

Christmas Special: Entrée

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](#) (available to download separately). The 'entrée' (below) consists of forty-eight 'impossible' symbols from the 'Tavistock' letter.

You'll find the answer form on pp.5-9. 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.

Entrée: 'impossible' symbols from the 'Tavistock' letter

Background

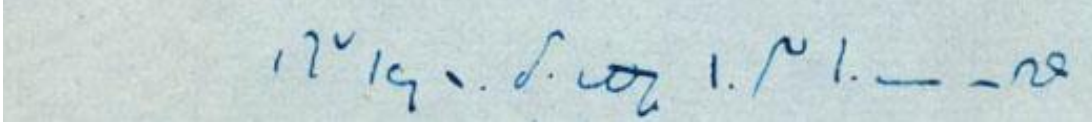
In May 1859, Dickens was a man on a mission. Following a row with his publishers, Bradbury and Evans, he had decided to disband *Household Words* – a popular magazine of which he was the editor and joint-owner – and set up a new one, to be called *All the Year Round*, over which he would have total control. His priority at this time was to make the transition between the two journals as smooth and immediate as possible while at the same time hanging on to the readership from *Household Words*. He knew that the timing of advertising and publicity would be key to a successful changeover. The 'Tavistock' letter (named after the Tavistock House letterhead) concerns an advertisement for the third number of *All the Year Round*, which had been rudely rejected by a clerk in the advertising department of *The Times*. The clerk in question had been instructed to 'say no' to anything that could cause injury to another party – and the advert's inclusion of the statement '*On Saturday 28th May, Mr. Charles Dickens will cease to conduct "Household Words;" that periodical will be discontinued by him: and its partnership of proprietors dissolved*' seemed inflammatory.

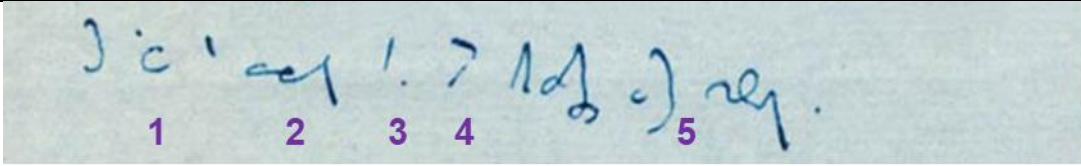
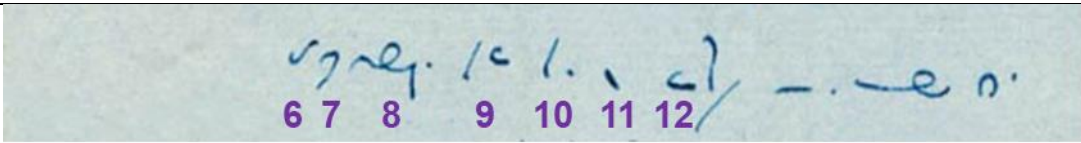
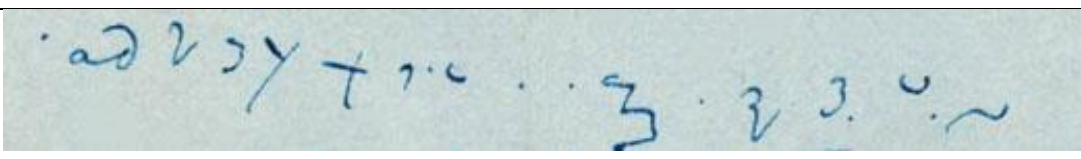
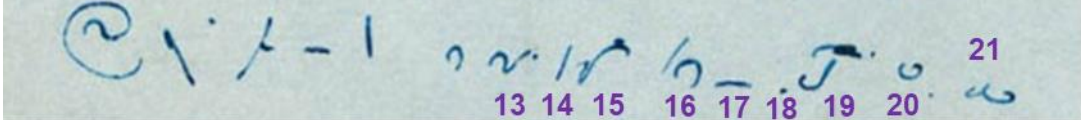
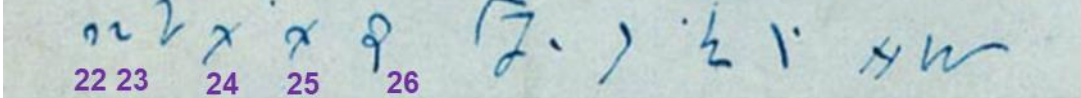
A cancelled advertisement in *The Times* came as a nasty surprise to Dickens and needed to be rectified, so he picked up his pen and wrote a letter to J.T. Delane, the editor of *The Times*, explaining what had happened and asking for the advertisement to be printed. The Tavistock letter is a shorthand copy of the letter that he wrote (the longhand copy has not survived).

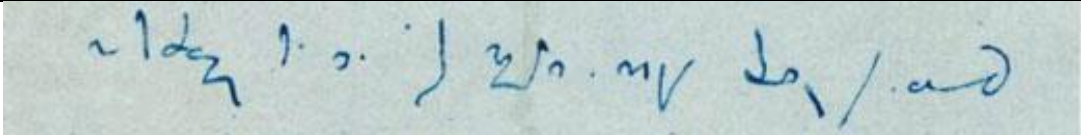
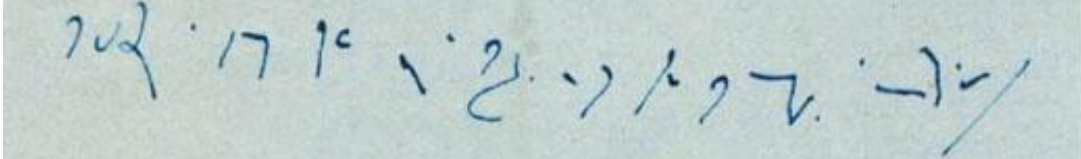
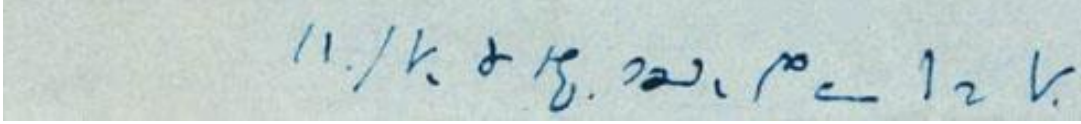
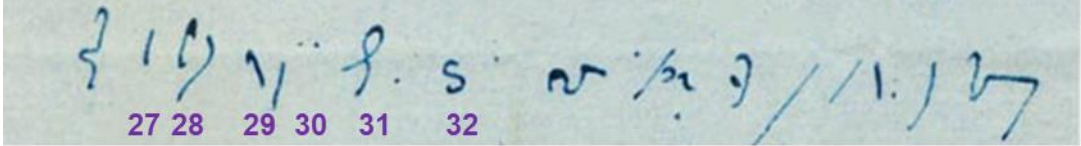
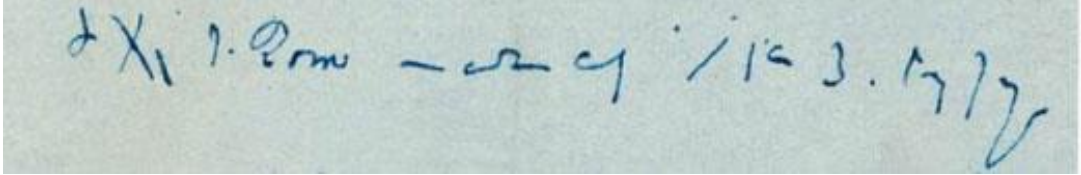
Your Task

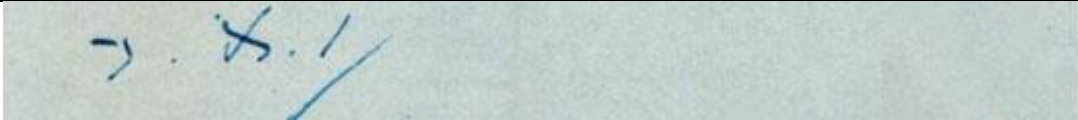
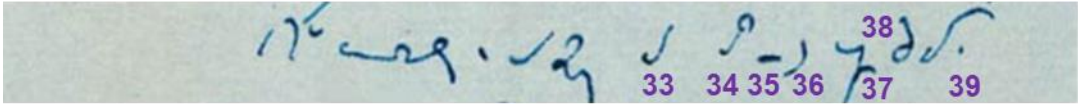
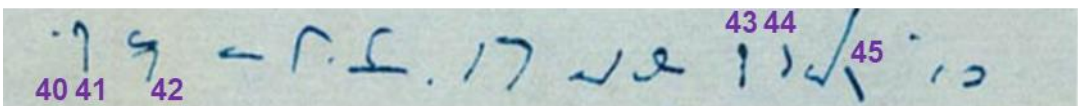
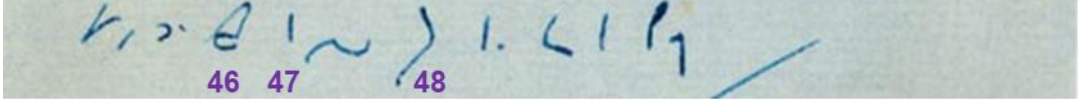
The wonderful Dickens Decoders have transcribed most of the letter – but not all of it. The shorthand symbols that you can see are the ones that have not yet been convincingly transcribed.

Can you fill in the gaps? To help you, we have written some of our Decoders' suggestions on the answer sheet (pp.5-9). Do you agree with them?

Line no.	
1	
	<p style="text-align: center;">I feel obliged, though very reluctant(ly), to appeal to you in person</p>



2	
	<p>from a __1 that _____ 2 __3 __4 advertisement ____5 yesterday.</p>
3	
	<p>__6 __7 _____ 8 _____ 9 _____ 10 _____ 11 _____ 12 in the usual way</p>
4	
	<p>the advertisement for 3 days next week of the contents of number 3 of All The Year</p>
5	
	<p>Round with a particular in it which __13 __14 __15 __16 __17 __18 __19 __20 __21</p>
6	
	<p>__22 __23 for ____24 ____25 ____26 announcing that after Ascension Day Household Words</p>

7	
	<p>will be discontinued by me and its partnership of proprietors dissolved . The advertisement</p>
8	
	<p>was refused and sent back with a message that this particular was untrue and unfair .</p>
9	
	<p>As to its truth , it is absolutely impossible that something can be more true</p>
10	
	<p>because ___27___28___29___30___31___32 a plain and simple fact . As to its fairness ,</p>
11	
	<p>it is signed by Romilly in open court and is taken from the short hand writer's</p>












12	
	<p>notes of a judgement of his .</p>
13	
	<p>I feel convinced that he himself ___33 ___34 ___35 ___36 ___37 ___38 ___39</p>
14	
	<p>___40 ___41 ___42 on any ground of sense or reason ___43 ___44 ___45 and I am</p>
15	
	<p>sure I may ___46 ___47 your ___48 to have it restored.</p>













Your answers




The 'possible transcriptions' are suggestions that have been made by our Dickens Decoders, but they may or may not be correct. Remember to check whether your answers fit the context of the letter.

No.	Symbol	Possible transcriptions	Your answer	How did you decide on your answer?
1.		<i>circumstance</i> (Roman letter used as abbreviation)		
2.		<i>/okrd/</i> <i>occurred</i>		

3.		<i>to</i>		
4.		<i>this, after</i>		
5.				
6.		<i>he</i> same symbol as n.33?		
7.		<i>was</i>		
8.		<i>present</i>		
9.		t+k, <i>take / took</i>		
10.		<i>to, so</i>		
11.		<i>that</i>		
12.				
13.				
14.		<i>I, is</i>		
15.		<i>ever, every</i>		
16.		<i>saw</i>		
17.		<i>in, on</i>		
18.		<i>the</i>		

19.		<i>June? Times</i>		
20.				
21.		<i>could</i>		
22.		<i>which</i>		
23.				
24.		same symbol as n.25? <i>picture</i>		
25.		same symbol as n.24? <i>picture</i>		
26.		<i>post, past</i>		
27.				
28.				
29.				
30.		<i>and the; of the</i>		
31.		<i>words</i>		
32.		<i>come/came</i>		
33.		same symbol as n.6?		

34.				
35.		<i>in/on</i> or is this a letter /n/ which begins the word in n.36		
36.		is this a word or is it the end of a word beginning /n/ (n.35) followed by a vowel?		
37.				
38.		<i>is not</i>		
39.		<i>every</i>		
40.		<i>and, of, a, the</i>		
41.		letter /b/ <i>before</i>		
42.		there may be a correction or overwriting in this symbol		
43.				
44.				
45.				

46.		badly written symbol; it can't be closed like this		
47.		<i>it, at, out, to</i>		
48.		<i>this, after, aid</i> ("seek out your aid" fits the context)		

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. Please ask a parent or guardian to sign the form if you are under 18.

Participant's signature: _____ **Date:** _____



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