

FOOD & WINE

DINING WITH DICKENS

By Barbara Ann Rosenberg



Mr. Muzzle's kitchen from *The Pickwick Papers*.

the place gets crowded) with folks who are drawn by the eclectic NewMarket shopping area. In the dining room he'd find familiar etchings and a menu with some dishes he might recognize, such as fish and chips at lunch, and roast beef and Yorkshire pudding at dinner, but he'd be surprised when he encountered poached rabbit with shitake mushrooms and juniper cream sauce, or paupiettes of sole with oyster and truffle stuffing and hollandaise sauce. Provincial indeed!

The Dickens Inn is run by Cedric Charles Dickens, the great-grandson of the English author. It is under the management of Dickens Ltd., a group of young British folks, some of whom, such as Paul Pinnock, the Sales Director, are graduates of Thanet and Oxford, as well as other prestigious catering colleges.

A life-long food lover with particular interest in the eating and drinking habits of his great-grandfather's day, Cedric has been with the group since 1975 when he strolled into their newly opened restaurant (recently sold) near the Tower of London and offered his services along with his family's familiar name. He's been running the Philadelphia restaurant since it started in 1980.

Recently, he wrote a book of his own called *Dining with Dickens* in which he notes that "the trend is back to real cooking, helped by the many radio and TV programmes, books and cookery courses." To help *Applause* readers go along with the trend, the restaurant shared some proper recipes for genuine English dishes. His great-grandfather would be proud.

□

WELSH RAREBIT

Serves 6

- ½ Lb. Cheshire (or cheddar) cheese, grated
- 1 Oz. butter
- 5 Tbs. Guinness Stout Ale
- 2 Tsp. dry mustard
- A few drops of Angostura Bitters and Tabasco

Melt the butter in a double boiler or chafing dish over hot water. Add the grated cheese and stir until melted. Mix mustard with beer and add to cheese. Add seasonings. Serve hot on toast.

Since the publication of *A Christmas Carol* in 1843, the name Charles Dickens has become synonymous with the spirit of the Yuletide season. This month on TV12, viewers can sample three adaptations of Dickens' classics (although, unfortunately, *A Christmas Carol* is not among them): a new eight-part Masterpiece Theatre presentation of *Bleak House*, starring Diana Rigg, beginning Sunday, December 8, at 9 p.m.; a 1947 film version of *Nicholas Nickleby*, airing Sunday, December 8, at 11:30 p.m.; and a 1948 film version of *Oliver Twist*, airing Sunday, December 29, at 11:30 p.m.

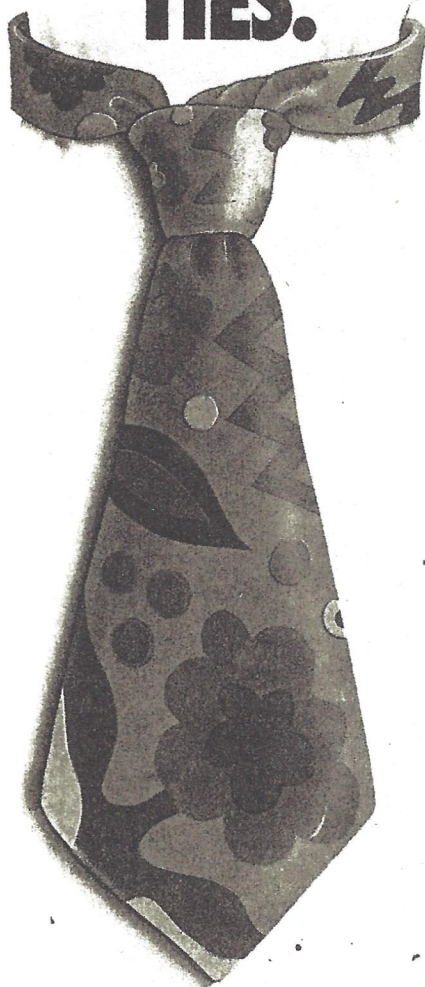
Charles Dickens came to Philadelphia once and wrote about his impressions

and experiences in *American Notes*. It took him six hours, two changes of trains and two ferries to get here from New York. When he finally did arrive, he observed that Philadelphia is "more provincial than Boston or New York." He just plain hated Philadelphia's brick pavements. "Distractingly regular," he called them. "After walking about for an hour or two, I felt that I would have given the world for a crooked street."

If he came back today, he would certainly feel that Philadelphia has lost its provincial air, especially if he wandered into the restaurant that bears his name, the Dickens Inn, located at NewMarket in Philadelphia's Society Hill neighborhood.

He'd feel right at home in the pub-like atmosphere of the bar, where Society Hill locals rub elbows (almost literally when

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MORE SUPER EATERS

Although it's the largest and most active of the eating societies in town, the *Confrerie de la Chaîne des Rôtisseurs* is not alone in its quest for nirvana at the table. Here are a few more:

The all-male Philadelphia chapter of the London-based *International Wine and Food Society* consists of about 50 guys who enjoy eating stag at most of their multi-course dinners (ten a year, rotating among restaurants and hotel dining rooms in town and in the burbs, with an occasional foray into an informal ethnic place). Dinners are mostly black-tie. Since the reason for the Society's existence is purportedly educational, president Herb Engelbert says they intend to keep it for men only, "because when we invite the spouses or spouse equivalents to our dinners, there's too much socialization to maintain the focus of the critique." Spouses (or spouse equivalents) are included, however, in wine and/or caviar tastings and a dinner or two each year. Dues are \$250 a year, most of which, according to Engelbert, "goes to maintain our wine cellar." There are no restaurant professionals in the group, because, Engelbert says, "It's tough to eat in another member's restaurant and be objective, or even diplomatic, in your criticism of the food." He sees no conflict, though, in having wine professionals in the group. For membership information, contact Herb Engelbert at 635-4866.

The *Commanderie de Bordeaux* was established shortly after World War II "as an arm and extension of the *Grand Conseil de Bordeaux*," according to George Chimples, a lawyer and secretary of the region. "We take our wine collecting rather seriously." Chimples notes that when The *Commanderie* wanted to pay homage to its late founder, Arnold Bayard, the toast was made with three cases of 1961 wine, "all *grand cru* from our own cellars—Château Palmer, Château Pichon Longueville-Baron and Château Grand-Puy-Lacoste." The *Commanderie* is intentionally small: "Only about 40 members," says Chimples, "and we have a waiting list of about 100." Dues are \$50-\$75 a year to the headquarters in Bordeaux and roughly an equal amount to the chapter here. The group has four or five functions a year, two stag and two not, plus a coed picnic. Contact George Chimples at 564-8012.

The *Commanderie des Chevaliers du Tastevin* has its headquarters at the magnificent medieval château Clos de Vougeot, right in the heart of the Burgundy vineyards. Alfred Putnam, another prominent lawyer, is the *grand sénéchal* (president) of the local *Tastevin*, and, like the other officers, shows up for its formal dinners in floor-length robes styled after those worn in medieval Burgundy. While the *Tastevin* is considered to be the "old-guard" club in the area, there is actually quite a lot of cross-membership between it and the *Bordeaux* group, as well as with some of the other eating societies. Robert Montgomery Scott, the president of the Art Museum, is a member of the *Tastevin* and is the *maître* (president) of The *Commanderie de Bordeaux*. And so he doesn't miss a meal, he belongs to the *Wine and Food Society* as well. The *Tastevin* has only 50 or so people at each of its dinners, because, says Putnam, "it's very difficult to produce a fine dinner for a large number of serious diners." Women are invited to some of the dinners, he says. "It's just not as much fun without the ladies." They have only two or three dinners a year—at top restaurants or in members' homes—and are not as active as the *Wine and Food Society*, says Putnam, and he should know: He's a member of that, too. Dues are nominal, he says. Contact Alfred W. Putnam at 568-7500.

There is a new eating group in town that's flexing its gastronomic muscles—the *Caterina de Medici Society*, which had its first meeting in 1984. It was founded, according to its president, Mario Mele, "to raise the public awareness of the various kitchens of Italy and their glorious classical wines." And the *Caterina* (as it's familiarly known) tries its best to accomplish that by mounting about eight dinners a year at the restaurants of its *fonditori* (founders), including some of the best dining rooms in town, La Famiglia, Monte Carlo Living Room, Gaetano's and La Buca among them. Dress is mostly black-tie. Each of the 150 or so members pays \$100 a year dues, and each dinner tab is about \$90-\$125, depending largely on the wines. The group sponsors numerous tastings of unusual Italian wines during the year, and following the lead of the *Chaîne*, the *Caterina* recently put a luncheon and a picnic on its calendar. Contact Mario Mele at 224-8888.

There's one last group, one that calls itself the *Pigs* (Philadelphia International Gastronomic Society). It's 20 members, all in the food and wine business. No discussion. No educational purpose. No sashes or ribbons. Not even any dues. The only reason this bunch gets together is to have fun, guzzle and eat. Contact Joel Assouline at 225-8600.

—Barbara Ann Rosenberg