

Christmas Special: Appetizer

Cracking the 'impossible' symbols

Our #SolveItDickens challenge for December 2022 to January 2023 is a 'fill in the gaps' Christmas special! We're inviting participants to go back to some of the tricky shorthand symbols from the manuscripts that none of our brilliant Dickens Decoders have yet transcribed convincingly.

We've divided the challenge in two: the 'appetizer' course consists of five 'impossible' symbols from the notebooks of Dickens's shorthand pupil, Arthur Stone, at the [Free Library of Philadelphia](#). The 'entrée' (available to download separately) consists of forty-eight 'impossible' symbols from the 'Tavistock' letter.

You'll find the answer form for our 'appetizer' course on p.4. Have a go at as much or little as you like – and don't worry about leaving gaps!

Please email us (claire.wood@leicester.ac.uk and bowleshugo@gmail.com) your proposed solutions by **31 January 2023**. **Good luck!**

What you need

- The [Dickens Code \(DC\) Alphabet](#) (Dickens's own alphabet characters).
- The [Dickens Code \(DC\) Lexicon](#) here (70+ of the most frequently used shorthand symbols).
- Our [8-step video guide](#) for beginners.
- The [Brachygraphy manual](#). Dickens used this manual to teach himself the shorthand system.
- Dickens's own [notes on the shorthand system](#) (courtesy of the John Rylands Library).

Top tips

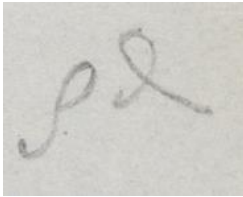
- Look at the whole sentence in which the symbol appears. What kinds of word or words would fit in the space?
- Remember that a symbol may represent two words, not one.
- Don't forget to analyse the dots, if dots are present.
- There is sometimes an alternative version of Dickens's shorthand symbol written by Arthur Stone; use it if you get stuck on Dickens's symbol.

Appetizer: five 'impossible' symbols from Arthur Stone's shorthand notebooks

'The Two Brothers': one undeciphered symbol

Check out the transcript for 'The Two Brothers' [here](#).

Symbol 1 (from page 1, line 1)



Sentence

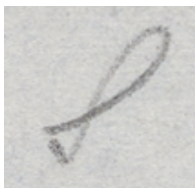
I once heard a story when I was living in _____
from the mouth of a deceased judge which struck my imagination
very forcibly.

Things to think about

- We think it's likely that this is a place name and that Dickens is using two characters. Are we dealing with a 2-word place name or a 1-word place name with a vowel in the middle of the word?
- The 'I' may or may not refer to Dickens (this could be a fictitious narrator). So, the place name may or may not be somewhere that Dickens actually lived.
- Could the first character be a longhand 's', rather than a shorthand symbol?
- The first shape of both characters looks quite similar but is very ambiguous; it could even be the same character, differently drawn; it might stand for the letters < j >, < i > or < hi >, < e > or < he >, < l >, < r >, < g > or < c > !
- Do the loops represent an < s > or are they 2 different shapes joined together?
- Does the final line of the second character represent < n > or < d > or something else?

Alternative version


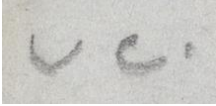
There is another shorthand version of the place name in Arthur's notebook.



In this version there is only one character. So perhaps it is an abbreviation of the place name.

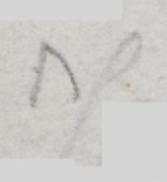
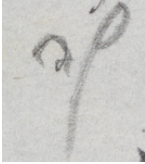
'Nelson': two undeciphered symbols

Check out the transcript for 'Nelson' [parts I](#) and [II](#) here.

Symbol 2 (from page 2, line 15)	Arthur Stone's alternative
	

Sentence

Nelson's body was said to have been very _____ was conveyed to Gibraltar.



Symbol 3 (from page 2, line 19)	Arthur Stone's alternative
	

Sentence

It is easier to transmit the _____ weaknesses of men's bodies than the worth of their souls.


'Travelling': two undeciphered symbols

Check out the transcripts for 'Travelling' [part I](#), [part II](#), and [part III](#).

Symbol 4 (page 1, line 18)	Arthur Stone's alternative
	

Sentence

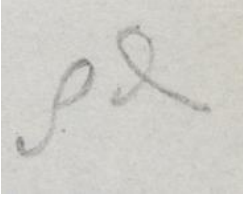

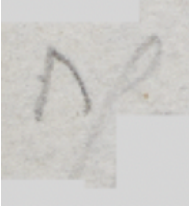

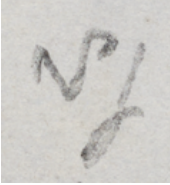
It is when a man _____ himself to consider that the action he beholds

Symbol 5 (page 3, line 7)	Arthur Stone's alternative
	No alternative for this symbol.

Sentence

I would rather travel with a ____ young Whig or even a prejudiced old one

'Appetizer' course: Your answers

Number	Symbol	Your answer	How did you decide on your answer?
1			
2			
3			
4			
5			

Name:

Email:

Country of Residence (optional):

Do you consent to being credited for your efforts and as the discoverer of any new symbols on the Dickens Code Roll of Honour? (please tick)

Yes No

If 'yes', please state the name that you would like to be credited under (this could be your full name, your first name, a pseudonym, or a social media handle)

I wish to be credited as: _____

By signing this form and emailing in your competition entry, you agree to license your solution and report under a [Creative Commons CC BY-NC](#) license and grant permission for the 'Dickens Code' project website and related social media channels to reproduce your work, with appropriate credit. If you do not provide a signature, unfortunately we will be unable to process your competition entry. If you are under 18, please ask a parent or guardian to sign the form on your behalf.

Participant's signature: _____

Date: _____



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