

Commissioned Illustrations for *Bleak House*

In 2010 the Penguin Collectors Society brought out a beautiful and highly informative book by Joe Pearson titled *Drawn Direct to the Plate: Noel Carrington and the Puffin Picture Books*.*

Pearson reveals that Noel Carrington was the perceptive and forward-looking editor who accepted *Captain Slaughterboard Drops Anchor* for Country House Books. He was the man behind the enormously successful Picture Puffins which were launched at Christmas 1940, yet Carrington worked only one day a week for Allen Lane; the rest of the time he was 'holding the fort' for Jock Murray. This no doubt gave rise to the long-held supposition that the publisher who commissioned Peake to produce a series of illustrations for *Bleak House* was John Murray.

Pearson offers no date for the commission to illustrate *Bleak House*, but it was in the immediate post-war years for a proposed series of Illustrated Penguins. However, Allen Lane had little faith in the market potential of hardback books and he cancelled the project before very long. So Mervyn Peake's sketches remained on his hands, to be handed out or sold in ones and twos over the years. The sketches still remaining with the Peake family were published in this book, but many others have surfaced since 1983. One can be seen in *Peake Studies* Vol.8 No iv (April 2004), several in Vol.13 No iv (April 2014), and many others here.

* My thanks to Gerard Neill for bringing this book to my attention.