

NAXOS
AudioBooks

**CLASSIC
FICTION**

Charles Dickens
The Pickwick Papers

Read by **Anton Lesser**



NA416612D

1	The Transactions of the Pickwick Club	4:01
2	Mr Samuel Pickwick burst like another sun...	7:52
3	Manoeuvres in Rochester	11:00
4	How Mr Pickwick undertook to drive...	8:09
5	...And Mr Winkle learned to ride	9:43
6	Mr Wardle of Manor Farm	15:32
7	Softer feelings in the bosom of Mr Tracy Tupman	10:12
8	Mr Jingle's intentions	8:46
9	The supper was ready laid...	4:45
10	How much are they ahead?	6:47
11	They resumed their journey	8:42
12	Sam Weller – in striped waistcoat...	14:52
13	Mr Pickwick's landlady – Mrs Bardell	10:58
14	Ode to an Expiring Frog	14:11
15	On to Bury St Edmunds and a surprise	9:28
16	Evening in the grounds of Westgate House	9:50
17	An unexpected lawsuit	5:49
18	Mr Weller, senior	4:15
19	Peter Magnus, a suitor	12:56
20	Mr Weller meets an old acquaintance	3:43

21	The oratory of proposition	7:51
22	George Nupkins, principal magistrate	3:55
23	Mr Pickwick's dinner is interrupted	5:37
24	Mr Pickwick faces Mr Nupkins	7:26
25	Sam meets Mary	7:37
26	The Pickwick Christmas	7:57
27	Mr Benjamin Allen and Mr Bob Sawyer	2:51
28	Off to skating	5:27
29	Fancy-sliding and Mr Pickwick takes a dip	4:28
30	In court: Bardell versus Pickwick	4:26
31	'Call Nathaniel Winkle'	6:38
32	Mr Pickwick's slumbers are interrupted	1:55
33	The Debtor's Prison	4:03
34	Familiar faces	2:59
36	Visitors for Mr Pickwick	2:28
37	Mrs Bardell goes on an unexpected journey	4:51
38	Mr Perker suggests a solution and Mr Winkle arrives	4:33
38	More marriages	4:33
39	Sam Weller makes his commitment	6:51
40	Mr Pickwick announces his retirement	7:51

Total time: 4:46:11

Charles Dickens

The Pickwick Papers

The Posthumous Papers of the Pickwick Club (1837) was Dickens's first fiction and, after a slow start, established him as a popular and successful novelist. It was originally issued in twenty monthly episodes and consists of a loosely-connected series of adventures based on the activities of the Corresponding Society of the Club: Mr Samuel Pickwick, the leader of this group, is a retired businessman of benevolent soul and enquiring mind; his three followers are Mr Tracey Tupman (much given to romantic infatuation), Mr Augustus Snodgrass (something of a poet) and Mr Nathaniel Winkle (a would-be sportsman). The opening chapter chronicles the acceptance of Mr Pickwick's proposal that he and his friends should form a Corresponding Society which will 'forward, from time to time, authenticated accounts of their journeys and investigations'. Upon this simple conceit the novel is founded.

The Pickwick Papers have long been loved for their broad and generous comic vision. The events range from the farcical to the sentimental but also include a variety of sharply-observed, mildly satirical scenes and

characters: Dickens is genially scathing about (for example) the legal system – see Mrs Bardell's breach of promise action – and surprisingly passionate in his strictures on the debtors' prisons of the day – see Mr Pickwick's sojourn in the Fleet. Folly and self-deception are mocked, but Dickens avoids the more uncompromising satire of his eighteenth-century predecessors, although the episodic structure and broad comedy often recall writers like Fielding. And the essential tone of the novel is benign: marriage, home and family lie at the end of the narrative for almost everyone, it seems. Mr Pickwick, it is true, remains single (but then his role is essentially avuncular), and so does Mr Tupman (whose romantic ardour is in any case more suited to the ideal than the real). The scenes at Dingley Dell – famously, the Christmas episode – express most fully the novel's moral and emotional core.

Modern listeners will also enjoy the picture of an England which even for Dickens was already passing: by setting his novel in 1827, ten years before its composition, he seems to be intent on

capturing the pre-Reform Bill, pre-railway world of corrupt elections and cumbersome stagecoach travel.

The latter is especially significant: Pickwick and his companions, travelling by coach, must perforce stop at intervals for refreshment and accommodation, so that the whole bustling world of the road, its towns and taverns, comes to life on these pages. This is above all the world of Sam Weller, perhaps the finest comic creation in the novel: Sam, whose introduction is artfully delayed, becomes his innocent master Pickwick's indispensable guide through the perils of life. Weller belongs to an old tradition of the servant who is wiser than his master – an obvious twentieth-century example would be Jeeves – and he perfectly expresses in his own nature the mixture of exuberant high spirits, worldly wisdom and human decency which the novel as a whole articulates.

Charles Dickens was born in 1812 in Portsmouth. His father was imprisoned for debt and the twelve-year-old Charles sent to work in a blacking factory; these experiences influenced (for example) David Copperfield and Little Dorrit. Having learnt shorthand, he became a Parliamentary reporter and began to submit magazine pieces. In 1837 *The Pickwick Papers* brought Dickens fame, and the rest of his literary career was almost uninterruptedly successful. His personal life was less happy: eventually he separated from his wife, Catherine, partly as a result of his growing intimacy with Ellen Ternan, the actress, and he died relatively young in 1870, his last novel, *The Mystery of Edwin Drood*, unfinished.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside

Cover picture: Frank Reynolds. Illustration from the 1910 edition of *The Pickwick Papers*.
Courtesy The Bridgeman Art Library, London.

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

DANZI WIND QUINTETS/SEXTET	8.553076
Michael Thompson Wind Quintet	
BRICCIALDI/CAMBINI WIND QUINTETS	8.553410
Avalon Wind Quintet	
SCHUBERT OCTET D.72	8.550389
Schubert Ensemble, Budapest	

Music programming by Nicolas Soames

Charles Dickens

The Pickwick Papers

Read by **Anton Lesser**

The Pickwick Papers, Dickens's first novel, is a glorious romp through the pre-Reform Bill England of 1827. Travelling by stagecoach, the innocent but well-intentioned Pickwick and his equally naive friends, all in search of 'interesting scenes and characters', are repeatedly saved from disaster by the resourceful and quick-witted Sam Weller...



Anton Lesser has worked extensively at the National Theatre and is an Associate Artist of the RSC where he has played over the years many of the principal Shakespearean roles including Troilus, Romeo, Petruccio and Richard III. His many appearances on television include *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Invasion Earth* and *Vanity Fair*. For Naxos AudioBooks he also reads *The Iliad*, *The Odyssey*, *The Pied Piper of Hamelin* and *Other Favourite*

Poems, *Paradise Lost*, *A Tale of Two Cities*, *Great Expectations*, *Hard Times*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *The Old Testament*, *The Happy Prince* and takes the title role in *Hamlet*.

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Total time
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