



# ***THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY***

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**NEWSLETTER**

**SUMMER 2023**

## ***WILKIE COLLINS IN CONTEXT – A BICENTENARY VOLUME***

*Wilkie Collins in Context* has just been published by Cambridge University Press, to celebrate the forthcoming 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth on 8 January 1824. The volume is officially released on 31 August 2023 in hardback but also available in Kindle format. Edited by long-standing WCS member Professor William Baker and Professor Richard Nemesvari, it includes contributions from seven WCS members. Overall, it provides a very accessible and factual appreciation of many aspects of Wilkie's life and work and will become an invaluable reference source for Collins studies. The full price of £103.50 has been reduced to £90 but we have done a deal with the publisher to discount it further for Society members to £72 (or \$92) plus postage. You can obtain the discount by ordering online at [www.cambridge.org/9781316510575](http://www.cambridge.org/9781316510575) and entering the PROMO code BAKER2023. If that is still too much, perhaps you can persuade your local library to buy a copy?

## **BICENTENARY EXHIBITION AT THE CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM**

To coincide with the 200th anniversary of Wilkie's birth, an exhibition at the Charles Dickens Museum in London 'Mutual Friends – the Adventures of Charles Dickens & Wilkie Collins' will run from 15 November 2023 to 25 February 2024 including of course that special day when Wilkie is 200 on 8 January 2024.

The exhibition will explore the professional and personal relationship between Dickens and Collins and its impact on their literary careers and private lives. It will include significant loans from members of the Wilkie Collins Society and feature a number of objects from the Museum not previously on public display.

Star objects will include

- the Act Drop from *The Lighthouse*
- Dickens's rules and regulations for his amateur dramatic company, not previously displayed
- Letters from Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins and others about their travels and work.
- Annotated copies of *The Frozen Deep*, 'Message from the Sea', and 'No Thoroughfare'
- Playbills of their collaborative work
- Original sketch of Wilkie Collins by E. M. Ward for 'Fall of Clarendon' painting, not previously on public display
- Wilkie and Charles Collins as boys, aged 9 and 5, by Alexander Geddes (1783-1844) painted in 1833.

The Museum expects 20,000 visitors to the exhibition and will take the opportunity to digitise up to 50 relevant items so that they will become permanently available online. It hopes to produce a pdf version of those for members of the Wilkie Collins Society and the Dickens Fellowship.

The Museum is at 48-49 Doughty St, London WC1N 2LX and is open Wednesday to Sunday 10.00am to 5.00pm; entry costs £12.50 and is free to members of the Dickens Fellowship (with membership card!). The website is <https://dickensmuseum.com/pages/homepage>.

There will also be a small Collins display next year at the British Library but the dates have not yet been confirmed.

## **ELECTRO-CHEMICAL TREATMENT FOR GOUT**

Wilkie suffered from what he called gout or rheumatism most of his life. And he spent a lot of time and money trying to find a cure or at least some alleviation of the painful symptoms.

Newly identified information from his bank accounts reveals what he paid for one of these attempts at a cure. We know from his letters that he tried the Electro-Chemical Baths of Dr Jean Caplin which were quite nearby at 9 York Place. On 31 March 1863 he wrote to his friend Charles Reade

I am to be found here before two – or after six. Between these hours, I take a drive in the fresh air, and a dip in “Dr Caplin’s Electro-Chemical Bath” – out of which I hope I am getting strength enough to go abroad on Monday week, April 13th. (to Charles Reade, 31 March 1863).

It seems he was having a course of treatment as four days later he wrote to his doctor Frank Beard

My back is painful again – and I had a restless night. But I managed to walk a quarter of an hour yesterday on the high road, and I shall try again today. I will call at Welbeck Street at or a little before four o’Clock this afternoon on the chance of seeing you before I go to the Bath. (to F. C. Beard, 4 April 1863).

The trip abroad was also to seek relief for his gout – he went to the sulphurous baths at Aix-la-Chappelle and then onto the springs at Wildbad, so presumably Dr Caplin’s treatment did work at least enough to get him on the trip.

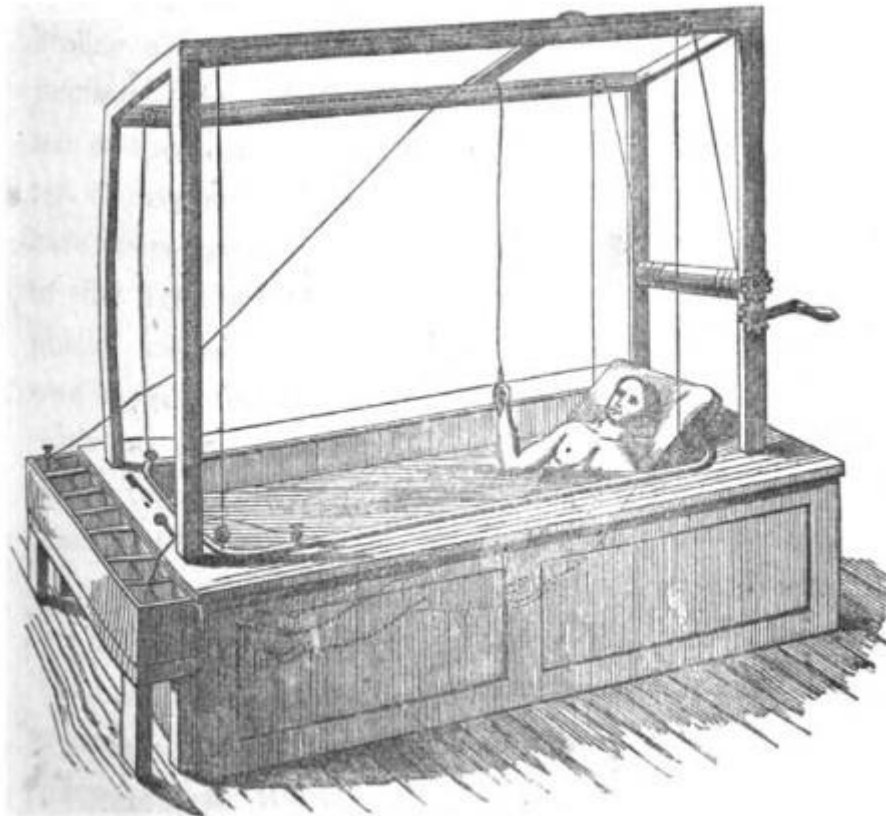
Five years later he was back at Caplin’s. In 1868 he wrote to his lawyer, Edward Benham

I have begun the electric baths. Rating the pores of my skin at only 7 million – I have had 7 million currents of electricity running through me for 45 minutes. The result is great cheerfulness... At 4, I take my Bath At 5, I get out – amidst thunder & lightning. (to Edward Benham, 25 September 1868).

The 45-minute sessions were described by Caplin in 1856 in a book explaining his methods.

The patient is placed up to the neck in a metallic bathing-tub, isolated from the ground and made to rest in a horizontal position, upon a wooden bench, the whole length of the body, which is to be also isolated from the bathing tub...One extremity of the bath is put in contact with the negative pole of the pile [battery] by means of a screw, and the patient takes hold of the positive pole, sometimes with the right hand and sometimes with the left. The arm is held up by supports in contact with the seat...The patient being thus placed, the positive current enters either by the right or left arm, circulates from the head

to the feet, and is neutralized at the negative pole on the sides of the bathing-tub. Being isolated from direct contact with the negative pole as well as from the ground, the electric fluid radiates from the body into the bath, forming a multitude of currents from the entire surface of the body, which, after having traversed the organs and even the bones, neutralise themselves upon the negative side of the bathing-tub. (*The Electro-Chemical Bath, for the Extraction of Mercury, Lead, and Other Poisonous Substances from the Human Body*, London: William Freeman, 1856, p. 3).



DR. CAPLIN'S ELECTRO-CHEMICAL BATH.

Wilkie's bank account for 1868 records these four payments to Dr Caplin:

7 Oct 1868 £5-10s

31 Oct 1868 £5-11s

7 Nov 1868 £5-10s

30 Nov 1868 £5-15s

The total of £22-6s for four sessions is equivalent to more than £2000 at today's prices. We also know that during this course of treatment Caplin gave Wilkie a copy of the third edition of his book which was published by Trübner in October

that year (*The Times*, 17 October 1868 p. 11f). The book was found in his library after his death described as a “presentation copy from the author to Wilkie Collins 1868” (Baker, *Wilkie Collins’s Library*, 2002 p. 87).

These are the only known accounts of Wilkie’s visits to Caplin. He did refer to ‘electric baths’ in letters in 1871 and 1877 but they may have been at a different establishment run by Adolphe Didier a ‘medical galvanist’ of 10 Fitzroy Street (*Kelly’s Directory*) to whom he paid £20 on 9 September 1871. And it was Caplin not Didier whom he later recommended to the photographer John Watkins

Have you ever tried Caplin’s Electro Chemical Baths? 9 York Place Baker Street. They did wonders for me, some years since. (to John Watkins, 26 August 1873).

## **WILKIE’S INHERITANCES**

We tend to think of Wilkie as earning his own living from his twenties until his death by writing novels, stories, and plays. Over his lifetime he earned around £62,000 from doing that – rather more than £6 million in today’s prices. But he also inherited a considerable sum from his father, the painter William Collins, RA (1787-1847). When William died, he left £11,815 most of it in trust to provide an income for his widow Harriet. When she died in 1868 the income reverted to his sons Wilkie and Charles, about £85 a year each. And in 1873 when Charles died all the income – around £180 a year – came to Wilkie. Over his lifetime he received £6,756 income from dividends on his inherited money out of which he felt obliged to pay £332 to a distant cousin of his father and her family. Wilkie also paid sums to two of his mother’s sisters, a total over several years of £500 to Catherine Esther and £605 to Mary Christina.

Harriet had her own money inherited from an aunt. On her death that was shared between her two sons, around £3,000 each. Charles’s share passed to his widow Katey on his death in 1873. Wilkie invested his share and dividends and gains on these brought him a net £445 over his lifetime. By the time of his death in 1889 all his investments had been sold, the last in 1881.

Other minor sums from the accounts of his father and mother leave him with a net inheritance of £10,039 over his lifetime. While this is far less than the estimated £62,000 he earned from his writing it is likely he could have lived modestly as a gentleman even if he had earned nothing. He could not have had

numerous foreign trips, spent summers in Ramsgate, maintained two households, smoked the best cigars and drunk quantities of dry champagne, not to mention paying doctors and buying laudanum. But he would have been comfortable.

When Wilkie died, the money left in trust by his father was largely intact and formed part of his estate. After the sale of his books and manuscripts that was valued at £11,414.80, rather less than his father had left for his family 42 years earlier and which Wilkie ultimately inherited. He had spent all he had earned and inherited in his lifetime bar £862.63 in his bank account, some of which arrived after his death. (Extracted from 'Money', *Wilkie Collins in Context*, 2023, pp. 201-211.)

## **BLUE PLAQUE**

The Spring Newsletter revealed plans for a blue plaque on the newly identified cottage where Wilkie stayed in 1859 and where he wrote the opening chapters of *The Woman in White*. The plaque was fitted to the cottage and unveiled on 16 May by Ken Nickoll, the man who did the forensic detective work to discover that Woodside Cottage, The Vale, Broadstairs was in fact as Wilkie described it to his friend Charles Ward in July 1859

Mr Wayhall's, Church Hill Cottage, Broadstairs...a half-detached cottage all to myself, on the Ramsgate road with nothing between me and the sea but the open down.



**Novelist & journalist  
WILKIE COLLINS  
(1824 - 1889)  
stayed in this cottage  
in 1859 and wrote the  
opening chapters of  
The Woman in White**

## RAMSGATE

A new analysis of Wilkie's letters and accounts shows that he spent sixteen holidays in Ramsgate on the Kent coast in the 1870s and 1880s – a total of 373 nights at a cost of £1185 – approximately £125,000 in today's money.

Most of these visits were with Caroline and her daughter Harriet though at least one was with Martha and their three children and probably three were taken by himself. After her marriage to Henry Bartley, Harriet and her children came to join him there. Wilkie stayed at the Granville Hotel three times, 14 Nelson Crescent at least eight times, and at least once at 27 Wellington Crescent on the east cliff. Another trip was mainly spent on the Yacht *Phyllis* but he sailed in a variety of vessels on a number of his visits. As well as getting away from the dirt, noise and oppressive heat of London, his trips were a mixture of seeking health from the Ramsgate air, holidays, and a place to work.

He set key scenes of three books in Ramsgate – *Poor Miss Finch* (1872), *The Law and the Lady* (1875), and *The Fallen Leaves* (1879). Only one of those scenes was ever illustrated, and then in *Harper's Weekly* – the key moment of revelation near the start of *The Law and the Lady*.



Valeria and Eustace Woodville on Ramsgate beach  
*The Law and the Lady* in  
*Harper's Weekly*, 17 October 1874, p. 853

In addition, we know he wrote or developed parts of other books while he was there including *The Haunted Hotel* (1879), *Heart and Science* (1883), “*I Say No!*” (1884), and *The Evil Genius* (1886).

### ***HARPER’S MAGAZINE***

Volume XVI of *Harper’s New Monthly Magazine* from December 1857 to May 1858 was sold by Forum Auctions on 10 August 2023 for £100 plus premium. This particular volume contained Thomas Nast’s illustration ‘Saint Nicholas and his Reindeer’ but more significantly for Collins, the first publication in the February number of ‘A Marriage tragedy’. This short story on pp. 334-357 was subsequently republished in *The Queen of Hearts* (1859) as ‘Brother Griffith’s Story of ‘A Plot in Private Life’. It is an early example of detective fiction with the chief protagonist a lawyer’s clerk named Mr Dark.

### **BEARDS IN THE NINETEENTH CENTURY**

There is an interesting article by Michael Steel in the latest Spring issue of *The Dickensian* (Vol. 119, No. 519, pp. 36-47). Entitled ‘Why *did* Dickens grow his beard?’, it discusses social and fashion implications of beards in the nineteenth century and how they changed from ‘Newgates’ to ‘door-knockers’. There are several pictures of Dickens with and without. *The Frozen Deep* is duly mentioned with a brief mention of Wilkie and includes the photograph of the cast at Gad’s Hill.

In fact both Dickens and Wilkie grew beards for their parts in the play and they continued to wear them for the rest of their lives. Wilkie wrote of his with good effect to the Dutch firm, Belinfante Brothers when they attempted to pirate *Man and Wife*. They also made the mistake of assuming that ‘Wilkie’ was a woman’s name and received on 10 November 1869 the following blunt response:

Your letter is addressed to me as “Madame Wilkie Collins.” I avow it with sincere regret, but the interests of truth are sacred. The trumpet of Fame, gentlemen, has played the wrong tune in your ears. I am not the charming person whom you suppose me to be. I wear trousers; I have a vote for Parliament; I possess a beard; in two dreadful words, I am – a Man.



## PAINTINGS BY WILLIAM COLLINS

William Collins's well-known 1844 oil painting of Seaford in Sussex showing three children playing on the beach is on display at the Victoria & Albert Museum in London in the British Galleries, Room 122. Also on display in the gallery is his even more famous *Rustic Civility* (1833) showing three children by an open gate, one apparently touching his forelock to a passer-by. It was widely reproduced as an engraving and print right through to the last century. A search on 'William Collins RA' at <https://collections.vam.ac.uk> brings up images of both as well as details – some with images – of more than 30 other items by William in the V&A.

## A VISIT TO LINCOLN'S INN

As a young man Wilkie qualified as a barrister which then only involved eating a set number of dinners at one of the Inns of Court. Wilkie chose Lincoln's Inn, the largest, and qualified on 21 November 1851. He wrote the morning after to his friend Edward Pigott – who had also qualified the same day

What a night! What speeches! What songs! I carried away much clarets and am rather a seedy barrister this morning. I think it must have been the oaths that disagreed with me!

In September Lincoln's Inn is throwing open its doors to the public as part of the Open House Festival weekend. It will welcome visitors from 10am to 3.30pm on Saturday 9<sup>th</sup> and Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> September and among other attractions such as a second folio of Shakespeare, a 400-year-old chapel, and a stunning Great Hall, it promises cake! Details here at [lincolnsinn.org.uk](http://lincolnsinn.org.uk) and search 'open house 2023'.

Wilkie never practised as a barrister though of course he did use the law and lawyers in several of his novels, especially in *The Woman in White* and *No Name*. He also came up with some nice lawyer quotes:

But then I am a lawyer, and my business is to make a fuss about trifles. *The Law and the Lady*

The men who rise in the law are the men who decline to take No for an answer. *Armada*

He fell headlong into the bottomless abyss of the English Law. *Armada*

Every human institution (Justice included) will stretch a little, if you only pull it the right way. *The Moonstone*

Always distrust a man's last wishes on his death-bed - unless they are communicated to his lawyer, and expressed in his will. *Jezebel's Daughter*.

Wilkie also used his legal status to become William Dawson, barrister-at-law, when visiting his morganatic 'wife' Martha Rudd and their children – all of whom went by the name 'Dawson' on censuses and in their son's case on his birth certificate. Their daughters were not registered as they were born before there were penalties for failing to register a birth.

CERTIFIED COPY OF AN ENTRY OF BIRTH

GIVEN AT THE GENERAL REGISTER OFFICE

Application Number *Y 004720/c*

REGISTRATION DISTRICT *Marylebone*

*1875* BIRTH in the Sub-district of *Christ Church* in the County of *Middlesex*

No.	When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar	Name entered after registration
<i>139</i>	<i>Twenty fifth December 1874 10 Taunton Place</i>	<i>William Charles Collins</i>	<i>Boy</i>	<i>William Dawson</i>	<i>Martha Dawson formerly Rudd</i>	<i>Barrister at Law</i>	<i>Martha Dawson Mother 10 Taunton Place Marylebone</i>	<i>First February 1875</i>	<i>Frank Stokes</i>	<i>Registrar</i>

When and where born	Name, if any	Sex	Name and surname of father	Name, surname and maiden surname of mother	Occupation of father	Signature, description and residence of informant	When registered	Signature of registrar
Twenty fifth December 1874 10 Taunton Place	William Charles Collins	Boy	William Dawson	Martha Dawson formerly Rudd	Barrister at Law	Martha Dawson Mother 10 Taunton Place Marylebone	First February 1875	Frank Stokes Registrar

Can you spot the three pieces of false information on this certificate!

## **IMPORTANCE OF *THE DEAD SECRET***

Elizabeth Steere, who teaches English at the University of North Georgia, re-appraises the importance of *The Dead Secret* in the genre of female detectives in detective fiction. She writes:

While Wilkie Collins' novels *The Moonstone* (1868) and *The Woman in White* (1859-60) have long been accepted as part of the early mystery canon, Collins' earlier novel *The Dead Secret* (1857) is rarely included. *The Dead Secret* is here reconsidered as one of the earliest English female detective novels, revealing its heretofore unrecognised significance to the genre of detective fiction and the evolution of the literary female detective.

Her essay 'The Mystery of the Myrtle Room' was published in *Victorian Popular Fiction* Vol. 5 Issue 1 (Spring 2023) and can be downloaded free from [victorianpopularfiction.org](http://victorianpopularfiction.org); search 'Steere'.

## ***THE FROZEN DEEP***

A website called [picnitwic](http://picnitwic.com) has a page about the 1867 Manchester production of Wilkie's play *The Frozen Deep* – see [picnitwic.com](http://picnitwic.com) and search 'albert smith'. It includes a photograph of the cast including Wilkie Collins but excluding the Ternan family, taken at a party on 12 July 1867 at the home of Dickens's lawyer Frederic Ouvry. The original is in the National Portrait Gallery ([npg.org.uk](http://npg.org.uk) search 'Francesco Berger'). It also has images of an invitation to the party and a playbill from the Manchester performance.

## **DOUBLE JEOPARDY AND A SPOT OF COLOUR**

"The mysterious Anne Catherick strongly favors a certain color in this novel by Wilkie Collins,"

That key question in the US quiz show 'Jeopardy' in May this year would be no problem for WCS members! It was answered correctly by Raquel Matta but she sadly failed to win the final prize which came to \$147,801 – see [www.tvinsider.com](http://www.tvinsider.com) and search 'Raquel Matta'. Technically, of course, white isn't a colour but a mixture of its components – think Isaac Newton and his prism!

Continuing the subject of colour, the title of *The Woman in White* was itself imitated during the nineteenth century with various ‘women’ in mauve, red, grey and black. These have continued into the twentieth century with the most familiar probably being Susan Hill’s ghost story *The Woman in Black*.

## **MARIAN HALCOMBE STRIKES AGAIN**

It seems that Marian Halcombe has become the eponymous heroine of Brenda W. Clough’s recent novel *Marian Halcombe: The Thrilling Victorian Adventures of the Most Dangerous Woman in Europe*. To quote from the publisher’s blurb:

The redoubtable Marian Halcombe first burst onto the world in the 1860s in *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*, by Wilkie Collins. In that classic Victorian thriller, Marian won the hearts of every reader. Now, refusing to rest on her laurels, she goes on a life of love and adventure in the most sensational Victorian style. Bigamy, murder, and a final confrontation with anarchists who will stick at nothing keep Marian from the happily-ever-after she’s determined to achieve.

The novel is published in the USA by Book View Café of Las Vegas but is available from Amazon at £9.20 paperback or £0.77 for the Kindle edition. Clough has written a further ten stories of Marian’s adventures all available as e-publications only from Amazon or Book View Café.

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