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# The Telegraph

## News

### Charles Dickens letter in TV forgery row as expert claims £10k letter being sold on TV channel is fake

Dr Litvack, principal editor of The Charles Dickens Letters Project, has cried foul after analysing the missive

**By Dalya Alberge**

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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 a leading Dickens scholar. Dr Leon Litvack said: “It’s definitely not Dickens’s handwriting or prose style.”

As an expert analyst of Dickens's letters, 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 per cent genuine.

Also supplied with a Certificate of Authenticity & a Lifetime Guarantee.”

The Dickens letter (pictured below) is not easy to read. It appears to be dated 8 June 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 some hotel, it refers to Gad’s Hill Place, Dickens’s country home near Rochester, Kent.

“Dear Wills”, it reads, “I will be at Gads 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 visit to church, it continues: “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, who has curated Dickens exhibitions at major institutions, is confident that it is not genuine.

Noting that, when Dickens wrote to Wills in this period, the form of address was always ‘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 Telegraph, Ideal World agreed to withdraw it “temporarily” to “carry out further enquiries”, while stating that they have “no reason to doubt the authenticity”.

A spokesperson from Ideal World 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 of the Charles Dickens letter, as a literary expert has expressed these concerns, we have as a precaution 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 consigned to them, welcomed the news.

He 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

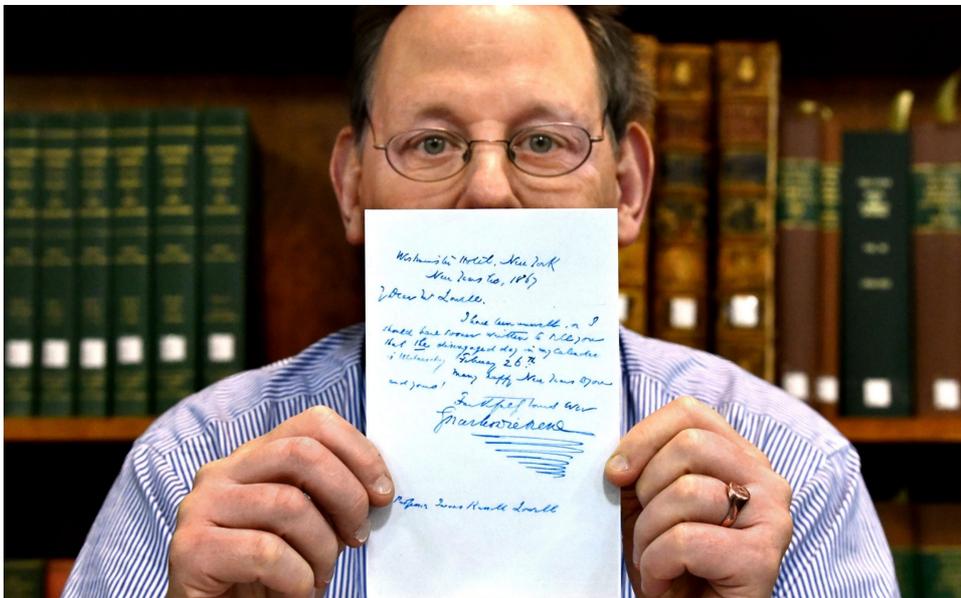
sent to me that are clearly not genuine.”

In 2019, a major auctioneer removed a letter from sale after he dismissed it: “They had it online. I spotted it as a forgery. The provenance actually was good, but it was a forgery.”

The same company sells everything from a Shaggy Faux Fur Throw for £24.99 to a Foldable Walking Treadmill for £299.99.

But it also has some manuscripts and memorabilia, including an “original personal hand written letter from Earl Mountbatten” for £414.99 and a “Princess Diana & Prince Charles Original Personal Xmas Card Personally Signed by Both” for £3,899.99.

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Dr Leon Litvack, Principal Editor, Charles Dickens Letters Project at Queens University Belfast holds a copy of an authenticated Charles Dickens letter with an original signature  
Alan Lewis/Photopress Belfast



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