



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

PATRONS Faith Clarke, Baroness James of Holland Park (P. D. James)

Chairman Andrew Gasson, 3 Merton House, 36 Belsize Park, London, NW3 4EA

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

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2005

THE PUBLIC FACE OF WILKIE COLLINS – SPECIAL TERMS FOR MEMBERS

The four volumes of Wilkie's letters, published under the title *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins* are due to be published in early to middle June of this year. The full price for the complete publication – volumes are not sold separately – is £350. The WCS, however, has been able to negotiate with Pickering & Chatto generous terms for members so that they can receive a 30% discount off the published price – making it just £245.

The offer is strictly for individual, non-institutional members of the society with the following conditions:

- Orders must be placed on or before the 1st of September 2005.
- They should be e-mailed or phoned through to James Powell at james@pickeringchatto.co.uk or on 020 7405 1005.
- In their correspondence with James Powell, members should refer to this offer and the WCS.

The Public Face contains a shade under 3,000 letters by Collins of which more than 2,000 have never been published before. Since the book went to press another couple of letters have turned up – one at auction and one in a 1917 catalogue. Updates will be published in the *Wilkie Collins Society Journal*.

COLLINS – A VICTORIAN LITERARY FIGURE

More news from Pickering & Chatto re-enforces Collins's continuing importance in studies of Victorian literature. Collins is the subject of one of the volumes in their ongoing 'Lives of Victorian Literary Figures' series. Part V comes out in 2006 with Collins featuring in a three-volume

set alongside Mary Elizabeth Braddon and William Thackeray. The author will be Professor William Baker and details can be seen at <http://www.pickeringchatto.com/victorianlives5.htm>. We hope to arrange a similar discount for WCS members in due course.

SHEFFIELD CONFERENCE

Andrew Mangham is to be congratulated on arranging an excellent one-day conference at the University of Sheffield on 19 March 2005 which turned out to be a truly international day. About fifty people attended with speakers and delegates from Europe, the United States and Japan.

The meeting began with a roundtable discussion conducted by Jenny Bourne Taylor and featuring several of the contributors to her forthcoming *Companion* who explained their particular emphasis on Collins studies. The first session continued with separate presentations by Graham Law (Waseda University) and Paul Lewis (WCS) on different aspects of their work on the forthcoming 'Letters' and concluded with Holly Furneaux (Birkbeck College) on 'Hold the "Matrimonial Sauce": The Celebration of Bachelorhood in Collins and Dickens'.

The session on 'Art and Illusion' featured Elizabeth Anderman (Colorado) on 'Paintings, Pater and the Aesthetic: How Reading and Perspective Create Sensation in Wilkie Collins *The Law and the Lady*'; Clare Douglass (North Carolina) on 'Text and Image Together: The Influence of Illustration and the Victorian Market in the Novels of Wilkie Collins'; and Aoife Leahy (Dublin) on 'The Evil of Raphaelesque Art: An Arc Throughout the Fiction of Wilkie Collins'.

A parallel session on 'Gender and Identity' included papers from Andrew Mangham (Sheffield) on "'What Could I Do?": Nineteenth-Century Psychology and the Depths of Masculinity in *The Woman in White*'; Tony Garland (Leicester) "'Pliable Under Change": Identity Anxiety and *The Woman in White* as Sensation Fiction'; and Jessica Cox (Swansea) on 'Miss or Mrs?: Gender Confusion in the Novels of Wilkie Collins'.

The concluding session on 'Genre and Narrative' featured talks on the stage adaptation of *The Woman in White* by Janice Norwood, who had gathered a good deal of new information on early versions of the play, together with papers on *The Fallen Leaves* by Anne-Marie Beller and *Heart and Science* by Christina Leja.

It is hoped to publish some or all of the papers presented at the Sheffield conference in the next issue of *Wilkie Collins Society Journal*.

THE DICKENSIAN

The latest issue of *The Dickensian* (Winter 2004, No. 464, Vol. 100, Part 3) contains various items of Collins interest.

Paul Lewis returns to his theme about Charles Dickens's famous bonfire in September 1860 at Gad's Hill where he burned a vast wealth of accumulated correspondence. Paul examines the evidence in detail and cogently challenges the generally accepted account and relates the events to the lives of Dickens, Collins and their families.

There is also a note that "the monument to Douglas Jerrold in West Norwood Cemetery has been reconstructed, after its destruction in the 1980s. There will be a re-dedication service on Saturday 21 May 2005 at 2.30 pm. All are welcome to attend at the West Norwood Cemetery in south London, SE27."

Jerrold (1803-1857) was editor of *The Illuminated Magazine* which published Collins's first known published article, 'The Last Stage Coachman', in August 1843. The two appeared together in amateur theatricals and Wilkie later wrote "Douglas Jerrold was one of the first and dearest friends of my literary life." Jerrold died suddenly in 1857 and *The Frozen Deep* was revived as one of a series of events to raise funds for his widow.

Finally, *The Dickensian* gives a brief description of Collins's and Dickens's ascent of Carrick Fell in September 1857. This became the first part of 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices', published in *Household Words* for 3 October 1857.

THE DICKENSIAN EXHIBITION

'100 Years of The Dickensian' is the current exhibition at the Dickens House Museum (48 Doughty Street, London WC1N 2LX). The display shows the history of a magazine that was first published in 1905 as the publication of the Dickens Fellowship, itself established in 1902. With an uninterrupted run, *The Dickensian* is one of the oldest literary magazines in the world. Over the years, because of the close association between Wilkie and Dickens, there have been many articles of interest to Collins scholars. The opening hours are Monday-Saturday 10.00-4.30, Sunday

11.00-4.30. Admission £5 (and concessions); telephone 020 7405 2127, www.dickensmuseum.com.

COLLINS AT AUCTION

Collins continues to achieve staggering prices at auction. A major sale took place on Wednesday 23 March with the auction of the Library of George Cosmatos. Cosmatos was a major film director and during his career had time to amass a superb collection of books and manuscripts. Amongst them were five early Collins editions. Lot 51 was a first English edition of *The Frozen Deep* (1874) which fetched £1,140 including the buyer's premium, against an estimate of £500-800. This seemed a high price as the copy for sale was a later, variant binding in brown cloth – an edition intended for sale by W. H. Smith. Lot 52 consisted of the first edition of *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins* and the first American edition of *The Moonstone* which together sold for £984 against an estimate of £700-800.

The highest price, however, was achieved by Lot 49, the first American edition of *The Woman in White* which was published in one volume and sold for £6,600 against the estimate of £6,000-8,000. Sold with a *carte de visite* photograph of Collins, it was certainly a very good copy which had originally belonged to Morris L. Parrish who published the standard Collins bibliography in 1940. As usual, this edition has the figure of a woman blocked on the lower part of the spine although in this copy the blocking appears to have been skilfully painted in after publication. Sotheby's description continues to perpetuate the myth that the US edition, published in August 1860, preceded the first English edition by a month, and erroneously describes the latter as issued in September. In fact Collins tried to arrange that both US and English editions should be published simultaneously and evidence suggests that there was at most one day between their respective publication dates.

One item, Lot 50, the first English edition of *No Name* remained unsold. This was not surprising since it is a relatively easy first edition title and had a very high estimate of £1,000-1,500.

FAT AND 'OPENBOOK'

BBC Radio's regular Sunday afternoon book programme, 'Open Book', on 9 January presented a special edition on 'Fat' and how the meaning of fat has changed for writers since novels of the nineteenth century. The discussion included details of several books with fat

protagonists, from Charles Dickens's *Pickwick Papers* and *David Copperfield* via Frank Richards's *Billy Bunter of Greyfriars School* to William Golding's *The Lord of The Flies*.

Collins continues to be the reference point for so many aspects of fiction and during the broadcast, his archetypal villain, Fosco, was mentioned as one of the favourite fat character to appear in a book.

The programme did, however, omit to mention Wilkie's most appropriate quote of all for the avoirdupois-challenged – "My weight has been the grand misfortune of my life." This first appeared in the short story 'Picking up Waifs at Sea' which formed Chapter 4 of the Extra Christmas number of *All the Year Round* for December 1861 and was subsequently included as 'The Fatal Cradle: Otherwise the Heartrending Story of Mr Heavysides' in *Miss or Mrs? And Other Stories in Outline* (1873). The humorous story concerns two babies born at sea, their identities confused by being placed in the same makeshift cradle and 'allocated' to parents by virtue of their weight.

THE LIGHTHOUSE – AN ANNIVERSARY

The night of 16 June 2005 is the 150th anniversary of the first ever production of Collins's play, *The Lighthouse*. In May 1855, Wilkie sent the finished play to Dickens who enthusiastically took over its production as one of his amateur theatrical pieces at his own little theatre at Tavistock House. The play is set in the Eddystone Lighthouse of 1748; Dickens played the head lightkeeper, Aaron Gurnock, and Wilkie his son, Martin. Other parts were played by Augustus Egg, Mark Lemon, Mary Dickens and Georgina Hogarth.

The production ran for four nights – all oversubscribed – from 16 June with Clarkson Stanfield painting the scenery and Francesco Berger composing the overture and incidental music. There was one further performance on 10 July at Colonel Waugh's miniature theatre at Campden House, Kensington, in aid of The Bournemouth Sanatorium of Consumption and Diseases of the Chest. The play received good reviews but a report of Wilkie's acting was less enthusiastic. John Lehmann's *Ancestors and Friends* records a letter describing the dress rehearsal at Colonel Waugh's private theatre: "Last night...Mrs Collins sat next to me and got every now and then so excited applauding her son Wilkie that I thought the respectable, comely old woman would explode, he all the time looking and acting most muffishly. Nothing could be better than the drama as drama, but oh, he makes a most unloving and unlovable lover."

Because of the play's success, Wilkie immediately hoped for a production on the professional stage for *The Lighthouse* but this did not take place until two years later at the Royal Olympic Theatre, from 10 August to 17 October 1857. This became Collins's first professional production with Frederick Robson playing Aaron Gurnock and George Vining reading the Prologue. There were also several amateur productions from 1865, many of which featured Wilkie's friend, Palgrave Simpson.

We have been in touch with various theatre companies, so far without success, to see if a production of *The Lighthouse* could be arranged to coincide with the anniversary. If any member knows of an amateur theatrical group which would be interested in either staging a production or simply doing a play reading, please contact Andrew Gasson.

THE DEAD ALIVE

Due to be published at the end of May, is *The Dead Alive: A new edition with an account of the actual case* by Rob Warden (Northwestern, ISBN 0810122944). There is also a foreword by Scott Turow, the author of several legal thrillers, who writes that on the evidence of *The Dead Alive* Wilkie Collins might well be the first author of a legal thriller. Here is the lawyer out of sorts with his profession; the legal process gone awry; even a touch of romance to soften the rigors of the law. And here, too, recast as fiction, is the United States' first documented wrongful conviction case. Side by side with the novel, this book presents the real-life legal thriller Collins used as his model – the story of two brothers, Jesse and Stephen Boom, sentenced to death in Vermont in 1819 for the murder of their brother-in-law, and belatedly exonerated when their “victim” showed up alive and well in New Jersey in 1820. Wilkie's story, later republished as *John Jago's Ghost*, was originally published in various periodicals of the time between the end of December 1873 and February 1874.

The forthcoming publication was spotted by a member of the Wilkie Collins list, Michael, who notes that “Rob Warden, one of the nation's most eloquent and effective advocates for the wrongly convicted, reconsiders the facts of the Boom case for what they can tell us about the systemic flaws that produced this first-known miscarriage of justice – flaws that continue to riddle our system of justice today. A tale of false confessions and jailhouse snitches, of evidence overlooked, and justice more blinkered than blind, the Booms' story reminds us of the perennial nature of the errors at the heart of American jurisprudence – and of

the need to question and correct a system that regularly condemns the innocent.” The book is available through Amazon at \$16.47 plus shipping.

KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY

The Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery are holding their annual Open Day on Sunday 10 July from 10.00am – 5.00 pm. There will be the usual tours, stalls, band and other activities. This year the event will be combined with 60th VE and VJ celebrations. Wilkie’s grave is number 31754, Square 141, Row 1, close to the central Chapel.

THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO WILKIE COLLINS

The Cambridge Companion to Wilkie Collins will be published in 2006. Edited by Jenny Bourne Taylor (author of *In the Secret Theatre of Home* (1988) and editor of the Oxford University Press edition of *The Law and the Lady*), the *Companion* will offer a critical resource for students, teachers and others interested in new critical perspectives on Collins’s work. The edition will cover the whole of Collins’s career, with a biographical chapter, overviews of the early and late writing, together with discussions of the short stories and the plays in the context of Victorian theatre. Other chapters will focus on different aspects of Collins’s work: his shifting position as a professional writer; his pivotal role as a sensation novelist, and ‘master of detective fiction’; his ambivalent representation of marriage and the position of women; his uneasy portrayal of masculinity; and his complex representations of race and disability. A final chapter will explore ‘Collins’s afterlives’ – his still powerful influence on writers today, as well as looking at rewritings and adaptations of his work. Jenny Bourne Taylor has assembled a distinguished panel of contributors including Tim Dolin, Anthea Trodd, Lyn Pykett, Graham Law, Lillian Nayder, Kate Flint, John Kucich, Carolyn Dever, John Bowen, Jim Davies, Ronald Thomas, and Rachel Malik.

NO NAME

Novelist Nick Hornby gives a lively if rather critical review of *No Name* in his new collection of essays, *The Polysyllabic Spree* (ISBN 1932416242). “...in fact, the last four hundred and eighteen pages nearly killed me, and I wish I were speaking figuratively. We fought, Wilkie Collins and I. We fought bitterly and with all our might, to a standstill, over a period of about three weeks...”

THE LAW AND THE LADY ON RADIO 4

A one-hour version of *The Law and the Lady* was broadcast in January on Radio 4 as part of its 'Lady Detectives' series. The abridgement of a three-volume novel into a one-hour play was done extremely well by director Patrick Rayner. The BBC has no plans to publish the CD of the series, or the play, at the moment. But it is always worth keeping an eye on BBC7, the digital radio station that rebroadcasts a good deal of wonderful drama from Radio 4. You can access it online at www.bbc.co.uk/bbc7.

THE FROZEN DEEP – A DRAMATIC VERSION

A version of *The Frozen Deep* will be performed by theatre company Ironduke at the Edinburgh festival this year. The 55 minute adaptation has been dramatised from the short story by Pauline Flannery, who will also direct the play. Pauline has previously dramatised successful versions of Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and Robert Louis Stevenson's *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*. The play is billed as 'against the backdrop of Franklin's doomed expedition to find the North-West Passage in 1845, experience a tale of sex and sacrifice in the North Pole.' The play runs from Monday 8 to Sunday 21 August (except Monday 15th), at Augustine's Sanctuary and there is a discount on the £7 ticket price for WCS members who can get them for £5. Book through Augustine's on 08452 262721 and mention you are a WCS member

THE WOMAN IN WHITE

A version of *The Woman in White* was performed by Louth Playgoers at the Riverhead Theatre, Louth, on 18 and 19 March. And *The Woman in White* was the book of the big read at the Cookham-on-Thames Festival on 30 April.

A GERMAN WEBSITE

Daniel Stark from Germany has created a new Wilkie Collins website entirely in German. www.wilkiecollins.de contains translations of Wilkie's work into the German language, many of them done by Daniel himself. There is also some biographical material, including a map of the Collins's family's trip to Italy in 1836. Some of these items contain a sound file of the items being read aloud which will play on your computer. If you speak German, an interesting resource.

FRENCH TITLES

The first etext in French of Wilkie Collins has been recently published online. It is *L'hotel hanté – The Haunted Hotel* and is at www.ebooksgratuits.com or from www.gutenberg.org. There are also half a dozen scans of French editions of Collins books at the website of the French national library <http://gallica.bnf.fr> but they have not yet been converted into etexts.

THE OTHER WILKIE COLLINS

Work on *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins* has turned up many strange things. But perhaps the oddest is the fact that there were two other Wilkie Collins listed in the 1871 census. One was a duplicate Collins family, but a generation younger than Wilkie's. Father William, a letter carrier, was born in 1833 and his wife, Harriet, a dressmaker in 1832. Wilkie Collins himself (Wilkie E. Collins) was born in 1865 and had a brother Charles, born in 1863. Siblings Ellen, Harriet A., Oliver and Winifred completed this rather larger family which lived in Commercial Road (now Ebury Bridge Road) in Chelsea. The census also records one other Wilkie Collins, a baby, born in late 1870. He lived with his mother, Mary Ann Collins, a 24 year old cotton weaver listed as married and living in Preston, Lancashire. Neither of these Wilkies appears in 1881 but there is another Wilkie Collins, a butterman, born in Wiltshire in 1858.

WILLIAM COLLINS

A number of paintings by Wilkie's father have been in auction recently. The splendid *Scene from the Caves of Ulysses at Sorrento* fetched £18,000 at Sotheby's on 22 March. Painted in 1841, the picture was bought from the Royal Academy exhibition by John Gibbons for £200. An 1822 oil sketch of *The Landing of George IV at Leith* which is mentioned in Wilkie's biography (vol.I, p.202) and which was sold at Bonhams in Edinburgh last August for £2,600, was put up again on 14 April but failed to sell. *Children on the Shore* fetched £900 at Sotheby's Olympia on 9 March. And a small portrait of Emma, Lady Hamilton as a bacchante, copied from a Joshua Reynolds painting, failed to sell (estimate £700-900) at Christie's South Kensington sale room on 9 March. The painting was bought at Bonhams in Chester for £480 in March 2004. A landscape with figures said to be by Collins c.1840 fetched \$2,225 on eBay in March (#7315684412).

THE UNKNOWN PUBLIC

The latest *Victorian Periodicals Review* contains an essay about Collins's early piece on the mass market readers of Victorian periodicals. 'The Unknown Public' was published in Dickens's weekly *Household Words* on 12 August 1858 and is used as the basis of the essay by Lorna Huett, a graduate student at Trinity College, Cambridge who is working on a thesis on *Household Words* and its successor *All The Year Round*. She looks at the public identified by Collins and draws her own conclusions about the readers of Dickens's periodicals – who of course were Collins's readers too.

Victorian Periodicals Review, University of Toronto Press, Vol.38 No.1 Spring 2005 pp61-82.

THE BRITISH ASSOCIATION FOR VICTORIAN STUDIES

The interdisciplinary British Association for Victorian Studies, founded in 2000, is actively looking for new members. Its President, Isobel Armstrong, writes "In the five years since the Association was founded we have developed our activities and extended our services to scholars so that membership of the Association has become a must – essential for serious scholars of the period." The Association holds an annual conference in September and publishes a Newsletter and Yearbook to provide important professional and scholarly information. The BAVS 2005 conference, 'Victorians in the Long View: Contrasts and Continuities', will take place at the University of Gloucestershire, 5-7 September 2005.

Those interested in joining should apply to Richard Pearson, Department of Arts, Humanities & Social Sciences, University College Worcester, Henwick Grove, Worcester, WR2 6AJ (Tel. 01905-855356 r.pearson@worc.ac.uk) or for additional information see. The website <https://bavs.ac.uk> has useful Victorian information and links, including one to a downloadable version of the 1827 Greenwood map of London.

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

The WCS continues to be affiliated to the Alliance of Literary Societies which is holding its AGM weekend meeting on 21 and 22 May 2005. This year's meeting is hosted by the Charles Lamb Society and begins at Swedenborg Hall, 20-21 Bloomsbury Way, London WCI. The

programme consists of walks round Lamb's London, a museum visit and a trip to Lamb's homes at Enfield and Edmonton. Further details can be obtained from the Society's chairman, Nick Powell, on 020 7703 6792.

LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL

The 2005 Ledbury Poetry Festival will be held from Friday 1 to Sunday 10 July. It appears to be going from strength to strength with no less than 69 items on the programme and poets from Europe, America, Asia and the Middle East. For a programme booklet or bookings, contact the box office at 0845 458 1743 (<https://ledburypoetry.org.uk/>).

**APG
PL**

**Paul Lewis
Andrew Gasson**

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

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

