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Opening extract from

Charles Dickens: Scenes from an Extraordinary Life

Written by

Mick Manning

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For the inimitable Elizona Home Roberston
1938 - 2010

JANETTA OTTER-BARRY BOOKS

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Charles Dickens was born on 7th February, 1812. He became one of the greatest writers who ever lived. Yet he never wrote down his own life story. In fact he kept details of his childhood secret for many years. Eventually he did talk, revealing that many of his characters and exciting stories, especially *David Copperfield*, were based on events in his own life.

By respectfully borrowing from his own words: conversations, letters, quotes and writings, as well as his own children's fond recollections, Mick and Brita have invited Mr Dickens to show you some of the scenes from his extraordinary life.

Charles Dickens

SCENES FROM AN EXTRAORDINARY LIFE



Mick Manning & Brita Granström

FRANCES LINCOLN
CHILDREN'S BOOKS

Charles Dickens was born into an age of war and revolution. . .





when war against France still raged, the Prince Regent ruled and the future Queen Victoria hadn't even been born.



In the early 1800s Britain was in a state of change. . . The inventions of the Agricultural Revolution meant machines now did the work of many farm labourers. Thousands lost their jobs – and the homes that went with them.





Thousands of families crowded into towns, working in the mills, mines and factories of the Industrial Revolution. Child workers did many dangerous jobs while others were forced, by hunger and poverty, into crime. These were the people Charles Dickens would one day feel such sympathy for and write about.



John Dickens was a wages clerk for the Royal Navy. This job moved him and his family from place to place around the shipyards near London. Elizabeth Dickens had a talent for comic voices and taught her son to read at an early age.

We shall call him Charles.. What do you think, Fanny?

Charles is a nice name, Father.

BABY DICKENS – 1812
In which Charles Dickens is born in Portsmouth, England

I was born on a Friday, at twelve o'clock at night. It was remarked that the clock began to strike, and I began to cry, simultaneously. Whether I shall turn out to be the hero of my own life these pages must show. . .

HAPPY DAYS – 1821
In which young Charles first performs in public

In Chatham I told a story so well and sang small comic songs so especially well, that I used to be lifted by my father on to the chairs and tables of local inns to display these talents. I blush to think now, what a horrible little nuisance I must have been to many grown-ups who were called upon to admire me!

"Every evening he was seen in a jacket and shorts of velveteen... He was quite a dandy dog's-meat man.'

He's the infant phenomenon!

Well done, my boy, well done!



In 1817 John Dickens was posted to work as a pay clerk at Chatham Docks. Sometimes he would take Charles and his sister Fanny with him around the noisy shipyard, and even sail past the old prison hulks.



The Dickens family lived next to a small theatre in Sheerness for a while. Songs came thumping through the thin wall – and the whole family would often join in!



Dickens and his father sometimes walked past Gad's Hill Place. Many years later, in 1856, Dickens returned and bought that very same house.