



IN MEMORY OF
WILKIE COLLINS

AUTHOR OF THE WOMAN IN WHITE AND
OTHER WORKS OF FICTION

Born 8th January 1824
Died 23rd September 1889

Kensal Green Cemetery – Path side, tall marble cross with marble curb.
Grave no./Square/Row 31754/141/1

THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

President
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Membership

Kirk Beetz, 1307, 'F' Street, Davis, California 95616, USA
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Collins had suffered from poor health for many years, his final illness coming during 1889. In January he had a severe attack of bronchitis for which he took his customary dose of laudanum "measured by the tablespoonful." Soon after, he was badly shaken when a four-wheel cab in which he was riding was involved in an accident. On 30th June he suffered a paralytic stroke which made front page news as far away as America. The New York Times for 3rd July 1889 carried the headline "Wilkie Collins Stricken". His condition improved significantly until mid-September when he again developed bronchitis. His last recorded note on September 21st was a brief message to his doctor, Frank Beard, "I am dying old friend" and he finally succumbed at 10 a.m. on September 23rd 1889.

THE FUNERAL OF MR WILKIE COLLINS (Taken from *The Daily Telegraph*, 28th September 1889)

In strict accord with the wishes of the late master of English fiction, the funeral arrangements were of the very simplest character; but though there was nothing of pomp or ceremony in the proceedings of yesterday morning there was strong and sincere evidence of the high esteem in which Mr Wilkie Collins was held both by his brothers in art and by many of the public, who attended to show their respect for his memory. At the deceased's house in Wimpole Street a few friends assembled in the room, hung with many of his father's pictures, where so much of his work had been accomplished, amongst them being the chief mourners - Mr Sebastian Schlesinger, Mr Henry Bartley, Mr Andrew Chatto, Mr Frank Beard, and Mr W. S. Pigott, Examiner of Plays, one of the gentleman's oldest friends, to whom he has bequeathed the little sketch of himself, painted many years ago by Sir John Everett Millais, Mr Bancroft, Mr Hall Caine, Mr A. P. Watt, and Mrs Henry P. Bartley. The coffin of plain oak lay, covered with wreaths, in a small room on the ground floor, and bore the inscription "Wilkie Collins, Born Jan. 8, 1824. Died Sept. 23, 1889". Amongst the many tributes of recollection were wreaths from "The Society of Authors", Mr Charles Ward, the Baroness De Stern, "Blanche Roosevelt" (who stood beside the grave), Miss Hogarth; a wreath of scarlet geraniums, his favourite flower, from "Mamie Dickens, in memory of Charles Dickens;" John Billington, Frank Marshall and Ada (Cavendish) Marshall, Mrs Maxwell, (Miss Braddon), Frederick Lehmann, and Mrs Campbell, Carlotta Leclercq, and many other old friends and fellow-workers.

The hearse started from Wimpole Street at 11.30, and as it left a small crowd who had gathered outside uncovered respectfully. At Kensal Green a still larger crowd of the outside public had assembled by the church steps and round the grave, many of them bringing with them their favourite volumes of the dead author's works, a simple sign of the esteem in which the outside reading public held Wilkie Collins. In the church the hearse and the three carriages were met by many well-known men in letters and art, including besides those already mentioned, Mr Holman Hunt, Mr Pinero, Mr George Redford, Dr W.S. Russell, and Mr Edmund Yates. The service was conducted by Dr Edward Ker Gray, incumbent of St. George's Chapel, Albemarle Street, who announced at the close of the impressive ceremony that a memorial service, in which he proposed to make some reference to the life and labours of the deceased, would be held tomorrow at the chapel in Albemarle Street. The grave lies behind the church, close to that of the late Lady Rivers Wilson. It is understood that Mr Wilkie Collins left his affairs in the perfect methodical order for which he was famous in his life, and that by order of the executors a sale of such portions of his books and pictures as are not mentioned in private bequests will shortly take place.

"ONE WHO KNEW HIM" By Edmund Yates (Taken from *The World* of 2nd October 1889)

FIVE AND TWENTY years ago the professional neurologist had few sources whence to obtain the information necessary for his purpose. From an encyclopaedia, or from *Men of the Time*, he gathered certain dales and a few bald facts, and he had to content himself with stringing these together in the best manner possible. Nowadays, on the appearance of a paragraph announcing the illness of any man of mark, *The World* office is at once invaded by the obituary-ghouls of journalism, who, with an eye to the immediate future, come to buy or beg the number containing the 'Celebrity' of which moribund was the subject. The information therein contained is generally reproduced by these gentlemen at great length, patched here and there with a little of their own embroidery, and neatly suggesting their intimacy with the deceased; but in the recent case of Mr Wilkie Collins there have, since his lamented death, been so many extraordinary revelations made in various journals, and in nearly every case "By One who Knew Him", as to create astonishment, and something more amongst his old friends. One gentleman announced that Mr Collins's death "took place at Dr Beard's residence in Wimpole Street," which is scarcely considered accurate by those who happen to know that Mr Collins died in his own house, that Dr Beard is Mr Beard, and that he lives in Welbeck Street. Another, who once paid the novelist a visit found "that his house bore signs of a certain dinginess, which I attributed to the absence of womankind", in itself a startling statement to Mr Collins's intimates. Wilkie's insight into character was generally quick, and in this case must have been instantaneous, for it appears that "he once produced a decanter of very fine brandy and a box of cigars", which was not, so far as I remember, his usual custom with visitors. No man was probably less like the popular idea of a professional author, no man less frequently appeared in the "foolscap uniform turned up with ink;" his conversation was by no means confined to literary subjects, and least of all to his own work; and his discussion of topics of the day was always salted with humour - grim humour undoubtedly, but cynically bright and telling. Another "One who Knew Him", this time an anonymous artist, who claims to have painted his portrait, does not take this view of the deceased. "While in the congenial company of the novelist", he says, "one always felt that he was taking mental notes of everything and everybody, and there was a strange, weird, far-off look about his spectacled eyes which impressed you with the fancy that he invested almost everything with an air of mystery and romance. At such times as he was able to sit for his portrait his eyes would often wander over every nook and corner of the studio, and sometimes he would put elaborate questions respecting some out-of-the-way object which had caught his observant eye. Upon one occasion a rather mysterious-looking door belonging to an improvised enclosure or partition of the studio, attracted his notice, and after contemplating it for some time in silence, with an air of suppressed wonder, he said in almost a whisper, which half alarmed the artist, 'Where does that lead to? It looks as if it opened to a subterranean vault or passage, and might easily be an escape in case of sudden surprise.'"

This description will also be a surprise to Wilkie's friends, who knew him as a cheerful amusing companion. But the most delightful of all these reminiscences is the following, confined, of course, "By One who Knew Him", to the *Pall Mall Gazette*: "He was, perhaps, the most intimate friend of Charles Dickens, to whom he was deeply attached. Almost every day when they were both in London, this distinguished couple might be seen walking arm-in-arm along the Strand, or sitting *over chops and coffee* in Verrey's Restaurant in Regents Street". The idea of Dickens walking arm-in-arm with anybody is good; but his sitting over chops and coffee at Verrey's is much better. Chops and coffee at Verrey's! Poor Mr Krehl, who justly prides himself on his *cuisine* and his cellar, would faint at the bare idea. *The Pall Mall Gazette's* gentleman's knowledge of London restaurants is not extensive, though certainly peculiar. He seems to think that Verrey's is one of those coffee-

shops which display two eggs in a worsted basket in one window, and an uncooked rasher of bacon in the other. He refers, I see, to the fact that Collin's name appears frequently in *Forster's Life of Dickens*, which is not, perhaps, remarkable; but he does not apparently know that Wilkie's copy of that work is profusely covered with marginal notes of curious comment, or that Wilkie was accustomed to speak of the book as "The Life of John Forster, with Occasional Anecdotes of Charles Dickens".

On Friday last we laid poor Wilkie to his rest, in the presence of half-a-dozen old friends and a great mob of people. Holman Hunt was there and Edward Pigott, two of his earliest companions, Charles Kent, for many years editor of the *Sun*, long intimate with all the Dickens surroundings, Mr Chatto the publisher, W.H.Russell, F.C.Beard, George Redford, S.B.Bancroft, and AW.Pinero. Another very old acquaintance was there in the person of Mr Lovejoy, one of the foremen-printers in the old Beaufort House, where *Household Words* and *All the Year Round* were printed, and who must have had a vast amount of Wilkie's "copy" through his hands. The arrangements were very simple - it was provided in the will that the cost of the funeral should not exceed £20 - and the ceremony was soon over. I had not been at Kensal Green since I "followed" dear old Charles Mathews, now eleven years ago, and I was more than ever impressed with the horror of a burial in a London cemetery.

Of course "One who Knew Him" was present, and gave his account in various journals, discovering among the company "Sir B. Sleshinger," which there is no such person, Mr Carr Beard and Dr Beard, presumably the same individual, omitting such well-known men as Hunt, Pigott, Bancroft, Pinero and Russell, but "observing" Mr and Mrs Frank Marshall, Oscar Wilde, and Charles Dickens, none of whom were within miles of the place.

The Pall Mall Gazette 3rd.October 1889 stated;

'There must have been at least one hundred of those unwholesome creatures present who call themselves women, who seem to live in graveyards. When the coffin had been lowered into the bricked grave there was a great rush of these people who craned over into the space, and clawed at the wreaths of flowers, and pulled about the cards which were attached to the wreaths, and laughed and cried chattered until they were moved on by the graveyard police.'

CAROLINE GRAVES: Caroline died on 14th June 1895 and was buried in the same grave as Wilkie at Kensal Green Cemetery. No words were added to the inscription. His grave was originally arranged by Frank Beard and Henry Bartley.

MARTHA RUDD: Martha Rudd is listed in the records of Kensal Green Cemetery as being the owner of Wilkie's grave. Martha died in 1919 and is buried at Southend Cemetery, Sutton Road grave number 2702, plot D. William Charles Collins-Dawson Wilkie's son was also buried there in 1913 as are Wilkie's daughters Marian and Harriet who died within a few months of each other in 1955.

I would like to thank William and Faith Clarke for providing the information about Caroline and Martha.

Further reading:

W. M. Clarke The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins
Catherine Peters The King of Inventors

The Times 28th September 1889 List of mourners at the funeral of Wilkie Collins:

	Notes
Mr Charles Dickens	(Junior as senior was deceased by this date)
Mr Hall Caine	
Mr Bancroft	
Mr Pinero	(Arthur
Mr Edmund Yates	
Dr. F. Carr-Beard	Mr Frank Beard
Mr & Mrs Frank Marshall	(Mrs Marshall nee Ada Cavendish - sec 'One who Knew Him')
Mr E.F.S. Piggott	Edward Piggott
Mr Oscar Wilde	(not present - see 'One who Knew Him')
Mr H. P. Bartley	(actually Mrs Henry P. Bartley)
Mr Andrew Chatto	
Mr P. Spalding	
Dr. W.H. Russell	Dr. W.S. Russell
Miss Blanche Roosevelt	
Mr J. Lately, Jr.	
Mr Edmund Gosse	(Gosse)(representing The Society of Authors)
Mr Egmont Hall	(Hallé)

Wreaths and tributes of flowers from:

Miss Mamie Dickens	(and Kate Perugini)
The Comte de Paris	
Lady Millias	(Millais)
Mr & Mrs J. Billington	
Miss Braddon	(Mrs Maxwell – E.M. Ward's widow)
Miss Carlotta Leclercq	
Mr Frank Archer	
Mrs Dawson	Martha Rudd and her children were not present but represented by a wreath
Mrs Perugini	
The Society of Authors	
The Society of Artists	

Various sources state that the following people were also present at the funeral:

Caroline Graves and her daughter Carrie and husband	
Jane Ward	(Wilkie's cousin)
Mr C. Ward	(representing The Society of Authors)
Sebastian Schlesinger	
Mr Watt	
Broness De Stern	
Miss Hogarth	
Frederick Lehmann	
Mrs Campbell	
George Redford	