

A Note on the Imaginary Date of *Bleak House*

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I

It is by no means a matter of simple and easy computation to fix an exact date to the story of *Bleak House*, because while there is scarcely any specific statement of the time the action of the novel takes place, it nevertheless abounds in temporal references very complex in nature and, at times, apparently contradictory to one another. When one tries to decide on any one date or period, therefore, one is more or less liable to pick out just some one or other of the salient indications of time in comparative disregard of all the rest.

K. J. Fielding, for example, in hazarding the bold assertion that *Bleak House* was written as "a deliberate period-piece of the eighteen-twenties," may be presumed to rely largely on W. S. Holdsworth who dated the story about 1827, positively "the very worst period of the Court of Chancery," on the assumption (after J. B. Atlay) that the Lord Chancellor described in the novel was Lord Lyndhurst who first assumed office that year.⁽¹⁾

T. W. Hill, again, in the prefatory remarks at the head of his "Notes on *Bleak House*," considers "the early thirties of the nineteenth century" to be the imaginary time of the story. It was, according to Hill, a favourite period with Dickens, the period also of *Oliver Twist* and *Nicholas Nickleby* when he was at the height of his descriptive powers. Hill bases his theory on a reference in the novel to the new railway

in the course of construction around that time (Chapter LV), though in the main body of his notes, he seems to give slight modification to his position and sets down "the late 1830's and early 1840's" as the approximate date of *Bleak House*: a likelier guess, for he himself notes that the actual construction of the railway from Lincolnshire, as yet in perspective in Chapter LV, was in fact begun only in 1846.⁽²⁾

Humphry House's unravelling of the novel's "chronological tangle," as he calls it, is carried out on a more comprehensive basis and altogether in a better-balanced manner than attempted by either of the critics mentioned above. He divides the seemingly confused mass of details into three distinct groups or categories, sorted out and layered, as it were, according to their respective dates. These groups are as follows:

- 1 material drawn from the personal experience of Dickens's early days (1823-1831).

Guppy and Jobling, with "the whole atmosphere of the legal parts of the book," as well as the "Spanish refugees" (Chapter XLIII) fall under this category.

- 2 material roughly covering the period between the later 1830's and the early 1840's.

In this class are included: the landscape undergoing complete metamorphosis in preparation for the coming railway from Lincolnshire; Inspector Bucket of the

Detective (first organized in 1844) and a "Peeler" (dating from 1829) who is scornful of the obsolescent beadle; Mrs. Pardiggle (Puseyism); Mrs. Jellyby (modelled on Mrs. Chisolm and the Niger Expedition); Mr. Turveydrop with his outmoded dandyish department; and also the "Carlyle-like attack on the latest dandyism" (Chapter XII)—critical partly of the Oxford Movement (flourished 1835–1845) and partly Young England (active about 1844). Lyndhurst, who was the Lord Chancellor first from 1827 to 1830, again in 1834 and finally from 1841 to 1846, naturally falls into both group 1 and 2.

3 material chiefly concerned with "the immediate present" (1850–1852).

Such topicalities as the Court of Chancery and the slums; and, of course, George Ruby, excluded from giving evidence at the Guildhall on 8 January 1850 (an extreme case of illiteracy, often deemed in those days one of the causes of crime and a proper occasion for the advocacy of National Education, a very topical subject, too) belong to the third group.⁽³⁾

Hence House concludes that group 2 forming the main and most substantial body of temporal references, the story itself in all likelihood commenced in the early 1840's, though he never loses sight of group 1 material intermingling with group 2, and group 3 overlaid on "this confusion of the past":

It seems unlikely that even Dickens, careless as he was, would have brought to life such marked and dated people as Mrs. Pardiggle, Mrs. Jellyby, and Inspector Bucket, in a world that could not possibly have known them. It is quite possible that when Esther wrote the last section of her narrative 'full seven years' after the story proper was ended, she wrote at the same time as Dickens, in

1853; which would mean that Richard died in about 1846, and that the story probably began in the early 'forties.⁽⁴⁾

In House's chronological scheme the topicality of *Bleak House* forms an overlay or superficialities added onto the base structure of the story, the historical significance of which can only be determined in relation to the material from groups 1 and 2. For the authors of *Dickens at Work*, John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, however, topicality constitutes an all-important factor in determining the novel's temporal character. They consider that it is the real unifying principle which integrates the things and people diversely dated in *Bleak House*. Those things and people, however divergent they seem as to their dates, are taken into the action of the novel in so far as they comprise "the topics of contemporary discussion." Thus, with the one conspicuous exception of the Great Exhibition, all of the five subjects taken up by *The Times* over and over again during 1851 (three of which—chancery reform, sanitary reform and the current unsatisfactory state of Parliament and Government—directly) found their way into *Bleak House*. Dickens's attack on Puseyists and the Oxford Movement was not exactly topical but obviously touched off by the other one of those recurrent themes pursued by *The Times*, the establishment of the Roman Catholic hierarchy in England during 1850, the unpleasant repercussions of which were strongly felt in 1851.

House fully recognizes that the reputed original of Mrs. Jellyby with her neglect of her family and housekeeping was Mrs. Chisolm who established the Family Colonization Loan Society in 1850. However, he decides that Mrs. Jellyby belonged "in spirit and in detail to the 'forties," since, he judges, her African emigration scheme

reminded the contemporary reader above all else of Fowell Buxton's Niger expedition which had come to a disastrous end in 1841.⁽⁵⁾

Butt and Tillotson, on the other hand, point out that Dickens reviewed the published account of the Niger expedition in 1848, and that in the review he looked on the expedition as a cogent example of that "misguided philanthropy" centred around Exeter Hall, "still a powerful force" in the early 1850's. Furthermore, they contend that the characterization of a managing, strong-minded woman given to Mrs. Jellyby as well as Mrs. Pardiggle and other ladies with a "Mission" clearly reflects Dickens's felt disgust to that peculiar manifestation of feminism, Bloomerism, hotly argued over in England throughout 1851.

Other characters are equally topical, according to Butt and Tillotson. Inspector Field, the prototype of Mr. Bucket of the Detective, was prominently featured in *Household Words* several times in 1850-1851. Mrs. Bagnet certainly owes something to a short note in *Household Words* (6 September 1851) calling the readers' attention to the woeful conditions soldiers' wives were obliged to live in. And Dickens's respect for ironmasters, quite evident in Mr. Rouncewell, was possibly aroused by an article in *The Times* (29 March 1851) reporting their humane treatment of the labourers during recession. Even the Spanish refugees, apparently drawn from Dickens's boyhood memory, could have been recalled to his mind in a nearer past by reading Carlyle's *Life of Sterling* (1851).

Although Butt and Tillotson do not hesitate to admit that there are certain indications of Dickens's intention to place the action at some distance in time, (of which the most "difficult to reconcile" is the coming of the railways to Lincolnshire), they nevertheless maintain that none of

these indications are enough "to counteract the strong flavour of contemporaneity in the action and in the characters."⁽⁶⁾ They have indeed made out a very strong case for the overall topicality of *Bleak House*. They, nevertheless, put so much emphasis on the novel's predominant contemporaneity that they nearly give one the impression that Dickens haphazardly laid his hands on anything that came under his observation and arrested his attention just before he began to write *Bleak House*. Yet some principle of inclusion is clearly observable in Dickens's choice of material. For instance, as noted by Butt and Tillotson, he deliberately excluded the Great Exhibition from his otherwise full representation of England in 1851, while the chosen material noticeably covers all the three phases of his Chancery experience.

After all, this is a matter of how one views *Bleak House*. It is the basic position of Butt and Tillotson that it is primarily "a tract for the times" or "a fable for 1852." But it is not simply that. Rather, it is a subjective history of his time in which he poured all his experiences, personal and impersonal, and to which depth was imparted through the condensation of material from different dates. There is no need for the "distancing" and the "flavour of contemporaneity" to be strictly exclusive of each other, nor is it necessary to "counteract" one with the other. They just coexist.

Besides, in spite of his seeming carelessness about such matters, Dickens was generally very anxious about the essential correctness, or 'truth' as he would have called it, of his statements. The Preface to *Bleak House* testifies to this conscientious or self-defensive attitude on the author's part. It is a justification of the novel on two heads: one concerning the scientific plausibility of Spontaneous Combustion and the other concerning the substantial accuracy

and currency of his Chancery criticism.

The natural inference is, then, that Dickens found some means temporally to "reconcile" all the accumulated data he had on hand. Tentatively, it would not be unreasonable to suppose that House's conclusion may be most appropriate here: that Dickens chose the early 1840's as the imaginary time the story of *Bleak House* was to be set. The period is a sort of half-way house, a kind of compromise between the present and his early days, and from adopting it he could derive a certain flexibility for his handling of material. Provided he avoided any specific reference that would irrevocably commit the story to either of those periods, he could easily manage to bring in material from either without making it appear remarkably incongruous or out of place. Added to this, the early part of the Hungry Forties was in itself a very crucial period for the development of his social awareness, which had already borne fruit most notably in *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *The Chimes* (1844). The period was also the time in which he personally experienced Chancery proceedings.

The time-indicators which set the date of the novel in the middle period are of two kinds: those which by fixing the latest date distance the story for some years from the contemporary and those which by marking the earliest date remove it from the far-away past and draw it closer in time to the present. Among the former (and scarcer) sort, one of the most clear-cut indications of time may be the railway which, if adopted as a determiner, closely pinpoints Mrs. Rouncewell's urgent journey from the country on a date in or shortly before 1846. Among the latter, such people as Mr. Turveydrop and the smartly uniformed policeman are most subtly and ingeniously contrived, since they at once suggest their connection with the late 1820's

and their distance from the period: one's forlorn department appears to have been maintained for some years after the death of George IV (1830), and the other's contempt for the beadle as a "remnant of the barbarous watchman-times" was made possible only after the Metropolitan Police established by Peel in 1829 had gradually replaced the parish beades in their capacity as night watchmen.⁽⁷⁾

The following is a very brief note on the examples of both types of datemark, one example for each, found in the course of rereading *Bleak House*, which might have been cited by House in corroboration of his conclusion, but which somehow seems to have escaped his notice.

II

An example of such time-indicating details that set the story at some years' distance from the immediate present is the number of the Members of Parliament. The Reform Act of 1832 left the total number of the Members unchanged at 658, and it remained the same for over ten years, when Sudbury (2 seats) was disfranchised for corruption in 1844, reducing the number to 656, and in 1852 St. Albans (2 seats) also was disfranchised, again reducing the number to 654.⁽⁸⁾

Now there is no question that Dickens was thoroughly informed of all these changes. First, he knew 656, the current number during the time between 1844 and 1852, very well. *Household Words* on 26 April 1851 carried an article entitled "The Metropolitan Protectives," in which the figure 656 was very conspicuously featured. From the descriptions of squalid night scenes witnessed in a London station house (i. e. police station), there burst out a strong plea for the rescue and reclamation of neglected and untaught children left to

prowl about the streets of the Metropolis, and a severe rebuke to the legislature that almost wilfully continued to ignore this crying social iniquity and hardly ever took any effective steps to remove it:

There are six hundred and fifty-six gentlemen in the English House of Commons assembling in London. There is not one of these gentlemen who may not, in one week, if he choose, acquire as dismal a knowledge of the Hell upon earth in which he lives, in regard of these children, as this Inspector has—as we have—as no man can by possibility shut out, who will walk this town with open eyes observant of what is crying to God in the streets. If we were one of those six hundred and fifty-six, and had the courage to declare that we know the day *must come* when these children must be taken, by the strong hand, out of our shameful public ways, and must be rescued—when the State must (no will, or will not, in the case, but must) take up neglected and ignorant children, wheresoever they are found, severely punishing the parents when they can be found, too, and forcing them, if they have any means of existence, to contribute something towards the reclamation of their offspring, but never again entrusting them with the duties they have abandoned;—if we were to say this, and were to add that as the day must come, it cannot come too soon, and had best come now—Red Tape would arise against us in ten thousand shapes of virtuous opposition, and cocks would crow, and donkeys would bray, and owls would hoot, and strangers would be espied, and houses would be counted out, and we should be satisfactorily put down. Meanwhile, in Aberdeen, the horror has risen to that height, that against the law, the authorities have by force swept their

streets clear of these unchristian objects, and have, to the utmost extent of their illegal power, successfully done this very thing. Do none of the six hundred and fifty-six know of it—do none of them look into it—do none of them lay down their newspapers when they read of a baby sentenced for the third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh time to imprisonment and whipping, and ask themselves the question, “Is there any earthly thing this child can do when this new sentence is fulfilled, but steal again, and be again imprisoned and again flogged, until, a precocious human devil, it is shipped away to corrupt a new world?” Do none of the six hundred and fifty-six, care to walk from Charing Cross to Whitechapel—to look into Wentworth Street—to stray into the lanes of Westminster—to go into a prison almost within the shadow of their own Victoria Tower—to see with their eyes and hear with their ears, what such childhood is, and what escape it has from being what it is? Well! Red Tape is easier, and tells for more in blue books, and will give you a committee five years long if you like, to enquire whether the wind ever blows, or the rain ever falls—and then you can talk about it, and do nothing.⁽⁹⁾

A letter of Dickens's makes it plain that he carefully went over the manuscript of the article and read the proofs afterwards. Moreover, it is conjectured by the editor of *The Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens* that though the piece as a whole was written in collaboration with W. H. Wills, managing editor of *Household Words*, this portion of the article was probably penned by Dickens himself.⁽¹⁰⁾ Be that as it may, the number 656 is here repeated four times altogether with a very Dickensian persistence, quite sufficient for driving it home into the reader's (and, for that matter, the

writer's) mind.

Secondly, it is almost impossible that Dickens was entirely ignorant of the flagrant election scandal which led finally to St. Albans's disfranchisement with the resultant reduction of two seats. Early in 1851, a glaring case of electoral corruption was brought to light at St. Albans, and the inquiry conducted during the year by the Royal Commission disclosed "a system of bribery so extensive and systematic, and continued for so long a period, that no measure short of the disfranchisement of the borough appeared an adequate remedy for the evil."⁽¹¹⁾ This official investigation and the subsequent process of disfranchisement in the first half of 1852—the introduction, readings and passage of the bill—was in consequence given a close coverage in *The Times* (Dickens was its regular reader) and other major newspapers, whose example was duly (if without any high degree of compendiousness) followed by *The Household Narrative*, monthly supplement to *Household Words*.⁽¹²⁾ Dickens certainly knew what he was doing, when toward the end of 1851 (just after the Royal Commission Report and only a short time before the bringing in of the bill) he chose as one of the main settings of his next novel the place which had in the course of the year achieved such scandalous notoriety.⁽¹³⁾

Besides, 1852 being the year of the general election, the total number of seats in the House of Commons and the distribution thereof ought naturally to have attracted considerable public attention. For example, a table of the election results in *The Household Narrative* explicitly gives the figure 654.⁽¹⁴⁾ And Dickens had a personal reason to be particularly interested in those results, for he had been offered more than one candidacy for the election early in that year.⁽¹⁵⁾

Then, when in Chapter XL (published in March 1853) of *Bleak House* one encounters such a reference to the MPs as "six hundred and fifty-eight gentlemen in a very unhealthy state," does it not argue very forcibly for a deliberate attempt on Dickens's part to distance the action of the novel for some (7-10?) years from the time of its writing and publication?⁽¹⁶⁾ In that case, the specific entry in his number plans, "658 gentlemen in a bad way," evidently served as a memo or a reminder for the author.⁽¹⁷⁾

III

One of the time-indicators which place the story in the contemporary society or otherwise not so far in the past as the late 1820's, and a very small detail at that, is the number of Vice-Chancellors. The Vice-Chancellor of England, next in rank to the Master of the Rolls, theretofore the only deputy for the Lord Chancellor in the Court of Chancery, was first appointed in 1813 to assist the Lord Chancellor in the exercise of his first instance jurisdiction (53 Geo. III, c. 24). By the provision of the Court of Chancery Act, 1841, two additional judges were installed as Vice-Chancellors (5 Vict. c. 5, s. 19), though the number of three was not legally made permanent until 1852 (14 & 15 Vict. c. 4 and 15 & 16 Vict. c. 80, ss. 52-58). On the establishment of the Court of Appeal in Chancery in 1851, two Lords Justices were newly created (14 & 15 Vict. c. 83), thereby raising the total number of the Equity judges to seven.⁽¹⁸⁾

Mr. Jarndyce was fully aware of the existence of more than one Vice-Chancellor, when he said in Chapter LX published in September 1853, "I suppose the Lord Chancellor, and the Vice-Chancellors, and the whole Chancery battery of great guns would be infinitely astonished by such

unreason and injustice in one of his suitors."⁽¹⁹⁾ This awareness alone would give a date not earlier than 1841 to this part of the story.

Dickens had been well acquainted with the increase in the number of the Vice-Chancellors effected in 1841 long before he wrote *Bleak House*. In May 1827 his parents got him a position of junior clerk (or rather, Office Lad) at the firm of Ellis and Blackmore, solicitors,⁽²⁰⁾ and he stayed there until November 1828.⁽²¹⁾ Although no record has been as yet (and perhaps ever will be) unearthed to connect him in any definite way with the Vice-Chancellor of England's Court (there was only one Vice-Chancellor those days) during these months, it is not to be supposed that the junior clerk's daily stint of work could have been effectively done, if he had been only imperfectly informed about the principal judges and the whereabouts of their Courts. There is ample evidence that Dickens frequented the Court(s) of Chancery about this time.⁽²²⁾ Edward Blackmore writes that he saw Dickens "occasionally in the Lord Chancellor's Court, taking notes of cases as a reporter" after the future novelist had left his office, while George Lear, an articled clerk at Blackmore's, remembers a little old lady "always hovering in or about the Chancery Courts, generally in Court," who was later made famous by Dickens as Miss Flite in *Bleak House*.⁽²³⁾ And at Westminster the Vice-Chancellor's Court was situated next to the Lord Chancellor's Court in Soane's buildings, completed in 1828.⁽²⁴⁾

Dickens undoubtedly learned the existence of three Vice-Chancellors in 1844 at the latest, if he had not already known it. When, exasperated by repeated infringement of copyright, he applied for a grant of injunctions to stay piracies of *A Christmas Carol* in January 1844, the presiding judge was Sir James Lewis Knight Bruce (1791-

1866), one of the two additional Vice-Chancellors appointed in 1841.⁽²⁵⁾

There was also a more recent occasion for Dickens to learn the number of the Vice-Chancellors. This was when Sir William Page Wood (1801-81), the then newest-appointed Vice-Chancellor, in returning thanks at a banquet given by the Lord Mayor at the Mansion House on 2 May 1853, made a few remarks in defense of the Court of Chancery. Following is the summary (reproduced from the accounts published in the newspapers) of his speech as printed in a headnote in *The Speeches of Charles Dickens*:

In returning thanks the Vice-Chancellor regretted the absence of some of his brother judges of the Court of Chancery, and he went on to say that the court had been blamed much more than it deserved. The parsimony of the public had long limited the Chancery judges to two—the number that had existed in the reign of George III—but its business had continued to increase. However, there were now seven judges, and each case would be examined on its merits. Everything brought before the court, he thought, would be decided within a few months.⁽²⁶⁾

What Dickens reported in the Preface to *Bleak House*, published with the final double number of the novel in September 1853, was an ironically exaggerated version of the judge's speech:

A Chancery Judge once had the kindness to inform me, as one of a company of some hundred and fifty men and women not labouring under any suspicions of lunacy, that the Court of Chancery, though the shining subject of much popular prejudice (at which point I thought the Judge's eye had a cast in my direction), was almost immaculate. There had been, he admitted, a trivial blemish or

so in its rate of progress, but this was exaggerated, and had been entirely owing to the "parsimony of the public"; which guilty public, it appeared, had been until lately bent in the most determined manner on by no means enlarging the number of Chancery Judges appointed—I believe by Richard the Second, but any other King will do as well.⁽²⁷⁾

No reference to the Vice-Chancellors is to be found in either of these extracts, but the very presence of the Vice-Chancellor who had been appointed to his office in 1853 (hence his diffidence in taking upon himself the duty of returning thanks in the absence of his colleagues) necessarily presupposes the existence of the other two senior Vice-Chancellors.⁽²⁸⁾

Since Jarndyce's foregoing observation was in the last installment of *Bleak House* published in September 1853 and written about the same time as the Preface, the case may be that Dickens was reminded of the enlarged number of the Vice-Chancellors at the Mansion House banquet. But more probably it was a long-known fact with him, not only because he had actually had a very memorable occasion to know it in 1844, but because, the sittings of the Courts being separately reported in the daily newspapers, the number of the Vice-Chancellors was common knowledge shared by the greater part of the literate people of the day. At any rate, if he had intended to set the imaginary date of the novel way back in the late 1820's when he had been a solicitors' Office Boy or a reporter in the Court of Chancery, he would certainly have written "Vice-Chancellor" instead of "Vice-Chancellors."

What Dickens was not quite alive to is the fact that the office of the Vice-Chancellor (first established in 1813) was a much more recent creation than that of either the

Lord Chancellor or the Master of the Rolls. Mr. Snagsby, the law-stationer, is rather indiscriminate in his musings over "the many Chancellors and Vices, and Masters of the Rolls, who are deceased" (Chapter X published in May 1852),⁽²⁹⁾ since in fact there was no more than one Vice-Chancellor "deceased" in office up to the time the part was published.⁽³⁰⁾ (Incidentally, the "Vices" in this quotation is ambiguous. It does not necessarily refer to two or more Vice-Chancellors simultaneously presiding in their respective Courts.)

Mr. Snagsby's imagination working thus only in a vaguely retrospective way, he gives one the curious impression that he inhabits a much older world than Mr. Jarndyce, who obviously lives in a contemporary world of three Vice-Chancellors. And yet the man cannot be really old, who speaks about the Vice-Chancellor's office as if it were a long established, time-honoured institution.

Notes

1. K. J. Fielding, ed., *The Speeches of Charles Dickens* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1960), p. 165; William S. Holdsworth, *Charles Dickens as a Legal Historian* (1928; rpt. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1972), p. 79; J. B. Atlay, *The Victorian Chancellors* (London: Smith, Elder, & Co., 1908), I, p. 143.
2. T. W. Hill, "Notes on *Bleak House*," *The Dickensian*, XL (1943-44), 39 and 139.
3. Humphry House, *The Dickens World*, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1942), pp. 30-33.
4. House, p. 33.
5. House, p. 87.
6. John Butt and Kathleen Tillotson, *Dickens at Work* (London: Methuen,

- 1957), pp. 177-200.
7. See House, p. 32, and George Ford and Sylvère Monod, eds., *Bleak House* (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 130. The references in *Bleak House* made to The Six Clerks' Office abolished in 1843 (Chapter I, p. 8) and the Fleet abolished in 1842 (retrospectively in Chapter XXIV, p. 314) are also to be noticed as pointing to the period 1840's.
 8. F. W. S. Craig, ed., *British Parliamentary Election Results 1832-1885* (London: Macmillan, 1977), p. 626.
 9. Harry Stone, ed., *The Uncollected Writings of Charles Dickens* (Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968; London: Penguin, 1969), I, pp. 263-264.
 10. Stone, pp. 253-254.
 11. "History," *The Annual Register*, XCII (1852), 78.
 12. *The Household Narrative*, III (1851), 77, 81, 83, 100, 101, 103, 150; V (1852), 34, 51, 54, 59.
 13. *Bleak House*, p. 917.
 14. *The Household Narrative*, VI (1852), 149-152.
 15. *Bleak House*, p. x.
 16. *Bleak House*, p. 502.
 17. *Bleak House*, p. 790.
 18. "Vice-chancellor," *Jowitt's Dictionary of English Law*, 2nd ed. (1977).
 19. *Bleak House*, p. 715.
 20. Blackmore called his office "a solicitor's office." See Philip Collins, ed., *Dickens: Interviews and Recollections* (London: Macmillan, 1981), I, p. 11. Collins (p. 9) and Carlton (below, 163) call him "solicitor," Forster (*Life*, ed. by J. W. T. Ley, p. 46) and Holdsworth (p. 9), "attorney." But see Holdsworth, p. 50:

Attorneys were the practitioners in the common law courts: solicitors were practitioners in the Court of Chancery. They were originally different classes of legal practitioners; but long before Dickens wrote, they had in effect become amalgamated. Generally all attorneys were solicitors and vice versa.
 21. W. J. Carlton, "Mr. Blackmore Engages an Office Boy," *The Dickensian*, XL VIII (1952), 162-167.
 22. The Court of Chancery at Westminster in 1828 was comprised of two Courts: the Lord Chancellor's Court (sometimes called the Court of Chancery) and the Vice-Chancellor of England's Court. The Master of the Rolls sat for the first time at Westminster on 22 June 1829. Until then the Rolls Court had always sat at the Rolls House in Chancery Lane. See E. T. Jaques, *Charles Dickens in Chancery* (1914; rpt. New York: Haskell House Publishers, 1972), pp. 19-20. Note also the plural in Lear's reminiscences.
 23. Collins, p. 10 and p. 12.
 24. Jaques, p. 23.
 25. See Jaques for a minute account of the proceedings.
 26. *Speeches*, p. 165.
 27. *Bleak House*, p. 3.
 28. "Page Wood, William, 1st Lord Hath-erley," *The Oxford Companion to Law* (1980). Earlier than that, Dickens had published "The Martyrs of Chancery, Second Article" written by W. H. Wills and A. W. Cole in *Household Words* (15 February 1851), in which are mentioned "the appointment of two extra Vice-Chancellors" and the names of two of the then Vice-Chancellors (Knight Bruce and Cranworth).
 29. *Bleak House*, p. 118.
 30. Sir Lancelot Shadwell (1779-1850), the last Vice-Chancellor of England. Sir James Parker (1803-52) died after Part III of *Bleak House* was published,

on 18 August 1852(*DNB*). Of the three former Vice-Chancellors who were dead, Sir Thomas Plumer (1753–1824) and Sir John Leach (1760–1834) died as Master of the Rolls; Anthony Hart (c. 1754–1831), after he had retired as Lord Chancellor of Ireland. Of the three living ex-Vice-Chancellors, Sir James Lewis Knight Bruce (1791–1866) and Robert Monsey Rolf (1st Lord Cranworth) (1770–1868) were appointed Lords Justices in Chancery in 1851 (the latter then became Lord Chancellor in

1852). Sir James Wigram (1793–1866) resigned in 1850 due to failing sight. The Vice-Chancellors in office in 1852 were Sir James Parker (1803–52), Sir George James Turner (1798–1867) and Richard Torin Kindersley (1792–1879), of whom Parker was succeeded by John Stuart (1793–1876) in 1852, Turner by William Page Wood (1801–81) in 1853. See Appendix I, 12 and the entries of the respective judges in *The Oxford Companion to Law*.