



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRON Faith Clarke

Chairman Andrew Gasson, 21 Huson Close, London NW3 3JW

Membership Paul Lewis, 4 Ernest Gardens, Chiswick, London W4 3QU

NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2021

WHERE WAS WILLIAM COLLINS BORN?

Last month we revealed that Wilkie Collins was mistaken in saying his father William Collins was born on 18 September 1788 after newly found baptism records showed it was in fact September 1787. That correction has now been made on the Royal Academy website and will be made in the *ODNB* later this year. Now, further checks have shown that Wilkie was also wrong about where William was born.

In Wilkie's biography of his father, *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.*, Wilkie writes "William Collins was born in Great Titchfield-street, London", but the records of ratepayers in Westminster show that William's father, William Collins senior, lived at 47 Great Marylebone Street from 1778 to 1787 and then moved to 4 Adams Street East where he lived in 1788 and 1789. The only year in which William senior paid rates in Great Titchfield Street was 1791 when he lived at no. 23. It is also unlikely that William's younger brother Francis James Collins, known as Frank, was born in Gt Titchfield Street, as his birthdate was 4 February 1790.

What is clear is that William Collins senior had an unsettled period before he moved to 19 Bolsover Street in 1793. He remained there until 1801 and recorded it as his business premises in two publications in 1793 and 1796 and is listed there in *Holden's Triennial Directory* 1799 p. 142 as 'booksellers and printsellers'.

After Bolsover Street and another unsettled year William Collins senior moved to 118 Great Portland Street in 1804. He ran his picture framing and print seller's business from that address until his death in 1812. The family remained there until 1816 when William Collins junior's growing fortunes as a painter enabled him to move his mother Margaret and brother Frank to 11 New Cavendish Street where, after a wedding in Edinburgh in 1822, he brought his new wife Harriet née Geddes. Wilkie was born there in 1824.

A further reference in *Memoirs* to an elder daughter born before William who "died a month before his birth" – that is in August 1787 or perhaps 1788 – remains unproven. No record of such a person's death or indeed birth appears in the Parish records of St Marylebone where all William's known addresses are located.

CHARLES ALLSTON COLLINS AT SCHOOL – A MYTH DISPELLED

Wilkie's brother Charles is listed as an old boy of Stonyhurst College in Lancashire. It is not true! The idea that he might have been sent to a Catholic school by his evangelical Anglican parents seems far-fetched. But a quick Google search will find several biographies and websites making that claim. And a search for 'Old Stonyhursts' will find a list of the alumni with Charles included in it. He may have been confused with another pre-Raphaelite artist James Collinson (1825-1881) who was from a Catholic family. But the archivist at Stonyhurst College has confirmed to WCS member Alan Bean that Charles did not attend the school, although a James Collins did so in the early 1840s. As far as we know, Charles was educated at home – see S. M. Ellis *Wilkie Collins, le Fanu and Others* (London: 1931, p. 55) and then on 13 January 1844, just a fortnight before his 16th birthday, he was admitted to the Royal Academy Schools sponsored, of course, by his father William Collins.

TWO MYSTERIES OF WILKIE IN THE TEA FACTORY

Longstanding member, Angela Richardson, has raised two queries concerning Wilkie's time spent with Antrobus & Co.

Mystery number one

What is the evidence that Wilkie loved or loathed his placement, as a 17 year old, in a tea merchant's office after he had finished school?

'The prison in the Strand' writes Catherine Peters in her biography, of the five years Wilkie spent at the offices of Mr Antrobus, tea provider to royalty. She believed he hated it. Whereas William Clarke, in his *Secret Life* considered it was a licence to write, with Dickens's publishers Chapman & Hall also in the Strand at number 186. They had published *Pickwick Papers* and while Wilkie was working there, also serialised Dickens's *Barnaby Rudge* and *Martin Chuzzlewit* in their monthly magazine *Master Humphrey's Clock*. Wilkie was first published during this time and wrote his first novel and began the second, at his desk in the office.

Which interpretation do you prefer? Here are two more conflicting pieces of evidence.

Wilkie's letters during the period 1841-46 are full of boisterous good humour and he is amusingly disrespectful about his boss, teasing his parents about the friendship they formed with Mr Antrobus. But only a year after he began his internship in the tea factory, his father, William Collins, writes to his main patron, Sir Robert Peel, seeking another position for Wilkie, this time in the civil service. Did he have regrets?

Mystery number two

How did the son of a Royal Academician come to the notice of the head of a tea establishment?

All the biographers like the idea that it was the Collins family friend Charles Ward who brokered the introduction. Ward was working at Coutts bank, almost next door to the Antrobus office and where Sir Edmund Antrobus, cousin or nephew, to the younger Mr Antrobus, was a director. Both 'the Antrobi', as Wilkie called them, were involved in the tea trade.

There is another, hitherto unresearched, contender for the introduction: Mr Thomas Uwins, RA (1782-1857). William Collins knew him well and they led very similar artistic lives. Both painted in the UK as well as Italy; they had the same patrons; they both covered the King's visit to Scotland in 1822 and Uwins followed Collins as Librarian to the Royal Academy.

Uwins also knew the Antrobus who employed Wilkie, as he tells his brother in a letter in 1825: "of the singular and favourable circumstances – Antrobus, nephew to the baronet ... has renewed acquaintance in a most friendly way". He saw him as a possible patron but it was William Collins who scooped the commission, and 200 guineas, for portraying the Antrobus children in his landscape 'Aberystwyth'.

I'm putting my faith in the trinity of father, friend and his friend to solve this mystery. Though the geographical and corporate connection between Coutts Bank and the Antrobus tea factory, is undeniable, I doubt an employee could approach a Director to seek such a favour. It is far more likely that Collins and Uwins would discuss the matter as equals in the RA Library and put the 'old boy' network to work.

THE NEW MAGDALEN – DRAMA IN THE NETHERLANDS

WCS member, Pierre Tissot van Patot, who lives in the Netherlands, is continuing his detailed research into Wilkie Collins's books and plays. He writes the following about his latest discoveries concerning the dramatic versions of *The New Magdalen*:

Wilkie Collins published his novel *The New Magdalen* in 1873. In the Netherlands the story was translated and first serialised in *Stuivers Magazijn* by the publishers Gebroeders Belinfante as *De boetvaardige Magdalena* from January 1873. The story was well-known in The Netherlands because many people read the magazine. Wilkie Collins created a play from the story that was very successful in both England and the USA. The play was first performed at the Olympic Theatre in London on 19 May 1873 and remained popular for many years.

The text of the play was used by theatres in several European countries and the play was performed in France, Germany, Scandinavia, and Russia. The text was published in France as *Madeleine, Piece en Quatre Actes dont un Prologue* by R. Du Pontavice de Heussey (Paris: Paul Ollendorff, 1887). Wilkie Collins gave the text to the group from the Royal Theatre in Den Haag who performed the play as *De Boetvaardige* from 15 September 1873. In later years, the play was used by various companies in Amsterdam and Rotterdam. The Dutch text was never published.

W. N. Peijpers, an author from Rotterdam, created a second play based on the book. This text was also never published and seems to be lost. It is the only version with 5 acts. From December 1873 the play was performed a few times in Amsterdam.

In 1895 the Gebroeders Van Lier staged the play again in their Grand Theatre in Amsterdam. This was a large commercial theatre with various acting groups. A handwritten text of this performance is preserved. It is interesting to compare it with the original English version that was published in 1873. Many lines were faithfully translated so that this version was clearly based on the original translation from 1873. The prologue is now called Act 1, so that there were 4 Acts. The earlier performances had a prologue. Many of the stage instructions were also translated from the original text. Some parts of this version are almost identical to the original, but others are very different. It is very likely that the original translation from 1873 was changed a few times.

The title on the cover is *Een Zondares* which was used for the new production in 1895. On the title page the play is called *Mercy Merrick*. Extensive changes were made to this text. More than 10% of the text was deleted, but fortunately most of the original lines can still be found. Perhaps the original version of the play was too long. According to the advertisements, this version was adapted by 'A.J.G.' although this name is not present on the manuscript. Also the name of Wilkie Collins is not given. This version of the play was performed almost 100 times in The Netherlands and Belgium between 1895 and 1905.

WILKIE'S LESSER KNOWN CLASSICS

Crimereads

“How does anyone read Wilkie’s best stuff and not immediately go seek out the rest?” comments crime writer Steve Goble at crimereads.com. “Most mystery lovers know of Wilkie Collins, beloved for his classics “The Woman in White” and “The Moonstone,” old-fashioned tales meant to be savored page-by-page by the fire late at night. Beyond that, however, one might accuse readers of what amounts to criminal neglect.” His article goes on to look at *Basil, No Name, Jezebel’s Daughter* and *The Evil Genius*. You can find him @Steve_Goble on twitter or on stevegoble.com.

American Thinker

“Since Edgar Allen Poe's *The Murders of the Rue Morgue* and *The Woman in White* by Wilkie Collins, there have been many famous fictional detectives, some of whom have achieved legendary status”. Thus writes Michael Curtis in ‘Deciphering a Duo of Detectives’ on the website americanthinker.com. It is the start of his survey of four famous modern fictional detectives. Sadly, Wilkie is only mentioned once but if you are into detective fiction it is a pleasant read.

‘VOLPURNO’ – HAVE YOU SEEN IT – AND ‘QUI EST LE VOLEUR’

Wilkie’s first identified publication in 1843 – long thought to have been ‘The Last Stage Coachman’ was correctly identified as ‘Volpurno’ during 2008. It was found in New York’s *The Albion, or British, Colonial, and Foreign Weekly* in the issue for 8 July 1843. It was republished in the same month in two other broadsheets, in both Philadelphia and New York and again later that year using the entirely different title of ‘A Maniac Bridegroom’.

But where was the English publication which almost certainly preceded that in the US newspapers? It is still unidentified over the last thirteen years so if you are researching English journals and newspapers of the period, see if you can find it and claim a place in Collins studies.

Another example of a Collins story crossing back and forth across both the Atlantic and the Channel is ‘The Biter Bit’. It was originally published anonymously in the *Atlantic Monthly* for April 1858 (Vol. I, No. VI) with the

title ‘Who is the Thief?’ It was almost immediately reissued in 1858 in Volume IV of the Bruxelles *Revue Britannique*, as ‘Qui est le voleur’ also without acknowledgement to Collins. The short story did not appear in England until its inclusion the following year in Collins’s second collection of short stories *The Queen of Hearts*, now with the revised title ‘The Biter Bit’. Since then it has been widely reprinted including a Swedish translation in 1912 and in *Ellery Queen’s Mystery Magazine* in 1949 where it is regarded as the first humorous detective story.

MRS INCHBALD, MESMERISM AND ANIMAL MAGNETISM

The latest issue of *The Dickensian* (Spring 2021, No. 513, Vol. 117, Part 1) features an article by A. J. Larner on ‘Dickens and Mrs Inchbald: a Bicentenary Appreciation’. Mrs Inchbald was probably best known for a *Simple Story*, a romance written in 1791 of which Collins wrote in September 1887 “I very sincerely admire Mrs Inchbald’s “Simple Story ... an admirable novel well worth reading...” [2752]. Mrs Inchbald was also the author of *Animal Magnetism*, a farce based on the ‘science’ of mesmerism.

Dickens used the play as an accompaniment to several of his theatrical productions from 1848 onwards, no doubt influenced by his practical interest in the subject and his friendship with one of its chief exponents, John Elliotson. In particular, it was used as the supporting play to the first two performances of Collins’s *Frozen Deep* at Tavistock House on 5 and 6 January 1857.

Collins described Elliotson as “one of the greatest of English Physiologists” and used a case history in his *Human Physiology* as his inspiration for the attempt to find the missing diamond in *The Moonstone*. You can read about John Elliotson in *The Mesmerist: The Society Doctor Who Held Victorian London Spellbound* by Wendy Moore. It is published Orion at £14.99 but discounted to £6.97 on the Book Depository.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE - THE FILM THAT NEVER WAS

Elliott Kastner was a Hollywood film producer whose name is found on dozens of major films including *Where Eagles Dare*, *The Long Goodbye*, and *The*

Missouri Breaks. He was based in Pinewood for much of his life and died in London in 2010 aged 80.

His studio contents have recently been sold, mainly to the British Film Institute, but one Wilkie-related gem is a complete screenplay for a film of *The Woman in White*, written in 1978 by the screenwriter Tom Clarke (1918–1993). The 260-page script was never produced but among the documents is a budget for ‘below the line’ costs – in other words everything except the fees for the producer, director, and actors – of £1.2 million. Clarke also adapted the screenplay into six parts for a TV series and Kastner showed it to the BBC at a meeting with Shaun Sutton in July 1978. It was not proceeded with. However, in April 1982 the BBC broadcast its own five-part adaptation of *The Woman in White* and Kastner at once consulted lawyers about lodging a claim for compensation for the BBC’s “most unprofessional and unprincipled action” in being “inspired” to do it by that meeting. It is not known if such a claim was made or, if so, how the BBC responded.

WINTER OF DESPAIR

Winter of Despair follows Cora Harrison’s *Season of Darkness* from 2019 which used as characters Wilkie Collins, Charles Dickens and Inspector Field. Her latest offering now also includes Charles Collins as the prime suspect in the murder of a Victorian blackmailer as well as frequent appearances of Harriet Collins in the family home in Hanover Terrace. Quoting the publisher’s blurb

Wilkie Collins must prove his brother is innocent of murder in the second of the compelling new Gaslight mystery series. November, 1853. Inspector Field has summoned his friends Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins to examine a body found in an attic studio, its throat cut. Around the body lie the lacerated fragments of canvas of a painting titled *A Winter of Despair*. On closer examination, Wilkie realizes he recognizes the victim, for he had been due to dine with him that very evening. The dead man is Edwin Milton-Hayes, one of Wilkie's brother Charley's artist friends. But what is the significance of the strange series of faceless paintings Milton-Hayes had been worked on when he died? And why is Charley acting so strangely? With his own brother under suspicion of murder, Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens set out to uncover the

truth. What secrets lie among the close-knit group of Pre-Raphaelite painters who were the dead man's friends? And who is the killer in their midst?

Another main character and one of the narrators is Sesina, a servant at Hanover Terrace where the novel is mainly set. This is an unlikely situation for her as she was one of the girls thrown out for bad behaviour from Urania Cottage, Charles Dickens's home for 'fallen women'. The book tries, not very successfully, to reproduce a Victorian atmosphere by including a good deal of detail but like most modern fiction which includes Wilkie as a character presents a rather unexciting read. We'll not reveal the rather preposterous dénouement! Nevertheless, *Winter of Despair* is published by Severn House at £22.99 but advertised on Amazon much more cheaply.

FOSCO IN FICTION

Modern authors do seem to like using names of earlier authors' characters. Fosco is a good example, featuring in Dan Vyleta's *Pavel and I* from 2008. The novel, which has no other connection with Collins, was recommended in an episode of the BBC's 'A Good Read', introduced by Harriett Gilbert and repeated from 2012.

An earlier example with Fosco from 2004 but even more remote from Collins is *Brimstone*, the fifth instalment of the Special Agent Prendergast series. It is written by American authors Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child who obviously like including references to other literary works. Another example, in this case, is the entombing of Prendergast beneath Fosco's home which alludes to Poe's 'A Cask of Amontillado'.

WHO READ WILKIE?

Here is another in our series of 'Who read Wilkie'

No Name was first published in book form as a three-decker on 31 December 1862 although designated 1863 on the title-page. Following the success of *The Woman in White*, all but 400 of the first edition of 4,000 copies were sold by the end of the first day. A second edition – really an impression – was published in February 1863. Collins later admitted in a letter to William Tinsley that "This

proved to be over-printing. The 500 copies hung on hand, and diminished, instead of adding to, the profits.” (11 July 1868 [0845]).

An interesting example of this second edition – also in three volumes – has recently come to light. There is no clue to the first owner but the book has the pictorial bookplate of Maurice Baring in each volume with the words “Here goes a ship with a cargo of books to the city of dreams,” a title subsequently used by Antonia Fraser for her centenary appreciation of Baring in the *Times* of 27 April 1974. Each volume has the additional bookplate of ‘Hugh et Antonia Fraser’ and Volume I also has the presentation inscription "Laura Lovat, from Maurice Baring - 1922."

Maurice Baring (1874-1945) was an English novelist, poet, dramatist and man of letters. He died at Laura Lovat’s home in Scotland where he had lived for his last five years. Laura Lovat (née Lister, 1892-1965) was the wife of Simon Fraser, 14th Lord Lovat and author of *Maurice Baring: A Postscript* (Hollis & Carter; London, 1948). Laura Lovat’s second son, Sir Hugh Fraser, was the first husband of Lady Antonia Fraser (b. 1932), the noted English historical novelist and biographer who subsequently married Harold Pinter. Sir Hugh Fraser (1918-1984) was a distinguished Conservative MP from 1945 and amongst other offices served as Secretary of State for Air from 1962-1964.

JANE AUSTEN’S LOST NOVEL

WCS member P. J. Allen has published an edition of a lost novel by Jane Austen called *Two Girls of Eighteen*. Published in 1806 but apparently suppressed, Peter has transcribed the text from one of the two surviving copies. He has also written a long introduction where he explains why he is certain this is a work by Austen and how it fits in with her work and her life supported by copious notes both in the introduction and the text. A fascinating read. Published by Matador, at £25 from troubadour.co.uk or search ISBN: 9781800460140.

Peter Allen, by the way, is also a book dealer operating under the name of Robert Temple Antiquarian Booksellers. His bibliographic descriptions of nineteenth century works are unsurpassed for detail and accuracy and many can be found in the archives on his website.

THE ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

The WCS continues to be affiliated to the Alliance of Literary Societies. In ‘normal’ times it arranges an annual meeting with the theme of a particular author, currently postponed for obvious reasons. The Alliance has, however, continued to issue its annual journal, *ALSO*, the latest issue of which has just been published. The theme for this year is ‘Parody: the Writer in Lockdown’ and as usual is freely available for WCS members to download from <https://allianceofliterarysocieties.files.wordpress.com/2021/08/also-2021-final.pdf>.

FRIENDS OF KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY – A ZOOM EVENT

The Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery – where Wilkie is buried of course – have arranged a talk by Alfred Hawkins, Assistant Curator of Historic Buildings at HM Tower of London and the Banqueting House, Whitehall which are cared for and operated by Historic Royal Palaces. The event takes place by Zoom on Wednesday 11th August at 6:30pm.

The Chapel Royal and Royal Peculiar of Saint Peter ad Vincula or ‘Saint Peter in Chains’ is located within the Inner Ward of the Tower of London World Heritage Site. Constructed in 1520, this working chapel serves the spiritual needs of the Tower community and is best known as the resting place of three queens of England and two catholic saints: Anne Boleyn, Catherine Howard, Lady Jane Grey, St. John Fisher and St Thomas More.

This talk observes the history of the chapel at the Tower, which can be traced to the 9th century, and discusses recent archaeological excavations which have unearthed new evidence concerning its development and use as the spiritual heart of England’s most famous fortress.

Tickets are £5 and can be purchased at <https://kensalgreen.co.uk/booking.php>.

Paul Lewis
Andrew Gasson

paul@paullewis.co.uk
apogee@apgee.co.uk

www.wilkiecollins.com
www.wilkie-collins.info

