

AUCTION LETTER

While writing to William Henry Wills around the time of the letter, he would always address him as "My Dear Wills"

1
The F - Genuine
The "f"s in "faithfully" are formed with a forward-facing lower loop

The auction letter
The "f"s are looped backwards, and are formed with a straight downward stroke

2
The I and Y - Genuine
The "I" and "y" are combined, and formed from an upward loop followed by a downward loop.

The auction letter
The first "I" in "faithfully" lacks the characteristic loop, and the second is distinctly separated from the "y".

4
The S - Genuine
The final "s" is formed by a rounded, upward loop, followed by a second loop formed towards the right, then doubling back to finish under the upward loop

The auction letter
The final "s" is detached from the "n", and formed with a chicane-shaped letter, travelling first to the left, forming a curve, then downward and to the right, doubling back to finish at the end of the "n"

GENUINE LETTER

3
The C - Genuine
The initial "C" is formed from an upward, quite circular loop, followed by a thinner downward loop.

The auction letter
The "C" is both detached from the "h", and is formed in a completely different way from the original, with a distinct oval, opened to the right

5
Flourish - Genuine
Dickens signed himself with a flourish below his signature, consisting of eight waves, starting at the left, and extending from below the "a" in "Charles", to under the "s" in "Dickens", and then gradually shortening and decreasing in length to finish with a final stroke ending below the "e" in "Dickens"

The auction letter
Flourish consists of two and a half short waves, under the "D" in Dickens

Is author's £10,000 letter a Dickens or a forgery?

By Dalya Alberge

A SHOPPING channel is not the most obvious place to find an original signed letter by Charles Dickens, but the *Ideal World* TV website has been offering one priced at almost £10,000.

The only problem is that it is "clearly a forgery", according to Dickens scholar Dr Leon Litvack. He said: "It's definitely not Dickens's handwriting or prose style."

As an expert analyst of Dickens's let-

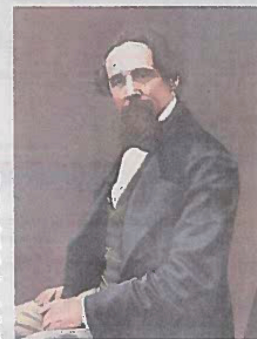
ters, manuscripts and handwriting, Dr Litvack is principal editor of *The Charles Dickens Letters Project*, which publishes correspondence that has emerged since the 2002 final volume of the *Pilgrim Edition of The Letters of Charles Dickens*.

Ideal World, which said the letter had been verified by a different "respected" expert, describes the item on its website as a "Charles Dickens Complete 2-Page Letter Personally Signed". It is priced at £9,898, with "£7.99 P&P".

The website description states: "This

item was signed in person and by hand and is guaranteed 100% genuine. Also supplied with a Certificate of Authenticity & a Lifetime Guarantee." The letter is not easy to read. It appears to be dated June 8 1868, long after he had written *Oliver Twist* and *A Christmas Carol*, among other masterpieces.

It is addressed to "W.H. Wills" - William Henry Wills was Dickens's close friend and sub-editor - and, sent from a hotel, it refers to Gad's Hill Place, Dickens's country home near Rochester,



A coloured image of Charles Dickens, 47, and, above left, Dr Leon Litvack

Kent. "Dear Wills", it reads. "I will be at Gad's Hill [sic] next Sunday and shall be at liberty to see you, as in addition to my usual office-business I have a mass of accounts to settle." Referring to a recent church visit, it says: "Doing me a deal of good both in body and mind." It signs off: "Yours faithfully Charles Dickens".

Dr Litvack, reader in Victorian studies at Queen's University, Belfast, is confident that it is not genuine. Noting that, when Dickens contacted Wills in this period, he always wrote "My Dear Wills", he said: "The signature is clearly not Dickens's. The individual letters and the flourish in the forgery are produced in a completely different way."

After being contacted by *The Sunday Telegraph*, *Ideal World* - a British free-to-view shopping channel that broadcasts on Freeview, Sky and Virgin media, among other platforms - agreed to withdraw it "temporarily" to "carry out further enquiries".

A spokesman said: "All collectables listed on *Ideal World* are verified by respected experts and go through a thorough authentication process before going on sale. While we have no reason to doubt the authenticity, as a literary expert has expressed concerns, we have as a pre-caution temporarily removed the item from our site while we carry out further enquiries."

Dr Litvack, who is consulted by auction-houses on the authenticity of manuscripts, said: "I'm very interested in forgeries of Dickens's letters. From time to time, I get letters that I find in auction houses or letters that are sent to me that are clearly not genuine."

Other *Ideal World* memorabilia include an "original personal hand written letter from Earl Mountbatten" for £44,999 and a "Princess Diana & Prince Charles Original Personal Xmas Card Personally Signed by Both" for £3,899.99.

LEGAJA ALANOVIC