

**For Immediate Release**

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**CHRISTIE'S**

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## **GREAT EXPECTATIONS – DICKENS' WRITING DESK AND CHAIR TO BE OFFERED AT CHRISTIE'S IN JUNE WITH PROCEEDS TO BENEFIT GREAT ORMOND STREET HOSPITAL**



The writing desk and chair of Charles Dickens (1812-1870)  
Estimate: £50,000-£80,000



Sir Luke Fildes's (1843-1927) haunting engraving *The Empty Chair*, published in 1870, which shows Dickens' writing desk and chair abandoned in his study, lamenting the death of the great author.

### ***Valuable Books and Manuscripts* Wednesday 4 June 2008, Christie's London**

**London** – Christie's announce that they will offer at auction two of the most important relics related to Charles Dickens ever offered for public sale. The great author's writing desk and chair, on which he penned a number of his later novels and short stories including the epic *Great Expectations*, will be offered together as one lot at the auction of *Valuable Books and Manuscripts* on Wednesday 4 June 2008 and are expected to realise £50,000-£80,000. The desk and chair passed by family descent to Christopher Charles Dickens (1937-1999) and his wife Jeanne-Marie Dickens, Countess Wenckheim, and were recently gifted to Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital by Jeanne-Marie Dickens in order that they could be sold to raise funds.

**Margaret Ford**, Director and Head of the Books and Manuscripts Department, Christie's London: "Charles Dickens is regarded as one of the finest authors of the English language, and we are thrilled to be offering the desk and chair at which he wrote many of his later works. It is particularly fitting that the proceeds from this sale should benefit Great Ormond Street Hospital which was dear to Dickens's own heart, and which received his support and patronage in its early history. Since 1870, when we sold the contents of Dickens's house Gad's Hill, Christie's has established a long and distinguished history in selling the works of Charles Dickens. We hope that we can continue this by realising the greatest possible value from the desk and chair, and helping to maximise the financial benefit to Great Ormond Street Hospital."

**Charles Denton**, Executive Director at Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity: *“We are very grateful to Jeanne-Marie Dickens for this hugely generous gift to the hospital. The author was not only a formidable champion for Great Ormond Street Hospital but also a tireless fundraiser. Money raised from the sale of his desk and chair will help Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity rebuild and refurbish the hospital, buy vital equipment and fund pioneering research. We need to raise £50 million every year to help provide world class care to very ill children and their families – this gift will help us do that.”*

**Jeanne-Marie Dickens**, Countess Wenckheim: *“Charles Dickens was a champion of the poor and needy and an enthusiastic patron of Great Ormond Street Hospital in its early days. My husband Charles shared his ancestor's desire to help the disadvantaged and when I became aware of the fundraising needs of Great Ormond Street Children's Hospital, I knew that I had to give the desk and chair to them. I felt that it was Charles' wish, and it is an honour for me to fulfill this wish. The desk and chair have been seen and admired by the public for almost 40 years while on public view first at Dickens House Museum in London and then at Dickens Center, Eastgate House, Rochester until 2005, and it is fitting that their sale will provide care and support for the patients of Great Ormond Street hospital 150 years after Dickens himself spoke at their first fundraising dinner.”*

In 1856, having established himself as the most popular author of his day, Dickens bought Gad's Hill, a country house near Rochester in Kent, his permanent home from 1859. Dickens converted a small bedroom on the ground floor of the house into a book-lined study and it is in this room that the present desk and chair were resident. It is not known if the desk was moved to Gad's Hill from Tavistock House, the author's London residence since 1851, although a portrait of 1859 shows the author sitting in the present chair at the London home. In 1865, Dickens had a Swiss chalet reconstructed in the grounds of Gad's Hill, and he divided his writing between the chalet and his library. The desk from the chalet is today in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, having been given to the institution in 1895.

Charles Dickens's desk and chair are reproduced in a number of portraits, paintings and publications, and are illustrated in the most authoritative biography of the author written by his friend John Forster (1812-1876), first published in 1872. Luke Fildes's haunting engraving *The Empty Chair, Gad's Hill – Ninth of June 1870*, which was published in the Christmas edition of *The Graphic* in 1870, shows the desk and chair abandoned in his library and laments the death of the great author. The chair can also be seen in the portrait of the author by William Powell Frith (1819-1909), painted in 1859 at Tavistock House, the author's London home, and now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

According to the memoirs of Mamie Dickens, the author's eldest daughter, on the evening of 8 June 1870 Charles Dickens returned to the main house from the chalet and *‘while awaiting dinner he wrote some letters in the library and arranged some trifling business matters’*. Having written his final correspondences at his desk and chair, he went for dinner and collapsed having suffered a stroke. He died the following day.

The desk is mahogany and dates to the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and bears a bronze plaque which reads: *This desk was the property of Charles Dickens and was in use by him at Gadshill when he died. It is the original of the desk shown in Fildes' drawing known as ‘The Empty Chair’ and upon it where written Charles Dickens' last works.* The chair also

dates to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century and is made of walnut, with a plaque which is inscribed *Charles Dickens, Gads Hill. 1870.*

The desk and chair have passed by family descent to Christopher Charles Dickens (1937-1999) and his wife Jeanne-Marie Dickens, Countess Wenckheim, and were recently gifted to The Great Ormond Street Hospital by Jeanne-Marie Dickens in order that they could be sold to raise funds. Dickens was an early supporter and patron of the hospital and was a close friend of its founder, Charles West. In its early years, the hospital relied on subscriptions, donations and fund-raising efforts and held an annual Festival Dinner in order to raise money. Charles Dickens spoke at the first ever Festival Dinner 150 years ago, and the event raised enough money to enable the hospital to survive a major funding crisis, and to purchase the neighbouring house which increased the bed capacity from 20 to 75.

The Charles Dickens Heritage Foundation was established as a non-profit charitable organisation in 1991 by Christopher Charles Dickens (1937-1999), the author's great-great-grandson, and his wife, Countess Jeanne-Marie Dickens. The Charles Dickens Heritage Foundation was established in order to help the disadvantaged, and to continue the philanthropic work in which Charles Dickens believed so strongly. The Foundation licensed the reproduction of the desk and chair through Hekman Furniture Company, Grand Rapids Michigan, USA., from 1990-1997, as well as some other heirlooms which had belonged to the author, and the sale proceeds are given as charitable donations to organisations who support the elderly, abused, homeless and disadvantaged. Recipients in the United States include Cathedral Shelter in Chicago, Mustard Seed School in Sacramento, Grace House in Minneapolis and Holy Angels in Belmont. The gift of the author's desk and chair to Great Ormond Street Hospital, London, is the most recent of many significant charitable gifts which have benefited countless disadvantaged individuals in the United Kingdom, United States and Europe.

Charles Dickens (1812-1870) was born in Portsmouth, Hampshire, in 1812 and moved to London with his family when he was 10 years old. In 1834, he became a political journalist and in 1836, a collection of his writings was published as his first novel, *The Pickwick Papers*. Dickens fast found fame and fortune and published a number of epic novels over the following decades including *The Adventures of Oliver Twist* (1837-39), *Nicholas Nickleby* (1838-39), *A Christmas Carol* (1843), *David Copperfield* (1849-50), *Bleak House* (1852-53), *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) and *Great Expectations* (1860-61). He is recognised to this day as one of the greatest authors of the English language.

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**Images available on request**  
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- For press information on *Great Ormond Street Hospital Children's Charity*, contact Sunita Sharma on +44 207 239 3039 / [sunita.sharma@gosh.org](mailto:sunita.sharma@gosh.org)

## **Notes to editors:**

**Auction – Christie’s, 8 King Street, St. James’s, London SW1Y 6QT**

Wednesday, 4 June 2008 at 2pm

### **Viewing:**

**Christie’s, King Street – 1 to 3 June 2008**

- Since 1766, Christie's has established a rich history of selling books and manuscripts at auction; indeed James Christie, the company's founder, oversaw the sale of Dr. Johnson's library in 1785. Christie's now holds the world record for any manuscript (Leonardo da Vinci's Codex Hammer which sold in New York on 11 November 1994 for \$30.8 million) as well as the top 5 prices for any printed book. Christie's international team of specialists based in London, New York, Paris and Milan offer books and manuscripts of universal interest, from first editions of Harry Potter to the notebooks of Leonardo da Vinci, and with estimates starting from £150. Christie's also stage a number of highly successful and specialized theme sales including Rare Photobooks, Cartography, Natural History and Modern First Editions.

### **About Christie's**

Christie's is the world's leading art business with global auction sales in 2007 that totaled £3.1 billion/\$6.3 billion. This marks the highest total in company and in art auction history. Christie's is a name and place that speaks of extraordinary art, unparalleled service and expertise, as well as international glamour. Founded in 1766 by James Christie, Christie's conducted the greatest auctions of the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, and today remains a popular showcase for the unique and the beautiful. Christie's offers over 600 sales annually in over 80 categories, including all areas of fine and decorative arts, jewellery, photographs, collectibles, wine, and more. Prices range from \$200 to over \$80 million. Christie's has 85 offices in 43 countries and 14 salerooms around the world including in London, New York, Los Angeles, Paris, Geneva, Milan, Amsterdam, Tel Aviv, Dubai and Hong Kong. Most recently, Christie's has led the market with expanded initiatives in emerging and new markets such as Russia, China, India and the United Arab Emirates, with successful sales and exhibitions in Beijing, Mumbai and Dubai.