



# **THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY**

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## **NEWSLETTER**

**SUMMER 1997**

'Nobody can accuse me of having ever been accessory to the disturbing of quiet people with useful knowledge.' (*A Rogue's Life*)

## **SOME SUMMER QUOTES**

'Of all oppressive summers, a hot summer in London is the hardest to endure.' (*The Evil Genius*)

With the Australians in England to contest the Ashes series, the Test selectors should bear in mind that 'Doctor Chennerly... was the best bowler in the Long Beckley cricket-club. A strictly orthodox man in the matter of wine and mutton.' (*The Dead Secret*)

And for those inclined to a more indolent approach to life, Gabriel Betteredge decided to 'set [himself] in the warm summer air next - seeing that what is good for old claret is equally good for old age.' (*The Moonstone*)

## **A LIST OF E-MAIL ADDRESSES**

It seems as if there are now several members of the WCS who are on the Internet. Anyone interested in being on a separate e-mail list for the mutual exchange of information should contact our membership Secretary, Paul Lewis, at paul@deadline.demon.co.uk.

## **THE WCS JOURNAL**

It has been a continuing disappointment that our erstwhile American colleagues have been unable to bring to publication any recent issues of *The WCS Journal* - hence our own reprints and brief articles by members (more always welcome). We are therefore exploring the

possibility of publishing in the UK a New Series of *The Journal* under the editorship of Collins scholar, Graham Law. Graham Law hails from the south of Manchester, completed his doctorate on mystery fiction at the University of Sussex, and is now Professor in English Studies at Waseda University, Tokyo. He is especially interested in questions concerning Collins's reading public. He has published essays on Collins's periodical publication and edited a number of Victorian novels for the Broadview Literary Texts series, including *The Evil Genius*. At present he is collecting material for a book on the late nineteenth century serialisation of popular novels in British provincial newspapers.

In addition, few of our current membership have any or all of the back numbers of the original *Journal* and we are looking at the prospect of reissuing the entire run from 1981-1991 as a single volume with an index. This will be for sale to members at a discounted rate as well as to libraries and others.

#### **AN ANALYSIS OF WILKIE COLLINS'S HANDWRITING**

'The handwriting wandered crookedly up and down, in deplorable freedom from all proper restraint' (*Armada*)

Handwriting expert Andrea Lyttleton recently took a look at Wilkie Collins. Andrea is a qualified graphologist and a member of the British Academy of Graphology with an Advanced Diploma in Personnel work. Her interest developed from a fascination of letter form and psychology and her usual speciality is the field of recruitment. However, she analysed Tony Blair's writing for *The Daily Telegraph* of 3 April 1997; and recently had the opportunity of examining several Collins letters dating from 1864 to 1889 in approximately 10 year intervals. Her report on Collins's handwriting is enclosed with this Newsletter.

#### **COLLINS AND POLITICS**

Wilkie wisely seems to have had very little to do with politics during his lifetime. Reading through his works, however, he might have suggested the following advice to our various leaders, new and old.

'In short, my dear sir, everything wears out in this world - and why should the House of Commons be an exception to the rule.' (*The Black Robe*)

'As a member of parliament, he set an example which might have been followed with advantage by many of his colleagues. In the first place, he abstained from hastening the downfall of representative institutions by

asking questions and making speeches. In the second place, he was able to distinguish between the duty that he owed to his party, and the duty that he owed to his country.' ('I Say No')

"Which of our political parties deserves the confidence of the English people?" In plain terms, on his side, Randal answered: "The party that lowers taxes." (*The Evil Genius*)

'Resignation is sublime.' (*The Woman in White*)

And finally, does our new Home Secretary, Jack Straw, know about his namesake (alias Hans Grimm) from *Jezebel's Daughter*? This novel was, of course adapted, from Collins's earlier stage play appropriately called *The Red Vial*

### **'THE GREAT (FORGOTTEN) INVASION'**

February 22 this year marked the 200th anniversary of the curious invasion of Britain by four ships sent by the Directorate of the French Republic. They contained 1,400 soldiers who landed on the coast of Wales. Under the leadership of Lord Cawdor, the local labourers put around their shoulders their wives' red petticoats. The French were so convinced that they were about to engage red-coated English soldiers in battle that they surrendered without a fight. The anniversary achieved reasonable publicity in the press and on the radio but the media overlooked Collins's historical account of the landing, first published in *Household Words* for 12 March 1859. The article was subsequently republished in *My Miscellanies* (1863), ending in Collins's words: 'But there is a Moral to be drawn from it, nevertheless. If we are invaded again, and on a rather larger scale, let us not be so ill-prepared this next time as to be obliged to take refuge in our wives' red petticoats.'

### **SOME LITERARY CONNECTIONS**

Long-standing member Muriel Smith has come across three interesting Collins connections:

#### **Collins and Chesterton**

The following extract comes from an early Chesterton essay entitled 'How Not to Do It', published originally in *The Speaker* of 23 March 1901 as a review of *How to Write Fiction* by Grant Richards and reprinted in *The Chesterton Review*, vol XXI, no. 4, November 1995.

'We have nothing to say to Wilkie Collins and Sir Walter Besant and other authorities from whom explanations of artistic method are quoted here, except that, with the

deepest faith in their talents and veracity, we do not believe a word they say. We do not believe that they wrote their books as they say they did; we know that the power to write a good story is one thing, the power to analyse one's own thoughts quite another, and we simply find evidence in their books themselves that they had their origin in infinitely higher and more mysterious forces than the simple rule of thumb to which their authors ascribe them. We should not believe that St Paul's Cathedral was built especially for a stable even if Sir Christopher Wren said it was, nor do we believe that *The Woman in White* was written by Wilkie Collins because he had invented a certain plot which required a villain, and that villain must be a foreigner. A villain is a dull person both in fiction and real life: Count Fosco was an inspiration from on high.'

### **Collins and Trollope**

*The Woman in White* began publication in *All the Year Round* on 26 November 1859. Anthony Trollope's *The Small House at Allington* began in *The Cornhill* in September 1862 and ran for 20 instalments, totalling 60 chapters. In Chapter 17, which would have appeared in February 1863, there is the following Collins reference:

'The ladies Margaretta and Alexandrina fluttered up with little complimentary speeches to their dear Lady Dumbello, hoping this and beseeching that, as though the 'Woman in White' before them had been the dearest friend of their infancy.'

### **Miss Inchbald's Simple Story**

It may be remembered that the *WCS Journal* Volume V for 1985 contained a reprinted piece by Collins, 'Books Necessary for a Liberal Education' from the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 11 February 1886. In this he notes:

'Read, My good public, Miss Inchbald's *Simple Story* in which you will find the character of a young woman who is made interesting even by her faults - a rare triumph, I can tell you, in our Art.'

This advice it is now possible, even easy to follow: the 1791 novel has lately been published in paperback by Penguin at £6.99.

### **THE SHIP HOTEL, ALLONBY**

Allonby is a coastal town in Cumberland on the Solway Firth, visited by Collins and Dickens on their walking tour of 1857. They arrived in time for lunch on 9 September and stopped for two nights before going on to Doncaster. They stayed at *The Ship* described by Dickens

as 'a capital little homely inn looking out upon the sea...a clean nice place in a rough wild country'. The landlord was Benjamin Partridge whose immensely fat wife was 'very obliging and comfortable.' It is in Allonby, in 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices', that Collins as Thomas Idle engages in autobiographical reflections.

After a recent visit, I can confirm that *The Ship* is still in existence and under the new and capable management of Carole (who is not immensely fat) and Peter Yates. It had apparently fallen on hard times but is now beginning to thrive. The dining room has become the 'Dickens Room' and they intend to make the first floor lounge into a 'Collins Room'. This is probably where Wilkie sat nursing his injured ankle. Bed and breakfast is from approximately £20 per person but the new landlords agreed that WCS members might have a 10% discount. Telephone 01900 881017.

### **COLLINS AT RAMSGATE**

Wilkie regularly stayed at Ramsgate from the early 1870s, convinced that the sea breezes were good for his health. Catriona Blaker of the Ramsgate Society has recently written for *Ramsgate Remembered* (Issue Number 13, 1997) 'Strange Doings at the Seaside or: Wilkie Collins (1824- 1889) and Ramsgate'. The title is based on a quote from *The Fallen Leaves*. The author of this very useful article discusses the relationship of Collins's life and works to Ramsgate. The town is also used for the plots of *The Law and the Lady* and *Poor Miss Finch*. Collins and Pigott are said to have joined the local yacht club, but her research back to the 1850s for this piece seems to have found no record of their membership of the Royal Temple Yacht Club, which moved down river from the Lower Thames. The editor of *Ramsgate Remembered* is Jeremy Hewett, 22 Wellington Crescent, Ramsgate, Kent (Wilkie, remember, installed Martha at number 27 as Mrs Dawson).

Catriona Blaker is also the Hon. Sec. of the Pugin Society and we are looking at the possibility of a joint meeting next summer (1998) - perhaps a walking tour combining both Pugin and Collins places of interest. Those wishing to join the society can contact her at 122 Grange Road, Ramsgate, Kent CT11 9PT. Tel 01843 596401.

### **AN ILLUSTRATION BY CHARLES COLLINS**

The ever alert Paul Lewis has recently discovered an 1851 oil on wood painting by Wilkie's brother, Charles Allston Collins, at the Tate Gallery. It is on view in room 10 and in addition has been reproduced by the Tate as a colour postcard (reference T 03025). The illustration is entitled *May in The Regent's Park* and represents the view

from the Collins then family home at 17 Hanover Terrace (the starting point for William Clarke's *Rambles Around Marylebone*). Apart from the traffic, the scene today is remarkably similar nearly 150 years later.

#### **CAN JANE EYRE BE HAPPY?**

John Sutherland, Lord Northcliffe Professor of Modern English at University College London, has just published his second volume of literary puzzles to follow last year's *Is Heathcliffe a Murderer?* His new book is also issued as an OUP paperback at £4.99 and contains an essay on *Armada* entitled 'What Precisely Does Miss Gwilt's Purple Flask Contain?'.  
*Armada*

#### **FORTHCOMING WORKS**

Lillian Nayder, professor of English at Bates College in Maine, has prepared a new short biography and analysis of Wilkie Collins for the Twayne series on modern authors. Replacing the version by William Marshall published in 1970, it is due to be published later this year as ***Wilkie Collins Revisited***, Twayne/Macmillan, New York 1997. Professor Nayder has also finished a book on the collaborative relationship between Dickens and Collins including *The Frozen Deep*, *The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices* and *No Thoroughfare*. It is due out in 1998.

Next year, 1998, promises to produce a bumper crop of new works on Collins, as well as being the 150th anniversary of his first published book *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, Esq., R.A.*

***Wilkie Collins: Man of Mystery and Imagination*** by Alexander Grinstein. Dr Grinstein, a US member of the WCS, is a practising psychoanalyst involved in training and supervision at the Michigan Psychoanalytic Institute. He has published a number of books and articles on psychoanalysis and biographical studies. His book on Collins examines the relationship between Wilkie Collins's personal history and his writings. Publication is anticipated by International Universities some time during 1998.

***The Letters of Wilkie Collins***, edited by Professor William Baker and William Clarke. The editors tell me they are making good progress on what has proved a mammoth task, having apparently located nearly two thousand letters. They hope the book will be published in autumn 1998 by Macmillan in two volumes.

*Ioláni*, Wilkie's long-lost Polynesian novel is being edited for publication at Princeton University Press by

Ira Nadel. This has apparently been delayed by other commitments but is also anticipated for next year.

**Wilkie Collins - An Illustrated Guide** by Andrew Gasson is still on schedule for publication by Oxford University Press in February 1998. It will be produced as an alphabetical reference guide with about 200 photographic illustrations.

#### **COLLINS ON THE INTERNET**

Paul Lewis offers the following updates to his excellent piece issued last year on 'The Wilkie Web':

#### **Collins Sites**

There are three dedicated Collins sites on the world wide web.

David Grigg runs a very nice site called the Wilkie Collins Appreciation Page from Melbourne, Australia at <http://www.ozemail.eom.au/-drgrigg/wilkie.html>.

Professor Mitsuharu Matsuoka at Nagoya University, Japan has some Wilkie Collins pages with a lot of information and useful links at

<http://ernie.lang.nagoya-u.ac.jp/-matsuoka/Collins.html>

Paul Lewis's Collins site is at <http://www.deadline.demon.co.uk>

#### **Sites which mention Collins**

Victorian Sensationalism Online puts Collins in the context of other sensation novelists <http://www.ualberta.ca/-amactavi/sens1.htm>

Michael Groat's British Sensation Fiction pages have some useful summaries and analysis of some of Collins's work. <http://members.gnn.com/MGroat/sensatio.htm#Collins>

Jon Varese has some interesting material on contemporaries of Charles Dickens and what they thought of him. Many of them were also Collins's friends. <http://www.sas.upenn.edu/-varese/ghosts.htm>

The BBC has a site associated with its December 1996 film version of *The Moonstone* <http://www.bbc.co.uk/bookworm/progs/wcollins.html>

Kirsten Hüttner, one of the few german scholars working on Collins, has just published a book on *The Woman in White* and her page is at [http://home.t-online.de/home/0711334553-0002/wilkie\\_1.htm](http://home.t-online.de/home/0711334553-0002/wilkie_1.htm)

There is a picture of Wilkie's grave at  
<http://www.xs4all.nl/~androom/dead/kensal.htm>

The Internet Bookshop (iBS search page) lists no less than 69 books by Collins. These include duplicates with at least 10 *Woman in White's* and 14 *Moonstone's*. The major works are mainly published by OUP and Penguin, as critical editions. Most of the minor novels come from Sutton Publishing - not critical editions but containing an introduction by William Clarke, nicely produced and representing the easiest way of reading Collins's more elusive titles.

In addition, there are now more than 20 of Wilkie's works in electronic form on the Internet. The full list is on the Paul Lewis web pages (see above) but one major contributor is James Rusk  
<http://www.why.net/home/jrusk/collins/contents.html>

The Gaslight study group has some Collins material including a contemporary review of sensation novels such as *No Name*  
<http://www.mtroyal.ab.ca/programs/arts/english/gaslight/>

An interesting bibliography of where to find Collins's supernatural stories in current books is at  
<http://www.sff.net/locus/b101.html>

Mysterious Bytes - an electronic magazine on mystery stories - has some Collins material  
<http://www.db.dk/dbaa/jbs/mystbyte.htm>

The best place to start looking for Victorian material in general is  
<http://www.indiana.edu/~victoria>

William J Palmer's home page with details of his pastiches of Collins is at  
<http://www.mdn.com/dickens/index.html>

#### *BASIL* - THE FILM

At last a production company has been adventurous enough to make a film of a Collins novel apart from *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone!* *Basil* has been financed by Kushner-Locke, a Californian TV, film and media company. The director is Radha Bharadwaj whose only other film, *Closet Land* (1991), despite some critical success, was not a money spinner grossing scarcely \$250,000 in the USA.

Mannion, the villain, is played by Christian Slater, perhaps best known for *Interview with the Vampire*.



Slater also co-produces the film. The main female character is played by Clair Forlani who appeared in *The Rock* and *Basquiat*. Basil is played by Jared Leto whose only other sighting in the UK was in *How to Make an American Quilt*. Basil's autocratic father is played by Sir Derek Jacobi, veteran of *I Claudius*, the *Cadfael* television series and *Little Dorrit*.

The film is currently in post production following location filming in London which ended in mid-April. There is no news yet of a British distributor but Kushner-Locke hope for a release later this year. They describe the film **as a Gothic Romantic Mystery**. Most of the plot appears quite similar to the book - a rare cinematographical event - except that Margaret Sherwin has been renamed Carla to contrast with Basil's devoted sister Clara. Wilkie, with his predilection for the theme of identity, might even have approved of the name switch (especially with the coincidence of a real-life Clair playing the part).

#### **BOOK REVIEWS (BY PAUL LEWIS)**

***Wilkie Collins to 'the Forefront.: Some Reassessments, edited by Nelson Smith and R. C. Terry, AMS Press, New York 1995 (ISBN 0404 643 515).***

*Wilkie Collins to the Forefront* is based on lectures and papers given at the 1989 conference held to mark the centenary of Wilkie Collins's death. But the glacial pace of academic publishing means that the book - dated 1995 - is only now available in the UK. It brings together some absolutely marvellous scholarship. Catherine Peters makes tantalising connections between Collins's work and three strong but almost invisible women in his life. Sue Lonoff finds a surprising amount of information on his almost undocumented friendship with Edward Lear. William Clarke's perceptive and lively essay is on Collins's correspondence late in life with the 12-year old Anne le Poer (Nannie) Wynne. And Kathleen o' Fallon examines Wilkie's challenge to traditional gender roles. There are eleven other excellent papers in this accessible, entertaining and varied collection. It costs £48.95 and is available in the UK from Eurospan Distribution Services. Tel 0171 240 0856.

***Heart and Science: A Story of the Present Time by Wilkie Collins, edited by Steve Farmer, Broadview Literary Texts, Ontario 1996. ISBN 1-55111-124-1.***

Like all Broadview texts this fine edition of *Heart and Science* contains a comprehensive introduction, copious

notes, and useful appendixes. Steve Farmer has done an excellent job in providing a sound academic framework for one of Collins's later and lesser known works. The appendixes include contemporary documents about the vivisection argument, the details of the serial divisions of the text when it was first published in *Belgravia*, contemporary reviews of the book, and the few letters of Collins which refer to it. On a few occasions I found Farmer's footnotes slightly otiose and in one case, where he locates the Sussex Downs in north west London, wrong. But that should not detract from an excellent edition which should revive interest in this excellent book which Steve Farmer summarises as "...an interesting Victorian love story, a...tale of intrigue and suspense...an engaging study of character...an occasionally lurid melodrama, and a unique and provocative document of a nineteenth century controversy that remains a volatile issue even today. And finally, it is a pleasure."

### 'NINE O' CLOCK! '

Paul Lewis, continuing his research into the publication of Collins's early works, has discovered a previously unrecorded fragment for **a** manuscript of one of the earliest short stories. 'Nine O'Clock!' is set in the French Revolution and was first published in *Bentley's Miscellany* in August 1852 - the fifth short story known. No manuscript of the whole story is recorded but the first paragraph is found on the verso of folio 65 of the manuscript of *Basil* which is in the British Library. It is a relatively unamended paragraph - especially when compared with the manuscript of *Basil* which is rendered almost illegible by alterations - and seems to have been dashed off as **a** single thought while *Basil* was being written early in 1852.

### Manuscript

'The night of the 30th of June, 1793 was a memorable night in the prison annals of Paris. The Deputies who represented the Department of the Gironde in the French Parliament had been thrust aside to make way for the sanguinary career of Robespierre and his colleagues of the Reign of Terror -- the twenty one leading men of the famous "Girondin" party, were condemned to the guillotine. Their last night in prison was the night of the 30th: on the morning of the 31st they had ceased to live.'

As printed in *Bentley's*

'The night of the 30th of June, 1793 is memorable in the prison annals of Paris, as the last night in confinement of the leaders of the famous Girondin party in the first French Revolution. On the morning of the 31st, the

twenty-one deputies who represented the department of the Girondin, were guillotined to make way for Robespierre and the Reign of Terror.'

#### **WILLIAM PALMER STRIKES AGAIN**

The author of the almost impossibly bad *The Detective and Mr. Dickens* and *The Highwayman and Mr. Dickens* is at it again with *The Hoydens and Mr. Dickens*. The good news is that this is the 'third and final book' in the series where 'Charles Dickens, Inspector William Field and Wilkie Collins must stop the blackmailer of one of Dickens's closest friends, find the murderer of a controversial feminist, and track down the robbers of London's greatest bank.' Neither Wilkie nor Dickens did anything to deserve such treatment, but those brave enough to order the book could contact St. Martin's Press (1-800-288-2131) or try the on-line bookstore: <http://www.amazon.com>. These details are derived from William J. Palmer's Homepage on the web. (This is not intended **as a** recommendation!)

#### **OTHER LITERARY SOCIETIES**

We have had several requests from other literary societies to mention their organisations and events of possible interest:

**The Alliance of Literary Societies.** The WCS continues to be affiliated to the Alliance which maintains a wide-ranging membership of societies and publishes the annual Newsletter, *Chapter One*. It held its AGM on 19 April 1997 followed by a presentation from the Mary Webb Society which included readings by the President, Gabriel Woolf, and Rosalind Shanks.

**The Ledbury Poetry Festival** has announced its inaugural programme which aims to promote poetry on a broad base and its approach will be populist, specialist and educational, reflected by music and painting. It will be launched by George Melly and runs from 4-13 July 1997. Other artists are expected to include Peter Barkworth, Tim Pigott-Smith, Jeremy Irons and Gabriel Woolf. Further information from the Town Council Offices, Church Street, Ledbury, Herefordshire HR8 1LDH. Tel and Fax 01531 634156.

**The Philip Larkin Society** is presenting an international conference, 'New Larkins for Old' at the Lawns Centre, University of Hull, 27-29 June 1997. Further information from Mrs Janet Whitehead, The Philip Larkin Society, The University of Hull, Hull HU6 7RX. Tel 01482 847930; e-mail [jhw@palsoc.karoo.co.uk](mailto:jhw@palsoc.karoo.co.uk).

**The Charlotte M. Yonge Fellowship** now issues a regular Newsletter devoted to this prolific nineteenth century author. A recent issue included a lengthy review of a study of her life and works by Alethea Hayter. This same author wrote *Opium and the Romantic Imagination* (1968) which included a chapter on Collins and his use of opium. Charlotte Yonge was a contemporary of Wilkie and Sutton Publishing have just republished *The Trial* which as an early detective novel has been compared to his work. Further details of the Fellowship from Mrs Jean M. Shell, 78 Sunningfields Road, Hendon, London NW4 4RL. Tel 0181-203 4353.

Unfortunately too early for this Newsletter, **The George Eliot Fellowship**, Southern Branch, recently held a full-day meeting at the Guildford Institute. Wilkie Collins and George Eliot knew each well. In the late 1850s and early 1860s Wilkie received frequent invitations from the G. H. Leweses and attended their Saturday evening soirees. Further information about the Fellowship's Southern Branch from Mrs M. Jennings, 130 Grattons Drive, Pound Hill, Crawley, West Sussex, RH10 3JP. Tel 01293 884716; e-mail [margaret@grattons.demon.co.uk](mailto:margaret@grattons.demon.co.uk).

The main George Eliot Fellowship, in conjunction with the Nuneaton & Bedworth Borough Council run Guided Tours of George Eliot Country during the Summer. Remaining dates are 29 June, 10 August and 14 September 1997. Details from the secretary, Mrs Kathleen Adams, 71 Stepping Stones Road, Coventry CV5 8JT. Tel 01203 5922331; or from Rose Selwyn, Nuneaton Town Hall, 01203 376490.

**The Walter de la Mare Society** was formed on 25 April 1997 to "bring his work to a wider audience". Founding members include de la Mare's surviving grandsons and luminaries such as Julia Briggs and Russell Hoban. It costs £15 a year for two newsletters. Walter de la Mare wrote a lengthy essay, 'The Early Novels of Wilkie Collins', for *The Eighteen Sixties* (CUP 1932). Further information from Claire Sawford, The Creative Umbrella, 30 Harcourt Street, London WIH 2AA.

#### **BOUCHERCON '97**

For fans of detective fiction, the 28th World Mystery Convention is to be held at the Monterey Convention Centre, California, 30 October - 2 November. The guest of honour is Sara Paretsky (of V. I. Warshawski fame) and further information can be had from Bouchercon '97, P.O. Box 26114, San Francisco, CA 04126-6114; E-mail, [bchrcon97@aol.com](mailto:bchrcon97@aol.com).

**APG**