



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 2008

THE FROZEN DEEP

One of the roles of the WCS has been to bring back into circulation some of the unpublished and difficult to locate works of Wilkie Collins. As a minor departure from this main objective, this Newsletter is accompanied by a CD of the overture to *The Frozen Deep*. This was composed by Francesco Berger for the original 1857 amateur production of Collins's play and dedicated to Charles Dickens. The WCS was fortunate to secure the services of pianist, Vyvian Bronk, who first performed the overture during Andrew Gasson's talk to the St John's Wood Society last October. We hope that Wilkie as a great music lover would approve. As he wrote in *Heart and Science*, "One *must* like music."

COLLINS AND DICKENS AT THE DONCASTER RACES

Alan Watts, doyen of the Dickens Fellowship, in a recent issue of his regular newsletter, *Mr Dick's Kite*, mentioned an interesting article by David Ashforth published in *The Racing Post*. The piece was published on 11 September 2007, the 150th anniversary of the visit of Collins and Dickens to Doncaster in 1857. The visit to the races followed their walking tour of Cumberland which was written up and published as 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices'.

'On the morning of Monday, September 14, 1857, two men caught a train from Leeds to Doncaster. The younger of the two, Wilkie Collins, was limping... Charles Dickens had insisted that they climb Carrock Fell, in the Lake District. Collins slipped on a wet stone and twisted his ankle. He had to be helped down the hillside, but Dickens was determined to continue their tour and reach Doncaster, where he had booked rooms at the Angel Hotel. Monday marked the start of St Leger week, the week when, according to The Doncaster Chronicle: "Doncaster is the beau ideal of the sporting town, where the tocsin sounds for its autumnal revelries."'

One reason for Dickens's determination to reach Doncaster, of course, was the presence in the town of the young actress Ellen Ternan. She was appearing at the Theatre Royal in a performance 'that ended with a dance by girls dressed as jockeys.'

WILKIE COLLINS'S AMERICAN TOUR, 1873-1874

Long standing WCS member, Susan Hanes, has just published *Wilkie Collins's American Tour, 1873-1874*. As the title suggests, the book is a detailed examination of Wilkie's reading tour of the USA, undertaken in 1873-1874. It includes chapters on his auspicious welcome to New York City; the early readings in upstate New York; Philadelphia, Boston and New York; Baltimore and Washington; Canada; and Cleveland, Detroit and Chicago. There are also appendixes on the

detailed itinerary, 'The Dream Woman' and a summary of performances. Susan has written the following few lines to give some background to her research:

"It was a happy (and exciting, I must admit) moment when I returned from our recent travels in Central America to find my book, *Wilkie Collins's American Tour, 1873-1874*, in the pile of mail that accumulates when one is away. Several years ago, I had the idea to try and retrace Wilkie's steps during his six months in North America, in much the same way I had followed his travels around England in 1998. Little did I know what I was getting into. As I write in my Preface, little had been written about Wilkie Collins's journey across the pond. There was no George Dolby or Eyre Crowe to record his daily activities as in the case of Dickens and Thackeray.

"Starting with Clyde K. Hyder's short article, 'Wilkie Collins in America', published in 1940 by the University of Kansas, I began my search. I began in Toronto, where I visited the Toronto Reference Library and poured over microfilm newspapers until my eyes glazed over. When I found an announcement for a reading, I would look for a review on the following day. I quickly learned that just because a reading was announced, it was no guarantee that it had actually occurred.

"Eventually, I traveled to over 50 cities in the eastern US and Canada as well as around the Great Lakes area. I visited nearly 80 libraries, research institutions and historical societies, looking for articles, news reports and personal correspondence. Eventually I was able to confirm 25 readings in 22 locations during the 154 days that Wilkie spent in North America.

"Incredibly, the hunt never got old for me. As happens so often in life, just when things seemed to be reaching a dead end, I would find a delightful tit-bit that would keep me going. My favorite finds include a letter written by a boy to his brother, describing the reading he had attended in Providence in less than glowing terms; the exchange of good-natured notes between respected US statesman John Hay and well-known raconteur William Seaver concerning a breakfast banquet in Wilkie's honor; and the menu of the dinner for Wilkie at New York's Century Club that he signed twice as it went around the table.

"But perhaps the most interesting discovery I made was the letter confirming that Wilkie's visit to the Community of Perfectionists in Wallingford, Connecticut had inspired his later novel, *The Fallen Leaves*.

"I approached the project as a librarian. My joy was in the seeking-and in the finding. I will leave it to others to evaluate what I have found, and look forward to adding to what we already know of Wilkie's travels in America as others make discoveries of their own."

Wilkie Collins's American Tour, 1873-1874 (ISBN 978 1 85196 968 5) is published by Pickering & Chatto which generously offers WCS members a 25% discount off the usual price of £60 for orders made before 31 October 2008. See the enclosed order form for details.

SUSPICIONS OF MR. WHICHER

Suspicious of Mr. Whicher: or The Murder at Road Hill House by Kate Summerscale is a full length investigation of the 1860 Constance Kent Road (a village in Wiltshire) murder case. The death of a young boy whose throat was slit in an outside toilet excited huge interest in the newspapers and in Victorian society, especially as the murderer had to be one of the family or servants within the house on the night of the death. Collins fans will know that features of this real life murder case, such as the stained night gown, were incorporated into the plot of *The Moonstone*. Whicher was the detective Inspector on whom Sergeant Cuff is partly based. Whicher joined the

police force in 1840 and the newly formed detective police in 1842. He featured prominently in the Road Case but his reputation as the 'Prince of Detectives' suffered after Constance Kent was acquitted and he wrongly arrested an innocent man during a subsequent murder case in 1861. Whicher was also the model for Dickens's 'Sergeant Wicheam' in his *Household Words* articles on the Detective Police: 'A Detective Police Party' (27 July and 10 August 1850); and 'The Artful Touch' in 'Three "Detective" Anecdotes' (14 September 1850).

Kate Summerscale investigates all aspects of the murder in her 300 page volume. Her lively style hides an enormous amount of original research - set out in 42 pages of notes and references - which makes the book a valuable modern account of a well documented event. The first book on the Road Case was written within a year of the murder by J. W. Stapleton, *The Great Crime of 1860*, and among the others is *The Tragedy at Road-Hill House* by Yseult Bridges nearly 100 years later in 1955. The book is handsomely produced and well illustrated with maps, diagrams and photographs of the principal protagonists. It is published in the UK by Bloomsbury at £14.99 (ISBN 978 0 7475 8215 1). For further details of the book and the murder see http://www.telegraph.co.uk/arts/main.jhtml?xml=/arts/2008/03/29/sm_whicher29.xml.

ARMADALE AT THE MILWAUKEE REPERTORY THEATER

Wilkie's own favourite of his novels, *Armada*, has now been seen on stage for the first time in more than 100 years. The Milwaukee Repertory Theatre is responsible for a new adaptation by Jeffrey Hatcher of Wilkie's longest and most complex novel. Hatcher is one of the most prolific and frequently produced playwrights in the US. *Armada* runs for 2 hours 30 minutes and from 23 April to 25 May. There is more at www.milwaukeeecrep.com but the ever peripatetic Susan Hanes, who was fortunate enough to see the production, sends us the following report:

'The world premiere of Jeffrey Hatcher's *Armada*, based on the 1866 novel by Wilkie Collins, opened at the Milwaukee (Wisconsin) Repertory Theater on April 23. Billed as a "tale of deception, inherited curses, rivalries and murder," the production, directed by Joseph Hanreddy, distilled Collins's longest and most complex work into an exciting evening of deception and intrigue.

"The play opened with the full cast on stage and the audience was called upon to pay close attention to a rapid series of explicative speeches as the characters revealed their complicated identities and relationships in the story. Interior monologues and commentaries by other characters carried the plot along within its two-and-a-half-hour running time. The single set employed multiple levels and well-chosen Victorian props to project the action seamlessly from one scene to the next. Characters often made their exits through the audience, allowing the pacing on stage to continue while at the same time suggesting a change of location.

"The sensational aspect of Collins's story was highlighted and there was no attempt to diminish the sense of melodrama. Collins's wit was evident in the deliciously droll characterizations of Brock/Bashwood, Mrs. Oldershaw/Mrs. Milroy, and Dr. Downward/Major Milroy, performed by Peter Silbert, Rose Pickering, and James Pickering, respectively. Deborah Staples delivered a delightfully scheming and equally disarming Lydia Gwilt, although her frequent excursions to the boathouse and a rather explicit encounter on the chaise longue at centre stage front belied any Victorian sensibilities. Brian Vaughn was a suitably good-natured and believable Allan Armadale, and Emily Trask demonstrated her singing and playing talents as the sometimes petulant, sometimes coquettish Nellie Milroy. But the most compelling role was that of Ozias Midwinter, performed with a dark intensity by guest actor Michael Gotch who captured the brooding angst of the "other" Armadale.

“As an ardent Wilkie Collins enthusiast, I approached this production with a mixed sense of anticipation and apprehension. I was concerned that the spirit of the story might be turned into a silly, slapstick jab at old-fashioned Victorian scruples. But this production, with its fast-paced, clever dialogue, its superb acting, and its intelligent direction, delivered a thrilling evening of theater of which Wilkie himself would have thoroughly approved.”

ALLIANCE OF LITERARY SOCIETIES

The WCS continues to be affiliated to the Alliance of Literary Societies. The alliance maintains a comprehensive website at <http://www.sndc.demon.co.uk/> featuring dozens of authors from Jane Austen to Charlotte Yonge. This year's literary weekend and AGM was held on 17 and 18 May in Swindon and organised by the Richard Jefferies Society. Further details of the Alliance from Linda J Curry, Chair, ALS, 59 Bryony Road, Birmingham B29 4BY.

THE 50 GREATEST CRIME WRITERS

The Times book page of Saturday 19 April featured the 50 greatest crime writers. Wilkie Collins was placed at number 24. His life and works were briefly described in a column of text by Nicci French (pseudonym for Nicci Gerrard and Sean French) complete with a half page photograph. The top ten were given as Patricia Highsmith, Georges Simenon, Agatha Christie, Raymond Chandler, Elmore Leonard, Arthur Conan Doyle, Ed McBain, James M. Cain, Ian Rankin and James Lee Burke. Our distinguished patron, P. D. James, was high in the list and placed at number 12. Full details can be found at http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/system/topicRoot/Top_50_books.

SUSAN HILL AND HER CREATIVE WRITING BLOG

Well known author, Susan Hill, perhaps best known for her ghost story *The Woman in Black* runs a creative writing forum on <http://blog.susan-hill.com/blog>. In the archives section for 27 September 2007 can be found her admirable assessment of Wilkie Collins:

“No, not a good, a great example. Wilkie Collins. Not every novel he wrote has stood the test of time and his short stories are not much read now but any writer would be proud to have written the two we still buy and read and admire, *THE WOMAN IN WHITE* and *THE MOONSTONE*. They were hugely popular when they were written, the former in particular and Collins deliberately did a very important thing - he showed that a popular, best-selling genre can become great literature as well. I have just read this in the Cambridge Companion to WC and I would urge all those who may think it beneath them to write a crime novel, a historical romance, a Gothic novel or any other genre piece to take it to heart.

“Collins's own ambition was to be a writer for all classes. His professionalism bred a sense of duty to his paying public and his first hand knowledge of the financial insecurity to which artists were always vulnerable committed him to an uncontroversial popular art. His great achievement was to show that a low, popular art form was capable of extraordinary subtlety and power. He discovered that it was by giving the reading public what it wanted - ‘violent and thrilling action, astonishing coincidences, stereotypic heroes, heroines and villains, much sentimentality and virtue rewarded and vice apparently punished at the end’ - that you could tell it what it did not want to hear.’ Take good note of that.”

VICTORIAN ARTISTS IN PHOTOGRAPHS

Wilkie was represented by a single *carte-de-visite* photograph in the recent exhibition at the Guildhall Art Gallery (7 January – 13 April). The portrait, showing the subject wearing an astrakhan coat, was taken as part of a series by New York photographer, Sarony, during Collins's 1873-74 reading tour. Wilkie always considered these US photographs far superior to any of those

taken in England. The exhibition mainly featured Victorian artists. It was based on the collection originally assembled by art dealer Jeremy Maas which passed on his death to Rob Dickens. Copies of the superbly illustrated *The Victorian Art World in Photographs* by Maas are still available on the internet through the various book search sites and the Sarony portrait can be seen at http://www.paullewis.co.uk/wilkie/wilkieimages/1874Sarony_full_CDV.htm

MARGARET CARPENTER

Margaret Carpenter was Harriet Collins's younger sister and Wilkie's aunt. She was a talented and successful portrait painter, exhibiting at the Royal Academy almost every year from 1814-1866. Albany Fine Art of Oxford has recently created amongst its featured artists a biographical page on its website at <http://www.albanyfineart.co.uk/carpenter/index.html>.

AUDIO BOOKS

The audio book of *Mr Wray's Cash-Box* has now been added to the Collins titles mentioned in the last Newsletter - *The Frozen Deep*, *The Evil Genius* and *A Rogue's Life*. *Mr Wray* is part of the 'Victorian Collection of Assembled Stories'. It is read by Peter Joyce, unabridged on four CDs with a list price of £13.49. (ISBN 978-1-86015-069-2). There is also a new full text audio book of *The Woman in White* about to be published by Naxos. Using multiple narrators for the various parts this is an unabridged reading of the book.

The Talking Bookshop in central London's Wigmore Street, close to Oxford Circus, has prepared the enclosed listing of currently available Collins titles, together with their reader, format and price. These recordings are all available from the Talking Bookshop where WCS members will be given a 10% discount until the end of July. Alternatively titles can be ordered through the website at www.talkingbook.co.uk quoting Wilkie Collins Society membership.

A PRODUCTION OF THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN SOUTHPORT

Valerie Pedlar has added to her brief comments in the previous Newsletter with the following notes on the Constance Cox adaptation of *The Woman in White*.

"It would appear that the publication of Constance Cox's dramatisation of *The Woman in White* by Samuel French in 2005 has encouraged amateur companies to put on the play (Newsletter, Spring 2006), and there was an opportunity to see it in the north-west last October when it was presented by The Southport Dramatic Society. After the liberties taken in the BBC serialisation a few years ago, and in the Lloyd Webber musical, it was good to see a dramatisation of Collins's novel that remains pretty faithful to the original.

"The major adaptation is in terms of setting, which is limited to the drawing room at Limmeridge Hall. This confinement emphasises the domesticity of the drama, and precludes any sensational staging of such key moments in the novel as Walter Hartright's first meeting with Anne Catherick, the meeting with Marian and Laura by the gravestone, the fire in the vestry and Marian's meeting with Laura at the asylum. It's a relatively small point, but the sense of conventional, almost comfortable domestic life is further preserved in the failure to account for the resemblance between Anne and Laura: Philip Fairlie's adultery is not revealed. Nevertheless, the text does allow for the horror of Laura's predicament, for the loss of identity and her persecution by both Sir Percival and, more subtly, Count Fosco. The continuity of place means that Sir Percival in effect takes over the Fairlie home; he becomes a usurper (if only temporarily) and his tyranny over his wife is augmented by his tyranny over the housekeeper.

“I found myself reminded of Patrick Hamilton’s *Gas light* (1938), where the terrorisation of a wife by her husband is achieved with gothic intensity within a domestic setting. But Cox’s play does not have such an impact, at least it didn’t in this production. *The Woman in White* has a much busier plot, but I think that more could have been done to create a sense of menace, perhaps with more atmospheric lighting, or by the use of background music at key moments. Most important, though, is the acting: on this occasion not the best I have seen on this stage, which has seen some fine amateur performances. The key moments listed above are reported onstage, so the actor needs to recreate the drama of the event. I was particularly aware that Marian’s long speech describing her rescuing of Anne from the asylum failed to communicate a sense of emotional trauma. And, though Laura’s appearance in the last act wearing Anne’s clothes was suitably cowed and bewildered, she recovered remarkably quickly once dressed from her own wardrobe.

“Reviewing the first adaptation of the novel, the play by J.R.Ware that was put on at the Surrey Theatre in 1861, the *Era* comments on the loss of mystery, the absence of originality when Count Fosco, for instance, is required to ‘portray and speak acts, and ideas only dimly hinted at by the author’. The reviewer seems to be concerned with mysteries of personality rather than of plot and to be jibbing at the inevitable substantiation of representing a character on stage. It is likely, however, that the fault lay in the script-writing and in the acting, and maybe a stage version of this classic novel that mediates between the original and the sensibilities of a modern audience has yet to be written.”

The popularity of the current version of *The Woman in White* continues with a further production at the People’s Theatre in Newcastle which opened its new season in January.

ANTONINA

Wilkie’s first published novel is back in print. Diggory Press, which is also a self-publishing company, has produced an edition of this Roman epic first published in 1852. It is available through Amazon for £7.99 or less, ISBN 978-1846859762.

THE MOONSTONE-THE DRAMATIC VERSION

A print edition of the dramatic version of *The Moonstone* has been published recently also by Diggory Press ISBN 978-1846859830.

THE NEW MAGDALEN

The e-texting of Wilkie’s plays continues thanks to the work of James Rusk. He has now finished *The New Magdalen - a Dramatic Story* using the original text as privately published by Wilkie Collins to preserve his dramatic copyright as the stage play opened on 19 May 1873 at the Olympic Theatre. www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/newmagplay.html. Seven plays - out of fifteen - are now available in e-text format through James Rusk’s site at www.digitalpixels.org/jr/wc/ and a link to all e-texts is found at www.wilkiecollins.com (menu item 1).

THE CIRCULATING LIBRARY

A new bibliographical website has been launched. At the Circulating Library: A Database of Victorian Fiction, 1837-1901 <https://www.victorianresearch.org/atcl/> aims to catalogue biographical and bibliographical information about the three-decker editions of Victorian authors. The database currently contains entries for over 800 authors, 60 publishers, and 2000 titles. Only 13 of Wilkie’s books from *No Name* (1862) to *The Legacy of Cain* (1888) are mentioned and at the moment details are brief.

DORÉ'S LONDON

Doré's London is a new book which combines Gustav Doré's renowned engravings of London life with passages from several authors including Dickens, Collins, and Trollope. Published by Arcturus Foulsham at £16.99 ISBN: 978-0572034320.

ANTHONY MINGHELLA

The recent, untimely death of Anthony Minghella is strongly reminiscent of one of Wilkie's early short stories, 'The Family Secret'. The film director underwent what should have been routine surgery for removing a growth on his neck but tragically failed to recover from a catastrophic and ultimately fatal haemorrhage. In Wilkie's story, Charley, the narrator, spends many years trying to discover the family secret from his relatives. He finally learns by chance that his beautiful young sister died when Uncle George, a doctor, performed a rash operation to remove an unsightly tumour from her neck. The story was originally published as 'Uncle George; or, the Family Mystery' in *The National Magazine*, November 1856. It was reprinted in *The Queen of Hearts* (1859) as 'Brother Griffith's Story of the Family Secret'.

OBITUARIES

We are sad to report the death of WCS member Alexander Grinstein aged 89. Dr Grinstein was a practising psychoanalyst for more than 50 years and in 2003 he published *Wilkie Collins: Man of Mystery and Imagination*, the only book length psychoanalysis of Wilkie's works and life. He also wrote a psychoanalytic study of Beatrix Potter. He had been a member of the Society since 1995. Alexander Grinstein MD, born 1918, died 11 December 2007.

The American academic Richard D. Altick has died age 92. Altick's book *The English Common Reader*, published in 1957, was the first to look at what he called the mass reading public. In its opening pages he cited Wilkie Collins's 1858 essay 'The Unknown Public' and there are other references to Wilkie's desire for a mass or popular audience. Altick was widely credited with bringing the Victorian era to life as well as encouraging its serious study. Richard Daniel Altick, 19 September 1915 to 7 February 2008.

The actress Eva Dahlbeck who appeared in a Swedish language film loosely based on *The Woman in White* (*Kvinna i vitt* 1949) has died aged 87. She played the part of Solveig Rygard but it is not known which character that represents in the original. Dahlbeck later acted in many Ingmar Bergman films and wrote poetry, plays, novels and screenplays. She died in Sweden of Alzheimer's disease on 8 February 2008.

ARCHIVES OF THE NEW YORK TIMES

The archives of the *New York Times* contain a wealth of information about Collins from book reviews to theatrical criticism and from details of his final illness to reports on the sale of his books and manuscripts. A search on his name in the section from 1851 onwards brings up nearly 400 entries. <http://www.nytimes.com/ref/membercenter/nytarchive.html>.

ARCHIVES OF THE ILLUSTRATED LONDON NEWS

Illustrated London News Group has been sold by its owners Sea Containers to new owners who will develop the extensive digital archive of the *ILN* and *The Graphic* in which several of Wilkie's stories first appeared. At the moment, however, it is not known when access to the early fiction and the engravings made to illustrate them will become available.

IN THE PRESS

Wilkie Collins has cropped up in a few highly unlikely references in the press recently. A piece by Craig Brown in *The Daily Telegraph* about the divorce case of Heather Mills and Sir Paul McCartney suggested that the case contained “fantastical coincidences such as one might find in a tale by Wilkie Collins, incorporating opposites with twinned names and sudden changes of appearance.” (22 March 2008).

Another in *The Guardian* about the troubled singer Britney Spears suggested that the “mad, bad and sad woman of psychiatric wards and courtrooms ... confined by her father’s legal order... might almost be in a Victorian melodrama scripted by Wilkie Collins.” (Lisa Appignanesi 10 March 2008).

The music magazine *Audiophile Audition* carried this review by Gary Lemco of Schubert’s Piano Works for Four Hands played by Allan Schiller and John Humphreys. “Schiller and Humphreys turn the *Scherzo* into a thrilling carillon whose F Minor trio rings with Poe and Wilkie Collins.”

And Wilkie even makes the credit crunch. Jeremy Batstone-Carr writes in *Moneyweek* “it is important to bear in mind that rising commodity prices and falling house prices (and accompanying crisis in the credit markets) are the physical manifestations of two key opposing forces; inflation and deflation. Pick the right one and investors could walk off with the big prize, pick the wrong one and investors could end up, like Wilkie Collins’ character, Rosanna, plunging dramatically into the suffocating mud.”

GUEST APPEARANCES

Wilkie appears briefly in a new novel by Karen Joy Fowler called *Wit’s End*. The 29 year old heroine is a teacher who loses things. “Countless watches, rings, sunglasses, socks, and pens. The keys to the house, the post office box, the car. The car. A book report on Wilkie Collins’s *The Moonstone* plus the library’s copy of the book, plus her library card.”

And he will appear extensively in *Drood* by horror and science fiction writer Dan Simmons. Described as a mixture of “history, biography, and dark fantasy” *Drood* takes the five years from Dickens’s involvement in the Staplehurst train crash to his death and “looks at the secrets of Charles Dickens and his friend Wilkie Collins in the period 1865 to 1870.” *Drood* will be published in 2009.

WEBSITE BIOGRAPHIES

The Vault at Pfaffs <http://digital.lib.lehigh.edu/pfaffs/people/psearch/> contains an archive of people in the artistic and literary world of 19th century New York. Wilkie doesn’t appear but Augustin Daly – who presented some of his plays – does and so too do his friends William Winter and Frank Bellew.

LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL

This year’s Ledbury Poetry festival takes place from 4-13 July. As usual there will be a mixture of readings, performances, exhibitions, music, talks and workshops. The annual competition will be judged by Jackie Kay. Further details from 0845 4581743 or <https://ledburypoe.org.uk/>.

Paul Lewis
Andrew Gasson

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

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