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? WHY THE WEATHER ?

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THE DINGLEY DELL CHRISTMAS

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Authority on Meteorology

Meteorologists have sometimes remarked that a snowy and icy Christmas, such as was spent by Mr. Pickwick and his friends at Dingley Dell, according to Dickens' immortal story, is more commonly depicted on Christmas cards than actually experienced in southern England. The description is, however, true to weather history. Dated events in the story show that the Dingley Dell festivities took place between December 23 and 26, 1830, and from Howard's "Climate of London" it appears that the minimum temperatures on these days at Stratford were 16 on the 23d, 12 on the 24th, 17 on the 25th and 23 on the 26th. Snow fell on the evening of the 24th.

"These observations," says a note published by the Meteorological Office, "are in remarkable conformity with the conditions in which, we are told, the Pickwickians celebrated the festive season. That the water in Mr. Pickwick's wash-hand basin had a 'mask o' ice' on Christmas morning there is little wonder, and that skating and sliding were practicable there is no room for doubt; while inasmuch as there had been little if any frost for five nights before the arrival of the party, the ice was of a thickness insufficient to support for long the avoirdupois of so great a man as the illustrious founder of the club.

"On the previous evening, too, we find that the snowfall, to which one of the servants gathered in Mr. Wardle's kitchen calls attention -- thereby giving the cue for the story of Gabriel Grubb -- actually occurred. There was a cold, north-westerly wind at the time, and the snow doubtless drifted 'across the fields in a thick white cloud,' as described. It is either a curious coincidence or a tribute to Dickens' memory that an account written in 1836 of the meteorological conditions prevailing in December, 1830, should be so exactly in agreement with scientific records."

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