



## ***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**

**SUMMER 2007**

#### **JOINT EVENT WITH THE CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM**

WCS membership secretary Paul Lewis will be giving a talk on the correspondence of Dickens and Collins at a joint meeting of The Wilkie Collins Society and the Friends of the Charles Dickens Museum. It will take place at 6.30 pm on Thursday 4 October in Holborn at Barnard's Inn Hall, Gresham College, London EC1N 2HH. The charge for the evening to include a glass of wine is £8 to members of the WCS or Friends of the CDM and £10 for non-members. Bookings should be made through the Charles Dickens Museum on 020 7405 2127 or [info@dickensmuseum.com](mailto:info@dickensmuseum.com).

#### **'WILKIE IN THE WOOD'**

Andrew Gasson is giving a talk to the St John's Wood Society on Tuesday 30 October 2007 at 7.00 pm in the St John's Wood Church Hall, NW8 7NE. This is situated on the St John's Wood roundabout next to Lords Cricket Ground. The title of the illustrated talk will be 'Wilkie in the Wood' and will be about Collins's life and works relating them where possible to St John's Wood. Wilkie lived for most of his life within walking distance of the area, in Marylebone.

Tickets are available in advance for £5 for members of the WCS and St John's Wood Society by sending the enclosed bookings form to Elizabeth Aldwinckle, PO Box 20586, London NW8 0ZU. The price for non-members and on the door will be £7.

#### **WHAT HAVE HARRY POTTER AND *THE MOONSTONE* IN COMMON?**

The recent hype about Harry Potter with huge queues outside bookshops waiting for the next publication reminds us of the huge popularity of *The Moonstone* in 1868. Its publisher, William Tinsley, in his *Random Recollections of an Old Publisher* recalled "During the run of "The Moonstone" as a serial there were scenes in Wellington Street that doubtless did the author's and publisher's hearts good. And especially when the

serial was nearing its ending, on publishing days there would be quite a crowd of anxious readers waiting for the new number, and I know of several bets that were made as to where the moonstone would be found at last.” Is anyone prepared to bet on whether Harry Potter will still be read in 139 years time?

### **COLLINS BIBLIOGRAPHY**

For those interested in Collins bibliography, bookseller Scott Brindred has copies available at £20 post free of the 1968 Burt Franklin reprint of Parrish and Miller’s *Bibliography of Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade: First Editions described with Notes*. This was originally published in a limited edition of 400 copies in 1940 and the facsimile reprint has also been out of print for several years. Contact Scott Brindred at 17 Greenbanks, Lyminge, Kent CT18 8HG (01303 862258).

### **A SIMPLE STORY AND THE PALL MALL GAZETTE**

Broadview Press which has been responsible for such excellent modern editions of Collins’s works has just published *A Simple Story* by Elizabeth Inchbald (1753-1821). Collins makes an interesting reference to this novel, originally published in 1791, in an article written for the *Pall Mall Gazette* of 11 February 1886, entitled ‘Books Necessary for A Liberal Education’. “Read, my good public, Mrs. 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.” Kirk Beetz in an essay for the *WCS Journal* (first Series) in 1985 notes that the *Pall Mall Gazette* frequently published negative if not downright nasty reviews of Collins’s books but when it asked its readers for their favourite author during 1884, Collins won by a wide margin. He was therefore asked to reply to John Lubbock’s earlier list of books necessary for a liberal education. The result was a compilation intended to be both respectable in literary terms as well as appealing to a middlebrow readership. Those wishing to read Wilkie’s entire selection will soon be able to find the complete article on Paul Lewis’s website.

### **A DRAMATIC VERSION OF ARMADALE**

WCS member, Susan Hanes from Chicago, has discovered a forthcoming adaptation of *Armadale*, based on the Wilkie Collins’s novel. It will take place in Milwaukee in the USA from Wednesday 23 April until Sunday 25 May 2008. The Wisconsin Events website at <http://www.wisconline.com> states: “A world premiere adaptation of Wilkie Collins’ sensational Victorian novel. A deathbed request leads to the most gripping of intrigues in this tale of deception, inherited curses, romantic rivalries and murder. In the center of it all is the mysterious and beautiful Lydia Gwilt, one of the most hardened and most fascinating female villains in literature. Single tickets go on sale Aug 20. Milwaukee Repertory Theater – Quadracci Powerhouse Theater, 108 E Wells St, Milwaukee, Milwaukee County. Call 414-224-9490.” Details of the

forthcoming production also feature on the Milwaukee Repertory website at [https://media.milwaukeeerem.com/filer\\_public/34/36/3436296b-0100-4cde-9d7a-71ff9d779098/armadalesgedited.pdf](https://media.milwaukeeerem.com/filer_public/34/36/3436296b-0100-4cde-9d7a-71ff9d779098/armadalesgedited.pdf).

In Collins's time, his theatrical version of *Armadales* was staged under the title *Miss Gwilt*. It was first performed at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool on 9 December 1875. It opened in London at the Globe Theatre on 15 April 1876 with Ada Cavendish in the title role and Arthur Wing Pinero taking the part of Mr Darch. It was also staged at Wallack's Theatre, New York, from 5 June 1879.

### ***THE FROZEN DEEP IN THE TIMES***

Another WCS member, Nikki Ellen, tells us about the *Times*<sup>2</sup> supplement to the *Times* of 5 June 2007. This contained about seventeen pages on the theme of the year 1857 and Nikki recommends it for its really good social and political background for that year. Collins and Dickens receive a mention for *The Frozen Deep* in the section 'The Great, the good and the bad.'

### **MORGAN LIBRARY AND MUSEUM**

*The Woman in White* featured in an exhibition on 'Victorian Bestsellers' at the Morgan Library and Museum in New York. This was held earlier in the year, between 26 January and 6 May. Some further details can be found on the Morgan site <https://www.themorgan.org/press/2006/victorian-bestsellers-exhibition>.

### ***THE LIGHTHOUSE***

The Spring 2007 issue of *The Dickensian* on p. 77 notes the recollections of the one time Fellowship Drama Group. From these we learn that there were two performance of *The Lighthouse* on 22 April 1950. "Adaptation and production for both performances was in the capable hands of Jane Bacon, with stage management by Doris Day, better known to many Fellowship members as Dot Walker." Also involved in the production were Elaine Waley and John Greaves. These were perhaps the first performances of the play since its original production in 1855 at Dickens's Tavistock House and a professional run at the Royal Olympic Theatre from 17 October 1857.

The WCS tried to interest various amateur theatrical groups to arrange a sesquicentennial production in June 2005 but without success. So if any member now knows of a theatrical society which might be interested in staging a revival or just performing a play reading, please contact Andrew Gasson.

The same issue of *The Dickensian* notes that the Melbourne branch of the Dickens Fellowship has been giving a dramatised reading of Collins's and Dickens's other collaborative play, *The Frozen Deep*.

### **NO NAME**

BBC Radio 4 broadcast a new two part dramatisation of *No Name* on 10 and 17 June 2007. Writer John Fletcher dealt with the short format (just two one-hour episodes) by beginning the play at the funeral of Andrew and Mrs Vanstone (both killed in this version in a train crash). That omits the astonishing drama in the book of his and then her death but the interview with the lawyer sets out the terrible consequences of the Vanstone's irregular relationship. This enables the play to concentrate on Magdalen Vanstone's journey to which the rest of the play is reasonably faithful - although much curtailed. Generally played by a fine cast (Jaimi Barbakoff tough and determined as Magdalen, Ron Cook an excellent Captain Wragge, Diana Quick superb as the intelligent and formidable Madame Lecount and with Richard Nichols as the completely self-absorbed Noel Vanstone) this is a very good two hour listen. It is in fact the fifth dramatisation by BBC radio of this book, the other four being broadcast in 1952, 1958, 1973, and 1989. It is almost certain to be repeated on digital radio's BBC 7 from time to time.

### **'WHO KILLED ZEBEDEE?'**

BBC 7 has been broadcasting a two-part adaptation of 'Who Killed Zebedee?' This is a short story of revenge, murder and detection, originally published in *The Spirit of the Times*, 25 December 1880. It was reprinted in the *Seaside Library* (volume 45, No 928), 26 January 1880, and as 'Mr Policeman and the Cook' in *Little Novels* (1887).

### **COLLINS AND THE BBC**

There are numerous references to Wilkie Collins scattered throughout the BBC's amazingly comprehensive website. A search on <http://search.bbc.co.uk> brings up several pages of results. These range from notes on programmes to details of the architectural heritage of the Cornish pilchard fishery, described by Collins in *Rambles Beyond Railways*; from saving the Crown public house in Hesket Newmarket, visited by Collins and Dickens at the start of their Cumberland trip in 1857; to Iain Duncan Smith's comment on his own novel, *The Devil's Tune*, "I'm more with the Wilkie Collins view of a novel than the Jeffrey Archer view." – We would certainly hope so!

### **JOSEPH SHERIDAN LE FANU**

*Le Fanu Studies* (ISSN 1932-9598) invites essays on any aspect of the life and works of famous Victorian mystery and ghost story writer Joseph Sheridan Le Fanu (1814-1873). It also seeks essays about works of drama, literature, and film related to Le Fanu. Authors should utilize documentation based on *The MLA Style Manual*. The journal appears twice yearly, in May and November. Prospective contributors should

contact the editor, Gary William Crawford, who can be reached by email at [gothicptl2@aol.com](mailto:gothicptl2@aol.com) or at Gothic Press, 2272 Quail Oak, Baton Rouge, LA 70808-9023. Telephone 225.766.2906. The recently updated Gothic Press website is [www.gothicpress.com](http://www.gothicpress.com) (c) 2006-2007 by Gary William Crawford. For further details see the website at <http://www.jslefanu.com/lefanustudies.html>.

## **ROBERT ASHLEY**

With regret the Society reports the death of one of Wilkie Collins's first biographers, Robert Paul Ashley, at the age of 91. Ashley's book *Wilkie Collins* was published in 1952 and made use of letters and original material which was then very hard to locate. It was based partly on his doctoral thesis *The Career of Wilkie Collins* submitted to Harvard University in 1948. Ashley had served in the navy during World War II before pursuing an academic life. He became Dean and then Professor of English at Ripon College in Wisconsin where he taught until his retirement in 1982. The college has a Court named after him. He was an authority on the Victorian mystery novel lecturing and organising readings, sometimes dressed as Sherlock Holmes. He was a keen tennis player until his final years and coached the Ripon College team until 1964. He died of complications following a stroke on 22 November 2006.

## **JOSEPH STRINGFIELD**

Wilkie knew and visited Dr Joseph Stringfield of Weston-super-Mare and stood bail for him when he was accused in London of threatening to kill his wife's solicitor. She was divorcing him on grounds of cruelty to her and their three children. More details of Stringfield's life emerged recently in the *Bristol Evening Post*. It claims he offended locals with his belligerent attitude and even fomented a mutiny in the voluntary artillery corps. His obituary in 1869 described him as "a lover of uniforms and the last Westonian to wear a tricorne hat." It also claims that Wilkie was a guest at Stringfield's marriage to his second wife in 1858 being listed as a "friend". (*Bristol Evening Post* 10 May 2007). See also *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins* II 45, 114-115.

## **MEMOIRS**

James Rusk, who has so far concentrated on e-texting Wilkie's fiction, has now fulfilled the massive task of e-texting the 173,000 words in *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins Esq., R.A.* The *Memoirs* were Wilkie's first published book – he interrupted writing *Antonina* on his father's unexpected death on 17 February 1847. *Memoirs*, published in 1848, is of considerable importance. It contains a great deal of information about Wilkie's early life and that of his brother, the artist Charles Allston Collins. It also tells us a great deal about his parents, his grandfather - also an author

in a small way – his uncle Francis Collins, and his brother Charles as well as giving a unique insight into the close artistic world in which he was brought up.

*Memoirs* also provides a wealth of information about William Collins himself including extracts from his now lost Journal and many letters. Today William Collins is a rather neglected Victorian genre painter. But in the second quarter of the 19<sup>th</sup> century he was one of the best known artists of his day and his fame lived on for a generation after his death. At a sale in May 1866 William Collins's painting *The Skittle Players* was sold for 1,200 guineas, just short of the 1,300 guineas paid for Constable's *The Hay Wain*.

Original editions of the *Memoirs* are rare and expensive to buy - good copies on the various internet book search sites sell for upwards of \$1,000. There was also a 1978 reprint by EP Publishing with very usefully added indices of People and Places but this is possibly even harder to locate. So making the text available electronically is yet another debt the Wilkie fraternity owes to James Rusk. It is currently available exclusively on [www.wilkiecollins.com](http://www.wilkiecollins.com) together with images of the portrait frontispiece by John Linnell and the two half-titles illustrated with engravings based on William's works. An Appendix lists William's major works. A plain text version should soon be uploaded to Project Gutenberg.

All the books and short stories published during Wilkie's lifetime are now available electronically together with much of his journalism and some of his plays. An e-text of the remaining novel *Ioláni*, written in 1844 but not published until 1999, will be released later this year.

## THE FIRST BIOGRAPHY OF COLLINS – VOLUNTEER WANTED

The text of the first full length biography and critique of Wilkie's work - and the only one published in his lifetime - has been put on the internet by Daniel Stark. *Wilkie Collins - Ein biographisch-kritischer Versuch* was written by the Austrian born writer and academic Ernst von Wolzogen (1855-1934) and published in 1885. Most of the book is a description and critique of Wilkie's work but Chapter 2 is a short biography and contains an extract of a letter which Wilkie wrote to von Wolzogen on 20 December 1882. The book, which is written in German, is extraordinarily rare and originally published in a Gothic typeface which is very difficult for modern readers. So a German e-text is extremely helpful. Daniel Stark is host of the German website [www.wilkiecollins.de](http://www.wilkiecollins.de) and has already e-texted *Rambles Beyond Railways*. The German text can be found at [www.wilkiecollins.de/biographie/index.htm](http://www.wilkiecollins.de/biographie/index.htm) and in addition there is a pdf version at [www.wilkiecollins.de/biographie/wolzogen.pdf](http://www.wilkiecollins.de/biographie/wolzogen.pdf). The original of the scanned text is now also available at <https://gdz.sub.uni-goettingen.de/id/PPN526297514>. Links to all three and an English translation of the letter extract are at [www.wilkiecollins.com](http://www.wilkiecollins.com) menu item 1.

If any German speaking member would like to volunteer to translate the text - which is just under 50,000 words - please contact the Society.

### **THE RAPTURE OF WILKIE COLLINS**

A friend of WCS member Jackie Irwin has discovered a modern eulogy to *The Woman in White*. Janine McLeod spotted this passage in the latest best-selling American novel by Nora Ephron: “And finally, one day, I read the novel that is probably the most rapture-inducing book of my adult life. On a chaise longue at the beach on a beautiful summer day, I open Wilkie Collins’s masterpiece, *The Woman in White*, probably the first great work of mystery fiction ever written (although that description hardly does it justice), and I am instantly lost to the world. Days pass as I savor every word. Each minute I spend away from the book pretending to be interested in everyday life is a misery. How could I have waited so long to read this book? When can I get back to it? Halfway through, I return to New York to work, to finish a movie, and I sit in the mix studio unable to focus on anything but whether my favourite character in the book will survive. I will not be able to bear it if anything bad happens to my beloved Marian Halcombe. Every so often I look up from the book and see a roomful of people waiting for me to make a decision about whether the music is too soft or the thunder is too loud, and I can’t believe they don’t understand that what I’m doing is Much More Important. I’m reading the most wonderful book.” (Nora Ephron *I Feel Bad About My Neck*, Doubleday, New York, 2006 pp185-186).

### **THE WOMAN IN WHITE ON THE RADIO IN THE UNITED STATES**

*The Woman in White* recently featured on air at the National Public Radio service in the United States. Following the programme they added the following web page: <https://www.npr.org/2007/08/07/12530673/a-summer-thriller-smartly-turned-out-in-white>

### **A WEBSITE CALLED [poormissfinch.com](http://poormissfinch.com)**

Sadly this website is nothing to do with Wilkie Collins. Owner Laura Adams explains “It’s actually a reference to the movie *The Seven Year Itch* with Marilyn Monroe. Nine years ago, when I was getting online for the first time and needed an email address, I wanted something more interesting than [LauraA@whatever.com](mailto:LauraA@whatever.com). My husband and his sister were constantly quoting that movie at the time, which I don’t particularly like, but the part with “A certain Miss Finch, poor Miss Finch...” is funny. So I decided to be [poorMissFinch@whatever.com](mailto:poorMissFinch@whatever.com). As our email carrier has changed, I’ve kept [poormissfinch@...](mailto:poormissfinch@...) and that has been my online identity ever since. When it came time to choose a URL, we kept coming back to it. And that’s the story.” Laura is not blind like Wilkie’s Lucilla Finch - nor is her husband blue. But her bloggish

website is typical of the personal accounts of daily life being made available to everyone in the world.

### **ROMANTIC FRIENDSHIP**

WCS member and WCS *Journal* contributor Dr Carolyn Oulton has published her book *Romantic Friendship in Victorian literature*. One chapter analyses *Armada* and its “engaging criminal adventuress, Lydia Gwilt” and how she interacts with the relationship between Allan Armadale and Ozias Midwinter. She also mentions briefly other relationships in Collins’s works - the friendship between the half-sisters Laura Fairlie and Marian Halcombe in *The Woman in White* and Miss Clack’s guarding of Rachel Verinder in *The Moonstone*. Published by Ashgate at £50 ISBN 978-0-7546-5869-6.

### **THE LETTERS OF WILKIE COLLINS**

An astonishing number of new letters have been tracked down this year by the editors of *The Public Face of Wilkie Collins*. More than 60 new letters have surfaced in the last twelve months. They range in date from the 1840s to the 1880s covering all aspects of Wilkie’s personal and public life. The full texts of several other letters, which were previously known only as summaries, have also been found. A collated *Addendum & Corrigendum (3)* will be published with the winter newsletter.

### **NATIONAL CURRICULUM**

Head of the National Curriculum (in England) Ken Boston has included Wilkie as one of 44 ‘English Heritage’ authors in his recommended books to study by 14-16 year olds in schools. Boston, 64, took up his post recently as head of the Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA). Now it is up to teachers to decide which of the books they actually teach or recommend.

### **FARNCOMBE ESTATE**

Farncombe Estate offers a wide variety of summer and autumn breaks with accommodation in the Cotswolds. Talks and courses include literature, writing, music, art appreciation, history and photography. Further details can be found at [www.FarncombeEstate.co.uk](http://www.FarncombeEstate.co.uk) or 01386 854100.

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