



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2021

WILLIAM COLLINS, R.A. – WHEN WAS HE WAS BORN?

The date of birth of Wilkie Collins' father, the portrait and landscape painter William Collins, has generally been given as September 1788. This indeed is the date given by Wilkie in his biography of his father. After some painstaking research by Paul Lewis, it has now been shown conclusively that the correct year should be 1787. The full details of Paul's investigation are set out in the enclosed pamphlet – 'When was William Collins R.A. Born?'.

WILKIE AND THE 'DOOK'

The recent passing of HRH the Duke of Edinburgh reminds us that Wilkie was no stranger to funerals, both personal – mother, father, brother, uncle and many friends including Dickens - and public. Almost 200 years ago he wrote to his lifelong friend, Charles Ward, on 16 September 1852 about the forthcoming funeral of the Duke of Wellington who had died on 14 September that year:

Oh the "Dook" the "Dook"! How they will write about him! how they have written about him already! What sort of funeral will it be I wonder? Military I suppose. If they don't keep it simple, and free from all the damnable tomfooleries of plumes, black velvet, and undertakers – it will be a public failure with all of the public who are worth making an impression on.

WCS JOURNAL

The current issue of the *Wilkie Collins Journal* is now available on our website. It explores Collins's influence on neo-Victorianism: his legacy and afterlives in

the literature and culture of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. Our hard-working editor, Joanne Parsons, for this issue together with guest editors Claire O'Callaghan and Jessica Cox has assembled contributors from around the globe with scholars from England, the USA and Australia.

Although previous content of Journals and Newsletters is available to all, this current issue requires the **new** username **Wilkie** and password **KirkBeetz81**.

PICCADILLY NOVELS FROM CHATTO & WINDUS

If any member has any of the Piccadilly Novels editions of Wilkie's books, Paul Lewis would like to hear from you. They were published by Chatto & Windus between 1875 and 1895 in green boards with a black impressed design with a large circle on the cover. The spine has both the title and Wilkie Collins in gilt. The books measure approximately 197 x 125mm and are not to be confused with the smaller versions also published by Chatto that are roughly 175 x 115mm. They generally have a Chatto & Windus catalogue at the end. If you do have any Piccadilly editions, could you email paul@paullewis.co.uk or write to his address above as we would like to get some bibliographic details from you for a current research project. Many thanks to those members who have already been in touch following Paul's email.

'MRS BADGERY'

One of Wilkie's nicely observed domestic pieces is 'Mrs Badgery'. Originally published in *Household Words* over 160 years ago (26 September 1857, Vol. XVI, pp. 289-293). It is the story of how a bachelor, on moving into his new house, is persecuted by the constant presence of the widow of its former occupant.

It was reprinted in the Tauchnitz collection *Novels and Tales from Household Words* (1857) and in *My Miscellanies* (1863). It was then included in *Alicia Warlock (A Mystery) and Other Stories*, the collection of Collins's tales published by William F. Gill of Boston in 1875. Gill had renamed 'The Dream Woman' after its main character, Alicia Warlock. As well as 'Mrs Badgery', there are six other stories by Collins.

It has not been republished since so it was a pleasant surprise to come across it in an issue of *The Spectator* dated 10 December 2015 with two nice original illustrations by the American artist Carolyn Gowdy. One shows a figure clearly intended to be Wilkie. You can read it without a subscription at <https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/mrs-badgery>. You can also hear the story read on Radio 4 Extra – search for ‘Badgery’ on BBC Sounds.

A TERRIBLY STRANGE OMISSION

'A Terribly Strange Bed' has proved one of Collins's most enduring short stories and has been a frequent inclusion in both nineteenth century and modern anthologies.

It is the story of a young man breaking the bank in a low-class gaming house in Paris after which he accepts accommodation rather than risk taking his large winnings home late at night. The canopy of his four-poster bed is attached to a screw by which it can be lowered from the room above to suffocate unsuspecting victims. Unable to sleep, Faulkner discovers the danger, escaping to return with the police. The same plot was used for 'The Inn of the Two Witches' (1913), a tale by Joseph Conrad who claimed never to have read Collins's story.

It was originally published on 24 April 1852 (pp. 129–137) as Collins's first ever contribution to *Household Words* and later included in *After Dark* (1856). In the USA it was included in *The Frozen Deep*, published by William Gill of Boston in 1875 but interestingly its first publication in the USA was in *Harper's New Monthly Magazine* for July 1852, Vol. V, No. XXVI, pp. 202-210. This seems not to have been previously noted, perhaps because it was omitted from the cumulative index for the first 40 volumes. The index, however, does include for August in Vol. V another contribution by Collins, 'The Midnight Mass', a translation of a Balzac short story originally published in *Bentley's Miscellany* in June 1852.

'THE TWIN SISTERS'

Another relatively unknown short story by Collins is 'The Twin Sisters'. It represents Collins's earliest attempt at fiction with a contemporary setting, originally published in *Bentley's Miscellany* for March 1851. It introduces the

themes of 'love at first sight' which re-appears in *Basil* (1852) and 'identity' which features in much of his subsequent work.

Thought not to have been republished, it has now been located in the obscure *The Saturday Evening Post* of Philadelphia on Saturday May 10, 1851 (Vol. XXX, No.1554). It occupies the first three columns of the front page with the by-line 'The Twin Sisters. A True Story. By W. Wilkie Collins, Author of "Antonina" – taken from Colborn's New Monthly Magazine.'

It is the story of a Mr Streatfield who falls in love at first sight with a girl he sees on a balcony. He effects an introduction, proposes and is accepted. But on the eve of the wedding he meets the twin sister and realises he has proposed to the wrong girl..... You can read the conclusion in Julian Thompson's *Wilkie Collins: the Complete Shorter Fiction*.

PICTURE WORLD

A new book discussing in detail all aspects of Victorian illustration is *Picture World: Image, Aesthetics and Victorian New Media* by Rachel Teukolsky, Associate Professor of English at Vanderbilt University. Quoting from the publisher's blurb:

The modern media world came into being in the nineteenth century, when machines were harnessed to produce texts and images in unprecedented numbers. In the visual realm, new industrial techniques generated a deluge of affordable pictorial items, mass-printed photographs, posters, cartoons, and illustrations. *Picture World* shines a welcome new light onto these critically neglected yet fascinating visual objects. Each chapter pairs a new type of picture with a foundational keyword in Victorian aesthetics. 'Character' appears differently when considered with caricature, in the new comics and cartoons appearing in the mass press in the 1830s; likewise, the book approaches 'realism' through pictorial journalism; 'illustration' via illustrated Bibles; 'sensation' through carte-de-visite portrait photographs; 'the picturesque' by way of stereoscopic views; and 'decadence' through advertising posters. *Picture World* studies the aesthetic effects of the nineteenth century's media revolution: it uses the relics of a previous era's cultural life to interrogate the Victorian world's most deeply-held values, arriving at insights still relevant in our own media age.

Collins is mentioned mainly in connection with *The Woman in White* in the chapter on 'Sensation, Cartomania and the Photographed Woman' where the novel is used to illustrate "the themes of female visibility, portraiture and

copyism” and “the constraints of Victorian female gender roles made feminine conformity into both a desirable mandate and a fraught cage, states of being that the novel dramatizes via the divergent femininity modelled by its two female protagonists – one a formulaic beauty and the other an extraordinary heroine.” There is a colour illustration of the famous crossroads meeting of Hartright with Anne Catherick. This is taken from the front cover of the Chatto & Windus 1889 yellowback edition. Earlier in the chapter, there is a reproduction of the 1861 cover to the sheet music for ‘The Woman in White Waltz’ by C. H. R. Marriott.

The 480 pages of *Picture World* have 156 illustrations, many in colour, and is handsomely produced by Oxford University Press (ISBN: 9780198859734); £45 from the Book Depository; also available as a Kindle ebook at £29.17.

WILKIE COLLINS MERCHANDISE - WHERE IS IT NOW?

There were numerous publicity triumphs too, all through 1860, for every possible commodity was labelled ‘Woman in White.’ There were ‘Woman in White’ cloaks and bonnets, ‘Woman in White’ perfumes and all manner of toilet requisites. ‘Woman in White’ Waltzes and Quadrilles.

Teukolsky in *Picture World* repeats this familiar description of *Woman in White* merchandise. The sole source for this often-quoted paragraph appears to be *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others* by S. M. Ellis (London: Constable, 1931). The waltzes and quadrilles certainly exist; but has anyone ever seen any of the actual merchandise? Is this just a Collins myth? Andrew Gasson has been looking for references or examples in museums and collections for years with no success. Do let him know with details for inclusion in a future Newsletter if you’ve ever seen any of the bonnets, cloaks or perfumes - or even a reference to the merchandise earlier than Ellis.

CORNWALL - CONTEMPORARY REVIEWS

Following ‘Cornwall then and Now’, the second part of which accompanied the Winter 2020 Newsletter, we’ve been looking at contemporary reviews of *Rambles Beyond Railways*. Although Norman Page’s *Wilkie Collins: The Critical Heritage* dismisses *Rambles* as too unimportant a book to include, there was a surprising number of reviews in important journals and newspapers at the

time. The first three listed below give *Rambles* extensive coverage with around 2,500 words:

The Athenaeum, No. 1216, 15 February 1851, pp. 185-186.

While Mr. Collins's 'Notes on Cornwall' are writing-table results, in which the freshness of the Land's-End breezes are mixed up with midnight oil, and with the labour of sentences not unfrequently got up for what artists call "effect" Mr. Collins in some of his descriptions reminds us not unfrequently of his father's skill in representing on canvas the beautiful coast scenery of our country,—while at other times we are sensibly reminded of the skilful novelist rather than of the observing traveller ... Mr. Collins is evidently of opinion that a man must have seen Cornwall to enjoy the beauties of English scenery.

Colborn's New Monthly Magazine, Vol. 91, March 1851, No. 363, pp. 310-313
Mr Wilkie Collins, and his artistic friend, Mr H. C. Brandling, are excellent companions to follow on a peripatetic excursion in a district of such varied beauty and interest.

The ***Literary Gazette and Journal of Belles Lettres***, 1 March 1851, No. 1780, pp. 159–161.

The illustrations by Mr. Brandling, our author's fellow-traveller, are very pleasantly and faithfully executed, and cannot fail to be of material assistance to all who may incline to follow these 'Rambles.' Mr. Collins is the 'Eóthen' of Cornwall; and we hope that, like that eastern hero, he may beget a whole generation—of *home* tourists.

Bentley's Miscellany, Vol. XXIX, June 1851, pp. 668-669

In this new work Mr. Collins speaks to us "of the remotest and most interesting corners of our old English soil;" he tells us "of grand and varied scenery; of mighty Druid relics; of quaint legends; of deep, dark mines; the venerable remains of early Christianity; and the pleasant primitive population of the county of Cornwall ... curiosities which, if they existed in France, would long since have attracted the butterfly world from their haunts in Belgravia.

The full text of the above reviews can generally be found by searching for the journal online. In addition, advertisements in these various periodicals quote extracts from *John Bull*, the *Morning Post*, the *Morning Herald*, *Observer*, *Weekly News*, and *Britannia*. Not bad for an unimportant little book which ran to a second edition in January 1852 and subsequent issues in the 1860s and 1870s in both England and America.

DICKENS & CO.

Dr Jeremy Parrott, a private scholar and researcher who lives in Szeged in Hungary, has been producing some entertaining and informative short videos

which are on YouTube (search for Dickens & Co). They are based on his extensive Dickens library and collection. Many of them include a passing mention or more of Wilkie. The latest is Dickens and Opium. Dickens's Favourite Novel shows his skills off to the best. There are more than a dozen of them to be found by scrolling down the list.

If Jeremy's name seems familiar, he is the discoverer of the marked-up set of Dickens's periodical *All The Year Round* with the name of the contributor written in pencil by each piece. The WCS published some of the newly identified Wilkie pieces in 2017. You can still buy these through wilkiecollinssociety.org. Parrott's complete index with biographies of almost all the contributors – many very obscure – is awaiting publication. It reveals – among many other things – that Charles Collins was a prolific contributor to *ATYR* rather than the occasional one which most scholars had assumed.

DICKENS, DIPHTHERIA AND A NEW LETTER

The *Times* of 28 December 2020 notes the contents of a newly discovered Dickens letter, uncovered by the Dickens Letters Project and dated 24 August 1856. It describes how the Irish doctor, Sir Joseph Olliffe who was physician to the British embassy in Paris, warned Dickens about an outbreak of diphtheria in Boulogne during the summer of 1856. Olliffe's advice possibly saved the life of Dickens's family when they were sent them home to England. Not in the current pandemic league, but the disease did kill 366 people.

Wilkie at this time was staying with Dickens at the Villa des Moulineaux, Boulogne. He was working on his short story 'The Family Mystery' which was published in the *National Magazine* in November 1856 and reissued in *The Queen of Hearts* (1859). Interestingly enough, in a letter home to his mother dated 19 August 1856, Wilkie makes no mention of the local epidemic.

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

Wikipedia now has a page devoted to *The Invisible Woman*, the 2013 film telling the story of Dickens's affair with Ellen Ternan. It was directed by and stars Ralph Fiennes as Charles Dickens and featured Tom Hollander as Wilkie Collins. The page gives a detailed plot summary, extracts from reviews and interesting box office statistics. Apparently in the UK it earned \$1,374, 682.

DICKENS WORLD ON RADIO 3

The series 'Words and Music' on BBC Radio 3 featured on Christmas day 2020 'Dickens's World'. The programme included works by Beethoven, Hayden, Michael Nyman and others. The music was interspersed with readings by actor Sam West from several of Dickens's letters, including one to Wilkie from Gad's Hill dated 14 October 1862. This concerned Collins's ill health and Dickens's offer to help him with the conclusion of *No Name* then being serialised in *All the Year Round*. Apart from letters to Dickens's family, other letters were to Mrs Gaskell, William Macready and Daniel Maclise. Topics included the Staplehurst Rail crash, observations on his first trip to America in 1842 and reflections on the British government and class system.

RADIO 4 EXTRA

We were treated to two recent Collins repeats on Radio 4 Extra. *The Woman in White* was serialised in four parts from 8-11 February 2021. This particular adaptation, originally broadcast in 2008, featured Toby Stephens as Walter Hartright, Juliet Aubrey as Marian Halcombe, Emily Bruni as Laura Fairlie, Jeremy Clyde as Sir Percival Glyde, Alice Hart as Anne Catherick, and Philip Voss as Count Fosco.

The second offering was 'Mad Monkton' broadcast on 1 and 2 January this year. It dated from an original World Service adaptation way back in 1976 and featured John Castle, Gary Bond, Lewis Stringer and Geoffrey Matthews. Harking back to Cornwall, Collins probably took the final scene where the ship is sunk in an instant, overwhelmed by a freak wave, from the legend of Forrabury Church near Boscastle. The bells were lost at sea in a similar fashion when the religious pilot was ridiculed by the captain for giving thanks for a safe voyage. Forrabury has ever since been known as the church with no bells although legend says their muffled sound can still be heard on stormy days.

A listing of all Collins adaptations on Radio 4 Extra can be found by simply searching 'Wilkie Collins' on BBC Sounds, although most are not currently available for listening. It shows, however, that over the years the BBC has given quite extensive coverage of Wilkie's works. There is also a good deal of material on Charles Dickens.

A VERY BRITISH MURDER ON BBC4

‘A Very British Murder’, presented by Lucy Worsley and originally made, in 2013 was recently repeated on BBC4. The episode of particular interest, ‘Detection Most Ingenious’ concentrated on the Victorian Age. It began with the Rugeley Poisoner, William Palmer, moved on to the newly formed Detective Police together with Charles Dickens and then looked at the Constance Kent murder with filming from within the actual house in Road. This naturally led to a detailed discussion of *The Moonstone*, “The first and greatest of English detective novels” - Worsley quoting T. S. Eliot. Collins was given much credit for sensation fiction and for setting the ‘rules’ for modern detective fiction, including the country house murder and the private detective. Another BBC presenter and Collins scholar, Matthew Sweet, was interviewed, stressing the importance of Franklin Blake’s cigars and his attempt to give up smoking. Mary Braddon also received due attention with interviews with her biographer, Jennifer Carnell. Overall, the programme is well worth watching and may be still available on BBC iPlayer.

WHICH WILKIE NOVEL?

A member in New Zealand has found a reference to Wilkie Collins in a detective story published there in 2000. She asks which novel might it have been? Annabel Gormack writes:

Being partial to a good detective story and having discovered a new author of such novels at the local community library, I was intrigued to find a reference to Wilkie Collins. Edmund Bohan has written biographies of some of New Zealand’s foremost nineteenth century citizens, among them Edward Stafford and Sir George Grey. In the Inspector O’Rorke series of detective novels, his setting of events in Victorian Christchurch and Wellington and his mingling of known personalities and fictional characters increases the appeal to New Zealand readers. The stories themselves rattle on at a good pace.

In *The Matter of Parihaka* (published by Hazard Press, Chch, NZ in 2000), we are transported back to the year 1882. The Inspector is called upon to conduct an enquiry into certain events that took place after the infamous sacking of the township of Parihaka by government forces in November 1881. The Maori leaders Te Whiti o Rongomai & Tohu Kākahi were earlier imprisoned as were many of their followers, after showing passive resistance to the ever-expanding settler population and the government confiscation of Maori land in the Taranaki region.

When the Inspector relaxes after a hard day's investigation, he draws from his document case "a new and hitherto unopened novel by his favourite novelist, Mr Wilkie Collins." Given that the novel is set in June 1882, which one would that be?

Paul Lewis adds: Annabel, this needs a bit of detective work in itself! First, this novel was written in the year 2000 so is not a contemporary account and it is possible that Bohan got it wrong. No Wilkie novel was published in 1882. *The Black Robe* was published in book form in April 1881 and his next, *Heart and Science*, in May 1883. I am not aware of a New Zealand publication of *The Black Robe* or indeed any Wilkie works at this time. We must conclude it was *The Black Robe* published in London and perhaps rather belatedly sent to O'Rorke. Passenger ships took three months to travel to the opposite side of the world then, though mail clippers may have done the journey in a few weeks less. He says the book was unopened. When Victorian books were printed the printed sheets of 16 pages were folded and bound but not always cut, so one of the pleasures of a new book was 'opening' the pages. That was done with a flat thin bone knife which did not tear or cut the paper as a metal knife would. O'Rorke had clearly been preparing for this pleasure for some time!

Just to confuse things, Andrew Gasson adds that the book could have been an Australian import. *Heart and Science* was published by George Robertson of Melbourne, appropriately located in Little Collins Street. *The Black Robe* had been serialised in the Melbourne *Leader* from 13 November 1880 to 7 May 1881. Possibly this had been reissued in book form.

PENGUIN PODCAST

To mark 75 years of Penguin Classics the publisher is launching a podcast series. *On The Road with Penguin Classics* is intended to inspire new readers to discover old titles. Hosted by author and editor Henry Eliot, Season One went live across podcast platforms on 28th January. The first episode featured actress Olivia Vinall, who starred in the BBC TV adaptation of *The Woman in White*, travelling to the Cumbrian coastline with Eliot to explore the Wilkie Collins classic. There are five other episodes which can all be found at podcasts.apple.com search for 'penguin classics'.

INDIA AND THE FILM THAT NEVER WAS

Talk about tantalising! thehindu.com revealed that the Indian film director Guru Dutt (1925-1964) was going to make a film of *The Woman in White*. The website reports “Guru Dutt was planning to adapt Wilkie Collins’ seminal work of detective fiction *The Woman in White* into a film called Raaz with Sunil Dutt and Waheeda Rehman. He abandoned the film after shooting two songs by R. D. Burman (It would have been Pancham’s debut).” Search ‘wilkie collins’ at thehindu.com.

Interestingly enough, In November 1883, Collins was delighted to hear that *The Woman in White* was about to be translated by an Indian novelist into Bengali.

WILLIAM DAWSON

When Wilkie brought Martha Rudd to London from her village of Winterton in 1868 and set her up in an apartment at 33 Bolsover Street, he had to add a veneer of respectability – or perhaps deniability – over her. After all, she would bear him two children there and a third not far away over the next six years. So he invented a new persona for himself as William Dawson, barrister, and Martha was to be known as his wife. Although they never married their three children all bore the surname Dawson and she also bore that name in all public records from that time. Wilkie himself was technically a barrister having eaten the required number of dinners at Lincoln’s Inn and was admitted or ‘called to the Bar’ on 20 November 1851. No source for the name he used has been found.

Until, perhaps, now. During some recent research it emerged that there was a barrister called William Dawson who was also a member of Lincoln’s Inn. He was called to the bar more than a hundred years before Wilkie, on 6 July 1738. “William Dawson, son of Wm. D., of Manchester, gen.” the entry reads. He is the only one of that name in the five volumes of Lincoln’s Inn barristers. When Wilkie was a student – or rather a dinner-eater – at Lincoln’s Inn that collation of the Admission Registers had not been published – that did not happen until 1896. But it is possible he saw the name somewhere. It may simply be a coincidence that he picked that name for his other self. But until a better theory emerges, that is one contender. The Registers were put online in 2017. To find them, search ‘digitised records Lincoln’s inn’.

WHO READ WILKIE?

In a fairly ordinary edition of *Armada*, published by Smith, Elder & Co. in 1871, there is a bold signature at the top of the dedication page Walter E. Birchenough. Inside on the endpaper in a mauve stamp in capital letters FODEN BANK COTTAGE, | MACCLESFIELD.

Walter Edwin Birchenough (1856-1912) was the son of John Birchenough (1825-1895) a silk manufacturer and his wife Elizabeth née Taylor. He was baptised in the Macclesfield parish chapel on 27 August 1856. In 1871 he was a boarder at a possibly short-lived school run by Classics scholar Francis Rigg at 32 Queen's Road, Ormskirk. There he was one of 19 boys, including Nathaniel Gould, who would emigrate to Australia and become a prolific author of horse-racing novels under the name Nat Gould.

If Birchenough owned the book new when it was published the signature is mature for a 14 year old. But it is identical to that eight years later on the licence for his marriage to Emily Gertrude Godwin on 6 August 1879. By then he was also a silk manufacturer, working as a partner with his two brothers and his father. He left the partnership on 12 October 1892, perhaps thrown out by his father. Walter had joined the army as a volunteer officer in the 5th Volunteer Battalion of the Cheshire Regiment. He rose to the rank of Captain by 1881 and was later made Hon. Major. He was awarded the Volunteer Officers' Decoration by the Queen in December 1895.

He lived at Foden Bank Cottage from at least 1881 to his death there aged 55 on 20 June 1912. Local papers reported that he was found in bed with his throat cut. The coroner said he had been taking drugs to cure insomnia which led to severe depression. The verdict was suicide while insane. He left £1871-3s-10d. Photographs of his brother Sir Henry Birchenough, Bt. (1853-1937) and his only son, Revd. Godwin Birchenough (1880-1953), the executor of the will, can be found in the National Portrait Gallery.

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