



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2021

COLLINS NUMBER ONE FOR THE DUCHESS OF CORNWALL

‘The Crown Chronicles’ – an online digest of all things royal - reveals that Camilla, Duchess of Cornwall recently “Released a second reading list for fellow bookworms.” At Number 1 came *The Woman in White*, “a menacing and mysterious tale spun by this great Victorian writer with a penchant for drama,” ahead of *Girl* by Edna O'Brien; the Roy Grace Series by Peter James; *The Queen’s Necklace* by Alexander Dumas and *The Island* by Victoria Hislop. Search thecrownchronicles.co.uk/category/film-tv-books/.

To mark World Book Day (23 April) the Duchess of Cornwall was asked about the importance of books and World Book Day, to which she replied: “I think it’s lovely that we have a special day to celebrate books. After all we have special days to celebrate everything else and books are very important things in our lives.”

According to *Vogue* (March 2020) which publishes a fine photograph of her, Kate, Duchess of Cambridge, also enjoys classic fiction. Apparently, she keeps on her desk amongst others works by Jane Austen, Charles Dickens, Thomas Hardy and George Eliot. But alas no Wilkie.

Wilkie, in fact, hardly mentions royalty in his stories and letters but may have had mixed views. In ‘A House to Let’, ‘Trotter’s Report’ questions “Why don’t

you get into a habit of expressing yourself in a straightforward manner, like a loyal subject of our gracious Queen Victoria.” On the other hand, corresponding with his literary agent A. P. Watt in June 1887 [2729] he writes “I don’t know which I am most weary of – the Jubilee [of Queen Victoria] or the heat”

WILKIE’S INHERITANCE

Detailed study of the Collins family bank accounts at Coutts reveals how important inheritance was to Wilkie. It is now thought that in his lifetime Wilkie Collins earned about £62,000 from his books, stories, and plays. But another £10,000 came to him from inheritance.

In 1840 his mother Harriet inherited £5075 from her aunt Mary Maria, the sister of her mother. This legacy gave Harriet an income of £147 a year from 1840 to her death in 1868. The capital sum was then split equally between her two sons, Wilkie and Charles. They cashed in the investments and Wilkie used £800 to pay off a loan he had taken out to buy the lease of his new home at 90 Gloucester Place during 1867. Most of the rest he invested and over the years those investments – which he finally sold in 1878 – made him £371. He and Charles also inherited £170 each in cash.

When Wilkie’s father, William, died in 1847 he left £11,615 held in trust so that Harriet benefited from the income of about £340 a year. Harriet also had £9.50 a year from some railway shares as well as the income from Mary Maria’s trust. Her income from 1847 to her death in 1868 was around £495 a year. For comparison the average wage over that time was £37.75 a year.

When she died, William’s legacy remained in trust and Wilkie and Charles shared the income from it. But when Charles died all of it passed to Wilkie and it brought him in around £340 a year. Over his lifetime these dividends totalled £6750. Altogether his inheritances boosted his lifetime income by around £10,000. *To convert money to present day values multiply by 100. [NB these paragraphs update and correct the note sent in the email to members dated 11 October.]*

WILKIE'S AUNTS

Further analysis of the bank account of Wilkie Collins has revealed that he made regular payments to two of the sisters of his mother, Harriet, after her death in 1868.

Mary Christina Dyke was one of Harriet's youngest sisters. Wilkie made quarterly payments to her from 30 June 1869 for the rest of his life. They began at £6 but in 1873 increased to £8 a quarter. Altogether he paid her £600. In his will he left her an annuity of £20 a year. She died in 1896.

Collins also made quarterly payments to another of Harriet's sisters, Catherine Esther Gray. He made a payment of £5 a quarter to Catherine from 30 April 1868 which increased to £8 in 1875 but fell to £6 in 1880. The payments stopped when Catherine died in 1882. But they were revived from 1 August 1883 – now for £8 a quarter – to one of Catherine's four daughters, Marion Gray. They continued for the rest of Wilkie's life. He paid Catherine a total of £358 and Marion £192. He also left Marion an annuity of £20 a year in his will. She died in 1900.

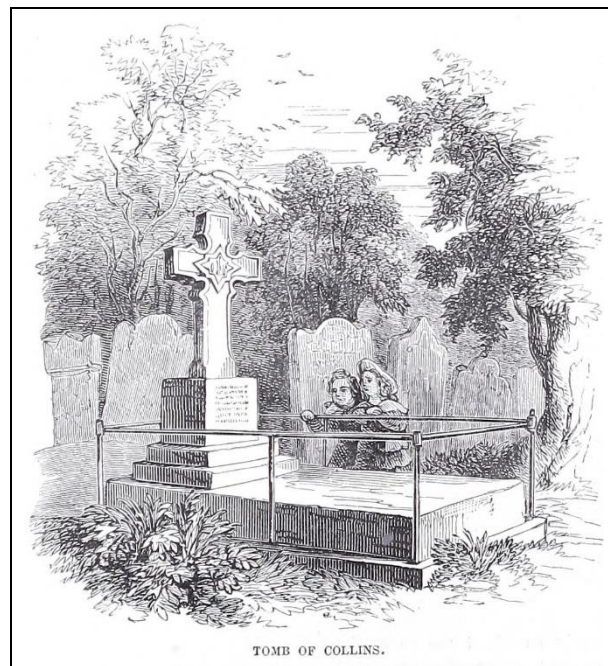
It is not clear why Wilkie made these payments to two of his aunts and then his cousin. They may have been requested by Harriet before she died – she may even have left what we now would call a letter of wishes. Harriet left no will so the administration of her estate – listed as less than £200 – was granted to her two sons, Wilkie and Charles. After her death two payments of £50 each were made from her account to her two youngest sisters Emily Elizabeth Clunes and Mary Christina Dyke. No payment is recorded to her sister Catherine but she left £50 to Jane Ward the married daughter of her sister Margaret Sarah Carpenter.

THE GRAVE OF WILLIAM COLLINS

The grave of Wilkie's father, William Collins RA, has been identified by WCS member Alan Bean. He was buried on 23 February 1847 in the churchyard of St Mary's Paddington in the same grave as his mother Margaret and brother Frank, who had both died in 1833. Present at the burial were William's widow, Harriet, along with their two sons Wilkie and Charles. Two other artists, Thomas Uwins RA and Charles Leslie RA, were also present with William's

physician Dr. Richardson, his friend John Bullar, and the vicar Revd. William Charles Howell.

Almost all the south part of churchyard was destroyed for the Marylebone flyover in the 1960s and the remains of 450 people were moved to a cemetery in Mill Hill. But William's grave was not among them as he was buried to the north of the church in what is now St Mary's Gardens, a public space created in 1893.



A drawing of the gravestone erected by his family after his death, is found on p. 44 of the *Art Journal* of 1859 in an article called 'Tombs of English Artists'. The marble cross which stood on top of it has gone but the rest of the gravestones and traces of the inscription are still there. A photograph of the grave as it is now and an older slightly fuzzy one with the marble cross can be seen online <https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/10145442/william-collins>.

BACH AND ARMADALE

WCS member Steven Isserlis has managed, as he put it, "to smuggle Wilkie" into his new book about Bach. *The Bach Cello Suites: A Companion* was published earlier this month. In Part 5 he writes

“...it’s important to remember that for Bach, music and religion seem to have been inextricably linked – different aspects of worship that permeated his entire existence: Soli Deo gloria. Not for him the sort of Christianity so admirably described by the Victorian novelist Wilkie Collins in his novel *Armadale*:

I have noticed that the Christianity of a certain class of respectable people begins when they open their prayer-books at eleven o’clock on Sunday morning, and ends when they shut them up again at one o’clock on Sunday afternoon. Nothing so astonishes and insults Christians of this sort as reminding them of their Christianity on a week-day. (Chapter X. Miss Gwilt’s Diary).

Bach’s religious conviction was on an utterly different plane.”

The book is published by Faber & Faber ISBN 978-0571366248 and Steven’s recording of the Cellos Suites is available on CD.

MR WRAY’S CASHBOX IN ITALIAN

Wilkie’s short Christmas book for 1852, *Mr Wray’s Cashbox*, is now available in Italian as *Lo scrigno di Mr Wray, ovvero la maschera e il mistero*. Translated by Emilia Carmen Cavaliere and edited by Mariaconcetta Constantini, it is published in Rome by Libreria Croce. (ISBN: 88-6402-371-2 EAN: 9788864023717). A review is available online by Francesca Vinci in *Victorian Popular Fictions*, Volume 2: Issue 1 (Spring 2020).

LITTLE NOVELS ON RADIO 4EXTRA

Listeners to Radio 4Extra were treated to five of Wilkie Collins’s short stories, one each weekday from 15 to 19 November. Each tale was dramatised by John Arden and featured the actor Ronald Pickup as the Wilkie Collins narrator. The five stories were ‘Mr Policeman and the Cook’, originally published as ‘Who Killed Zebedee?’; ‘Miss Jeromette and the Clergyman’, originally ‘The Clergyman’s Confession’; ‘Mr Marmaduke and the Minister’, originally ‘The Mystery of Marmaduke’; ‘Miss Bertha and the Minister’, originally ‘The Duel in Herne Wood’; and ‘Miss Morris and the Stranger’, originally ‘How I Married Him’.

The stories had originally appeared in the New York periodical *The Spirit of the Times* to which Collins contributed for the Christmas number each year from

1876 to 1887. They were five of the total of fourteen published in *Little Novels* in 1887. Unlike Collins's earlier collections of short stories, *After Dark* (1856) and *The Queen of Hearts* (1859), there was no connecting narrative but most of the tales revolve around the themes of love and marriage, frequently across social barriers and class.

1917 WOMAN IN WHITE

A 104-year-old nitrate print of a 1917 film based on *The Woman in White* was found in October in a garage by the UCLA Film & Television Archive. It is called *The Unfortunate Marriage* and will be carefully unwound, protected, and stored safely. More at www.cinema.ucla.edu. There is already a digitised version of this film available on DVD, though of course the newly found print may have differences. The current version was taken from a copy in the Library of Congress and can be purchased for \$24.99 (plus \$15 airmail to UK) through www.thanouser.org/DVD-7-8-9.htm. Thanouser says the film was originally called *The Woman in White* but was re-released in 1920 as *The Unfortunate Marriage*. You can search for the title or Wilkie Collins at the movie database imdb.com. Copies also appear from time to time for sale on ebay.

A RECORD PRICE FOR THE WOMAN IN WHITE

A first edition of Wilkie's most famous novel *The Woman in White* fetched what we believe to be a record price of \$36,000 – at least that is where the hammer fell but with 25% premium the buyer will have paid \$45,000 (about £34,000). The three-volume novel was in good condition and in its original purple cloth. Each volume has a red clamshell case. The sale was on 14 October 2021 at Heritage Auctions based in California. The previous record was probably held by a copy sold in 2004 for an inclusive \$30,000 in the Sotheby's J. Insley Blair sale.

THE MOONSTONE AT AUCTION

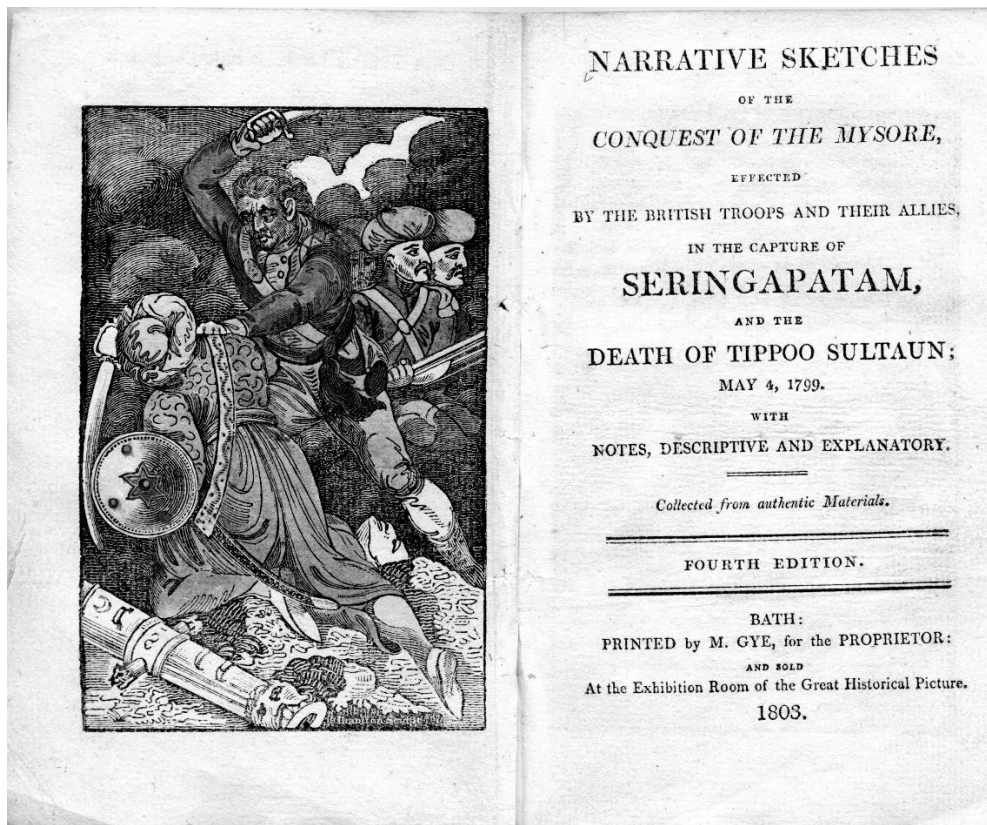
The previous month, on 14 September, Christies of New York held the first part of 'The Exceptional Literature Collection of Theodore Baum'. A copy of the less sought after first US edition of *The Woman in White* sold for a hammer price of \$2,500 against an estimate of \$3,000-\$5,000. In the same sale, lot 22, a first English edition of *The Moonstone*, failed to sell against an estimate of

\$15,000-\$25,000. Despite its rarity in original cloth, this was probably due to its poor condition with faded and worn cloth and the half-title to Volume I replaced with a facsimile. Had it sold for something near the estimate, this would still have paled into insignificance compared with a nice but by no means perfect copy of *The Moonstone* sold in the 2004 Insley Blair sale for an amazing inclusive sum of \$125,600 against an estimate of \$25,000-\$35,000.

In other respects, the Baum sale certainly was exceptional with a copy of *Pride and Prejudice* selling for \$112,500, *Great Expectations* for \$162,500, a presentation copy of *Dracula* for \$275,000 and *Frankenstein* for \$1,170,000. Wilkie would probably feel rather neglected. For those who wish to drool over unattainable treasures, search online for Christies, Part I of the Baum Collection. Part 2 with twentieth century offerings took place online between 2 and 17 September.

THE STOLEN JEWEL

Wilkie readers will remember the opening chapter of *The Moonstone* which begins with 'The Storming of Seringapatam' and the theft of the Moonstone diamond by John Herncastle who killed three local Indian guards in the process. The cursed stone is of course at the heart of the story and like many of Wilkie's tales there is truth in the fiction.



It has emerged in recent weeks that the British Government is trying to stop the export of a gold-jewelled tiger's head which was taken after Tipu Sultan was defeated at Seringapatam in 1799. It was one of eight jewelled gold finials on his throne, made between 1787-93. After Tipu Sultan's defeat and death in 1799, the throne was broken up and brought back to England by the British Army's Prize Agents. Parts of the throne were presented to King George III. The finial, which has only recently come to light in private hands, is said to be worth £1.5 million but an export licence has been withheld until February or possibly June next year to allow a British institution to raise the money to acquire it. It had better be well guarded!

WHO READ WILKIE?

One of the fascinations of collecting early editions is discovering the lives of previous owners. On the title page of a Smith, Elder yellowback dated 1872 is the ownership inscription "Thomas Weeding Weeding, Gravesend, 1st May 1873". Thomas Weeding was originally known as Thomas Weeding Baggallay but under the terms of a relative's will changed his name to Thomas Weeding Weeding by royal licence, announced in *The London Gazette* on 14 July 1868.

Baggalay/Weeding (1847–1929) was born in London at St Pancras. He qualified as a solicitor in 1870 and became a Justice of the Peace in 1878. He served Surrey County Council for more than thirty years, as deputy clerk from 1891–1904 and Clerk from 1904–1927. With his wife Alice Maude Elizabeth, they had two sons and two daughters. Both sons were killed during the first World War.

Weeding's other claim to fame is a short career as a wicket keeper for Surrey County Cricket Club. He played eight games as an amateur between 1865 and 1874 with a highest score of 82. He was tall at the time at 6'3" and tall for a wicket keeper even now. Further details of his short career can be found in *A Century of Surrey Stumpers* by David Sawyer, 2001.

It is worth returning to the yellowback copy, itself. *The Woman in White* must have engaged Weeding's legal mind for quite a while. No doubt using his professional training and dated 18.6.74, Weeding has appended to the volume his own detailed chronology of the story together with a construction of the Fairlie family tree.

Weeding died from a fall in December 1929 at Kingthorpe, Addlestone, Surrey, recorded in the *Thanet Advertiser* for 3 January 1930. A stern looking portrait by William Carter can be seen at artuk.org/discover/artworks/thomas-weeding-weeding. His name is still visible on a 1904 sign in south London's Mitcham Lane, warning against bill stickers.

WRITERS AND LETTERS IN THE *NEW YORKER*

An article on the American writer Philip Roth in the *New Yorker* magazine (29 March 2021) claimed

Many literary figures have dreaded the spectre of the biographer. Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins, Walt Whitman, Henry James, and Sylvia Plath are but a few who put their letters and journals into the fire.

WCS member Susan Hanes, who wrote *Wilkie Collins's American Tour* (London, 2008), asked if this was true.

There is no evidence that Wilkie Collins systematically burned his manuscripts, almost all of which survive even for stories he specifically said he did not want to be republished. One of his diaries and some of his notebooks are extant though there are few letters to him, so perhaps he did destroy those. He certainly wrote about letters being burned in several of his stories.

For example, Wilkie wrote in the 1854 Christmas Number of *Household Words* in the 'Fourth Poor Traveller' (later reprinted as 'The Stolen Letter' in *After Dark*)

My experience in the law, Mr. Frank, has convinced me that if everybody burnt everybody else's letters, half the Courts of Justice in this country might shut up shop

Charles Dickens did burn almost every letter written to him on his infamous bonfire at Gad's Hill on 3 September 1860 and then continued to do so for the rest of his life. But he could not burn the letters he had sent and around 12,000 have been published in the Pilgrim edition and document his life and his thoughts. Since 2002 newly found letters are at the excellent Dickens Letters project www.dickensletters.com.

Wilkie helped Catherine Dickens publish the first edition of Dickens's letters and he did recommend that a few be destroyed. But Wilkie looked after letters he had written to his mother and brother Charles, which he inherited on their deaths, and carefully kept and labelled them. More than 3350 of Wilkie's letters are known and documented and are an invaluable biographical source.

However, among them there are no known letters to either of Wilkie's two lifelong companions – Caroline Graves, or Martha Rudd who was the mother of his three children, or to any of those children. So some letters clearly are missing and have most likely been destroyed. But that is probably an issue of privacy, tidiness, or carelessness rather than fear of biography. Indeed, on many occasions Wilkie gave information to journalists and writers about his life – largely because he preferred what they wrote to be accurate.

If Wilkie had wished to avoid biography he would be a very disappointed man. Depending how they are counted – starting with the unfinished biography by Dorothy L. Sayers and the groundbreaking work by Kenneth Robinson in 1951 – there are certainly more than a dozen biographies and more than double that number if literary analysis, letters, chronology, and guides are added.

More on Dickens's bonfire and Wilkie's view on burning letters at wilkiecollins.com menu item 9 and see Paul Lewis 'Burning: The Evidence', *The Dickensian*, Winter 2004, pp. 197-208.

WILKIE AT FRYSTON HALL

Richard Monckton Milnes – later Lord Houghton – was a good friend of Wilkie's who visited his home at Fryston Hall on more than one occasion. Wilkie's letters reveal that the first visit was in August 1860 and there was another four years later. Fryston Hall was packed with so many books 'they spilled out into the hallways, bedrooms, and every hidden cupboard' says Professor of Victorian Literature, Deborah Lutz. In her book *Pleasure Bound* she reveals that Fryston would 'become notorious for a subset of this library: its huge stash of rare and illegal erotica which earned the whole house the nickname Aphrodisiopolis'. Much of the material was clandestinely imported from Paris. Milnes was MP for Pontefract from 1837 to 1863 and in 1857 opposed the passing of the Obscene Publications Act which made much of his

collection illegal. He was elevated to the peerage as Baron Houghton in 1863. *Pleasure Bound: Victorian Sex Rebels and the New Eroticism*, New York: 2011, p. 69.

GASLIGHT MYSTERIES

Continuing Gaslight Mysteries, Cora Harrison has now added two more which feature Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens as characters who solve the various murders and mysteries. The first two were *Season of Darkness* and *Winter of Despair* and there are now two new titles to complete the four-part series.

The first new arrival is *Summer of Secrets* set around Knebworth House. Quoting from the publisher's blurb: "When Inspector Field shows his friend Charles Dickens the body of a young woman dragged from the River Thames, he cannot have foreseen that the famous author would immediately recognize the victim as Isabella Gordon, a housemaid he had tried to help through his charity. Nor that Dickens and his fellow writer Wilkie Collins would determine to find out who killed her. Who was Isabella blackmailing, and why? Led on by fragments of a journal discovered by Isabella's friend Sesina, the two men track the murdered girl's journeys from Greenwich to Snow Hill, from Smithfield Market to St Bartholomews, and put their wits to work on uncovering her past."

Number 4 in the series is *Spring of Hope*. "*March, 1859*. After the 'Great Stink' of the previous summer when Parliament was overwhelmed by the stench of sewage from the River Thames, and with cholera running rife throughout the city, Charles Dickens has a new enthusiasm. Having formed a firm friendship with Joseph Bazalgette, he is assisting the ambitious young engineer in his efforts to find a solution to London's pollution problem. Dickens' friend and fellow writer Wilkie Collins meanwhile is distracted by thoughts of his pretty new housekeeper and her charming daughter. But what does he really know of his new employee's past - and just who - or what - is making her so frightened? During an exhibition to showcase London's top engineers' plans to solve the sewage issue, proceedings are disrupted by a high-pitched, agonised scream - and the discovery of a blood-soaked body; the result - it would appear - of a terrible accident. Dickens however is convinced of foul play, and once again he and Wilkie Collins set about uncovering the shocking truth."

These titles, along with several others by Cora Harrison, who appears to produce books at an astonishingly fast rate, are issued by publishers Severn House. All are available on Amazon or Book Depository.

As an aside, there really was ‘the Great Stink’ in the summer of 1858 which Wilkie would have endured – see ‘One Hot Summer’, WCS Newsletter Spring 2019. The real-life Joseph Bazalgette constructed the impressive Crossness Pumping Station with its beam engine house on the southern side of the Thames at Abbey Wood in 1865. Crossness still exists and hosts open days for visitors. The interior is truly magnificent and certainly well worth a visit. (See www.crossness.org.uk/visit.html).

LARGE PRINT EDITIONS

Most of Collins’s titles, including some of the short stories, now seem to be available in large print editions. Most are paperbacks and can be found on Amazon; or on Book Depository just search for Wilkie Collins Large Print. Prices vary mainly between about £8.99 for *Hide and Seek* and £22.99 for *The Black Robe*.

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