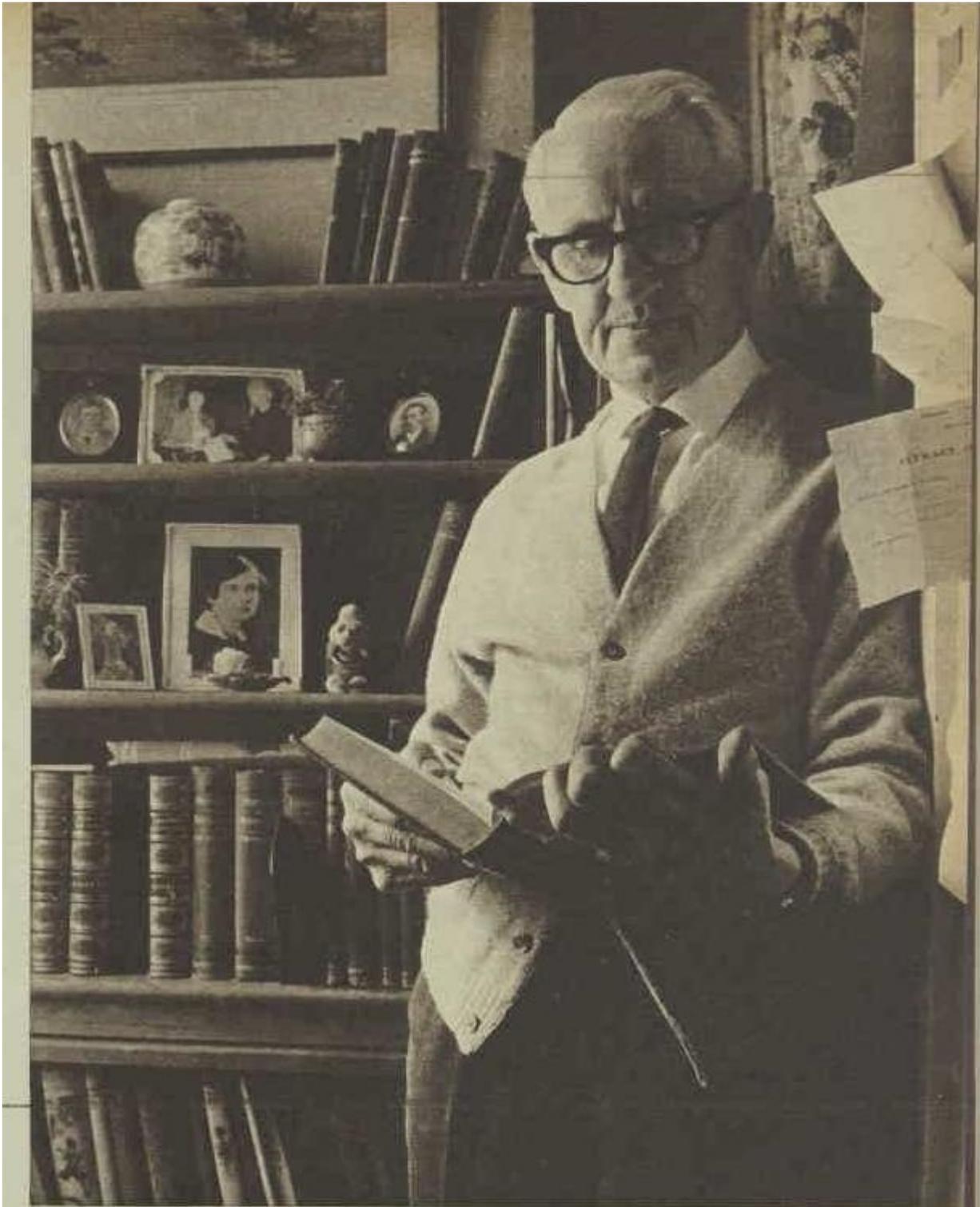


Charles Dickens' son landed here 100 years ago

(left) is treasured by Mr. Gordon Williamson (right), of Sydney, Plorn's cousin by marriage. Mr. Williamson holds a rare \$400 copy of "Pickwick Papers."



CHARLES DICKENS' youngest son, Plorn, short for Plornish-maroonligonter, was his father's favorite. This picture of him as a young man (left) is treasured by



● Plorn Dickens, youngest son of novelist Charles Dickens, landed in Australia, as a boy of 16, just 100 years ago. Sydneysider Mr. Gordon Williamson, whose cousin Plorn married, has devoted much time to research on his life.

TO Charles Dickens Australia was Utopia," said Mr. Williamson. He visualised all the poor of England flocking out here, and living idyllically on little plots of land.

"Of course, he never set foot in this country, but two of his sons did, including his youngest, his favorite, Plorn."

Mr. Williamson warmed to his theme. At his back, and all round in his tiny immercity flat in Sydney, rare old books jostled for house room.

Old prints, old pictures, old photographs, old invitations, and greeting-cards lined the walls. Folios of old letters and albums of famous autographs were piled on tables.

Mr. Williamson's whole life was there in the room, and the lives of his family, too. ("I'm the only one left of seven," he told me over a delicious morning tea, "and all my family left me some of their things. That's my brother's spoon you're using.")

Gordon Williamson is 71, and a bachelor. He is smallish and lively. In retirement from a variety of occupations, he goes on collecting old books and conducting correspondence with all kinds of interesting people.

He took down a small picture of a wistful young man,

dressed in the style of a century ago. This was Plorn, Charles Dickens' tenth child, his seventh and youngest son, who married Mr. Williamson's cousin.

"They say," said Mr. Williamson, grey eyes firing, "that Plorn was a failure. I've set out to prove that wasn't so."

wasn't so."

Unwanted child

"It's exactly a hundred years since he came to Australia, as a youth of 16. He was christened Edward Bulwer Lytton Dickens (Lord Lytton was his godfather) and he was born when his father and mother were about to separate.

"The plain truth is that the child wasn't wanted. Yet he grew up to be Charles' favorite. The father and mother did separate, of course, and Plorn loved his mother dearly. It must have been very difficult for him.

"Plorn, by the way, was a nickname given him by his father — short for Plornishmaroonligonter! Just a piece of nonsense. His Australian friends called him Ted.

"Well, he decided to migrate to the Australian Utopia at the tender age of 16. He had had the smallest training in agricultural pursuits — but then farming in Australia was supposed to be easy.

"He joined an agricultural

firm, but did badly, and went to South Australia, where he managed many properties. Finally, he travelled to Wilcannia, N.S.W., and ran a big property called Murchison Station.

"He married Constance de Sally, descended — as I was, too, of course — from a First Fleeter, a marine on the Sirius. Then he started a stock and station agency in Wilcannia.

"Then he became a Member of Parliament. Not such a failure, eh?

"He served two terms and did very well — very well, indeed. In 1893, after the

By KAY KEAVNEY

Elder brother followed him to Australia

big strike, he was opposed by a fervent unionist and defeated.

"Well, then he went to Moree, N.S.W., and became Acting Inspector of Pastures. He died of lung trouble in 1902, and he is buried in the Wesleyan section of the Moree Cemetery.

"For many years the grave lay forgotten. When I wanted to erect a monument over it, no one could remember where it was. Then an old lady, an old resident, pointed it out, and I had a tall obelisk erected there.

"So Plorn's memory will be preserved, and so will this very direct link with the great Charles Dickens.

"Yes, another son became an Australian — the sixth child, Alfred Tennyson Dickens. He came out to Melbourne and for many years had a business in Collins Street. He married into a social family and became an auctioneer in Hamilton, Victoria.

"Lots of people say that Charles himself visited Australia, but no, I'm afraid that isn't so."

One was quite sure that Mr. Williamson would know. Dickensia lined his

shelves, in almost equal proportions to Australian history.

He was reared in an atmosphere of history. His

father owned the Old Curiosity Shop at Brown's River, Tasmania. Historians and famous people like Jack London visited it to see its collection of curios, documents, and shells.

"My great-great-grandfather," he told me, "came out in the Sirius, and married the widow of another Sirius marine. The ceremony was performed in 1791 by Richard Johnson, the first chaplain. In 1808, he took

up land in Brighton, Tasmania, and built a big homestead.

"His was the first land ploughed in Tasmania, by a hand-made plough. He leased some of his land on the understanding that the beautiful bushland should remain undisturbed.

"In 1826 the homestead was held up by bushrangers, who went through the house looking for treasure. All they found was a keg of rum, which, to use the vernacular, they got stuck into. Great-great-grandfather attacked them with a bayonet and was wounded.

"He died that year of a heart seizure, and is buried in old St. David's cemetery in Hobart."

Mr. Williamson remembers bundles of old letters in lofts on stations where he worked in his youth.

"I dream about them now, wishing I could go back and

get them. Australia's history lies in old letters like that, destroyed now, all destroyed."

When he was a lad, he made a train journey with a strange man who held his hand very tightly and talked for two hours.

Henry Lawson

"It was only later I found out he was Henry Lawson! I tried to remember what on earth he talked about, but do you know, I couldn't?"

"I've done many things, had many jobs. During the Depression I worked as a

waiter, and met Helena Rubinstein and all sorts of fascinating people. I met Madame Melba at the Opera.

"I still sometimes work in a club to finance my book-buying. That can be very expensive, you know, and it's getting more so. New Australians are even more interested in Australiana than old ones — which is nice, don't you think?"

"But it does drive up the cost.

"My copy of 'Pickwick' cost four hundred dollars. I bought it from Dr. George Mackaness' library. My library is small but selective.

"Sell? Oh, no, I never sell my books. I love them too much. With my letters, they are company.

"I have like-minded

are company.

"I have like-minded friends, too. In late years, Dorothea Mackellar was my friend. So are Sir John Ferguson, the celebrated author of 'The Bibliography of Australia,' and the Rev. H. D. Mackie, author of 'The Great Divide.'

"I'm lonely, but I like to be lonely. I don't need TV. Then, too, I have my projects, like researching the life of ~~Plorn~~ ~~Dickens~~ ~~and~~ rehabilitating his memory."

He set young Plorn's picture back on the shelf, alongside a picture of Plorn's famous father.

"On June 8, 1970, said Mr. Williamson, "it will be 100 years since Charles Dickens' death. I'm very glad to have emphasised these links between a very great writer and the country my ancestor helped to found."