *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Dickens places them in a storytelling role again and exaggerates some of the features of cockney dialect in their speech, showing an awareness of the marketability of cockney and hoping to benefit from it. The Wellers remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, creating a popular image of cockney speech, in contrast with other more negative depictions.