



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

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THE WOMAN IN WHITE - WEEK BY WEEK

Paul Lewis continues the mammoth task of publishing *The Woman in White* in its original weekly parts. More than 550 subscribers all over the world eagerly await their Sunday morning Collins 'fix'. Many others download the weekly pdf from the website www.womaninwhite.co.uk. Some subscribers admit they cannot cope with the suspense and cheat by looking ahead in a paperback edition on their shelf. But most seem to enjoy the cliff-hangers and wait in agony for the next weekly part as Victorians did 150 years ago.

The text is freshly e-texted from the original and carefully checked against the text down to the last comma. It is the first time the misprints in the original text have been carefully documented. And the exercise has turned up some eccentric spellings - such as 'recal' - which were sometimes but not always changed in subsequent editions. As well as the original text Paul has also scanned the original illustrations from the New York publication *Harper's Weekly* and those from the 1875 Piccadilly edition.

The exercise has given new insights into how Wilkie worked and split the story up, balancing his own workload with the dramatic needs of the fiction itself. Some parts end in the middle of what is later a continuous section in the book publication. And Wilkie constantly underestimates how many parts the story will take to finish.

It is still possible to join. New members are sent the back numbers by email. All Wilkie Collins Society members are already on the list but any friends, colleagues or secret Wilkie fans need only send an email to paul@paullewis.co.uk.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN THE INDEPENDENT

The 150th anniversary of *The Woman in White* was also picked up by *The Independent* of Sunday 27 December. The article by Fiona Halliday describes its huge popularity at the time, adds some biographical notes and concludes with “Collins influenced writers as diverse as Hardy, Conan Doyle and Du Maurier. Contemporary novelists such as Sarah Waters and Michael Cox have acknowledged his power. Though dispossessed hysterical heiresses and supernatural jewels may be dated, those blood-filled and myopic eyes of his proved far-sighted indeed. He took the measure of the immeasurable and parcelled out the dark forces of crime, death and desire as if he had a tape measure and a T-square. Nothing in the world was alien to him, and in what seemed most alien lay what was most truthful.”

The piece ends with quotes by Kate Mosse, Audrey Niffenegger, Helen Oyeyemi, James Wilson and Collins’s biographer, Catherine Peters, who writes “*The Woman in White* is a great mystery story, with suggestions of ghosts and the enduring fascination of ‘domestic gothic’. Collins appeals to succeeding generations according to their preoccupations. In the 1920s-1930s, he was seen as a detective story writer; feminism claimed him as a champion of women; now there seems to be a return to ghosts, vampires and other aspects of the uncanny.” The full piece can be seen at <http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/books/features/white-magic-the-woman-in-white-has-kept-us-in-suspense-for-150-years-1848385.html>.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE AND OTHER PLAYS IN SOUTH AFRICA

Pierre Tissot van Patot has been extending his researches to South Africa. He has discovered that *The Woman in White* was staged on various occasions in Capetown during 1867. The adaptation was probably made by Sutton Vane (senior) and the company headed by Le Roy and Duret: productions were staged

on 21 and 24 October and 4 November. The theatre apparently burned down in 1868. There were also productions of other Collins plays:

“*The New Magdalen*, a new play in a prologue and 3 acts adapted by Mr Sutton Vane from Wilkie Collins’s celebrated novel” was staged on the 11 and 12 October 1877.

Adrift, was adapted by Sutton Vane from Collins’s novel *The Frozen Deep* on 6, 7 and 11 March 1878 and staged in the Good Hope Gardens.

Some of these details are contained in F. C. L. Bosman’s *Drama en toneel in Suid-Afrika, Deel II 1856-1912*: J. L. van Schaik, Pretoria, 1980 (ISBN 0 627 01105 5).

THE WOMAN IN WHITE DRAMA

The Woman in White as a drama continues to please contemporary audiences. Kelso High School in Lower Columbia, Washington State performed its own dramatisation of the story in aid of the American red Cross in Haiti. A local reporter said the Victorian plot had “mysteries swirling like the fog on the moors.” And the teenage cast gave their insights into the play. Skylar Cruz summarised his character Glyde as “A very secretive character... pretty much my whole goal is to try to get money;” and Sierra Baker who played Anne Catherick warned “There are a lot of underlying plots; a lot of twists, you really have to pay attention when you watch it.” Indeed.

And the characters and plots continue to fascinate from different perspectives. Vivienne Parry wrote an interesting piece on the BBC website <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/health/8622367.stm> to support her Radio 4 documentary *Madwomen in the Attic*. She reminds us that Bulwer Lytton had his wife declared insane and confined to an asylum though she was clearly not mad after she made embarrassing remarks about him when he stood for parliament.

THE LOUISE NOTTAGE CASE

The source of Collins's plot for *The Woman in White*, with Laura's confinement in a lunatic asylum, is generally accepted as Maurice Méjan's *Récueil des Causes Célèbres*. A descendant of the Nottidge family, James Miller, draws our attention to an English case reported in *The Times* which also has some similarities.

Following the death of clothier Josias Nottidge of Wixoe in 1844, his five daughters each inherited the sum of £6,000. By 1846 the sisters had been persuaded by the Rev. Henry Prince, a defrocked Anglican priest, to contribute to a new religious community, to be called Agapemone, or The Abode of Love. The following year the sisters travelled to live in The Abode of Love, a walled community guarded by dogs in Spaxton, Somerset. Rev. Prince immediately arranged for the sisters to marry young clergymen of his selection: the young clerics had agreed to pay over a proportion of their wealth, once acquired by marriage, to the Rev. Prince.

While three of the sisters proceeded with the marriages, Agnes and Louisa Nottidge declined to marry in these circumstances. Agnes reported experiencing brutal treatment and left the community. When Agnes' brother-in-law, Frederick Ripley, heard her story he travelled to The Abode of Love and forcibly removed Louisa from the grip of Rev. Prince, then committing her to a private lunatic asylum.

Louisa Nottidge escaped from the asylum, then sued her brother-in-law, and her brother, for abduction and false imprisonment. The proceedings of *Nottidge v Ripley and Another*, were reported in *The Times* on 26-29 June, 1849. Louisa won her case, having been certified sane by Rev. Prince, and returned to spend the rest of her life at The Abode of Love.

In 1849 Collins was studying to be a barrister at Lincoln's Inn and would almost certainly have heard of the case which was the sensation of the time with the court "crowded to suffocation". He had not yet met Dickens but may well have read the latter's supplement to *Household Words*, *The Household Narrative of Current Events* for May 1850 (p. 110), which devoted half a column to the case.

There was a later suit, *Nottidge v Prince* (1860), in which the Nottidge family were able to recoup some of the monies handed over to Rev. Prince by the Nottidge sisters. This action remains a leading case in the field of ‘undue influence’. It can only be speculation as to whether the original Nottidge case had any influence on Collins’s plot for *The Woman in White* or on *Man and Wife* (1870) where he argues for a Married Woman’s Property Act, or even on the much later *Fallen Leaves* (1879) which features an American religious sect - although this is generally regarded as based on the Oneida community in New England. But what turns out to be an interesting coincidence is that this second Nottidge case was widely reported in the press between July and August 1860, just as the serialisation of *The Woman in White* in *All the Year Round* was drawing to its dramatic conclusion. The book publication took place on 15 August 1860 and the publicity of *Nottidge v Prince* may well have assisted the marketing success of Collins’s novel.

The Woman in White is dedicated to “Bryan Waller Procter from one of his younger brethren in literature who sincerely values his friendship and who gratefully remembers many happy hours spent in his house.” Procter, pseudonym Barry Cornwall, was by another coincidence Commissioner of Lunacy from 1832-1861 and wrote the report which was responsible for the release of Louise Nottidge.

The religious community at The Abode of Love was not finally dissolved until 1958. Members who would like further details of his theories can contact james_miller44@talktalk.net.

THE MOONSTONE LEGACY

It’s rather surprising that so few of Collins’s stories have been ‘borrowed’ to provide a modern sequel. One example is James Wilson’s 2001 *Dark Clue* where Laura, Marian and Walter from *The Woman in White* embark on new adventures. Now, however, we have a continuation to *The Moonstone*, in the form of *The Moonstone Legacy*, due to be published by Pushkin Press on 31 May 2010. Authors Diana de Gunzburg and Tony Wild have sent us the following advance notes:

“What will be the next adventure of the Moonstone? Who can tell?” So ends the Collins classic - and the challenge has finally been picked up in the form of a young adults’ mystery adventure novel, partly set in Shalimar, a splendid Anglo-Indian mansion on the North Yorkshire Moors.

Fourteen year-old Lizzy Abercrombie’s mother dies in a tragic accident on the full moon. But was it really an accident? Lizzy discovers that her death may be linked to a mysterious family curse. Determined to find the truth, her quest takes her to the Temple of the Moon in India, where she uncovers the terrible past of her ancestor George Abercrombie. But her discoveries put her in mortal danger from a ruthless enemy...

The Temple of the Moon at Somnath is, of course, the setting of *The Moonstone’s* visionary final chapter. What members of the Society may not know is that region is one of India’s most sacred landscapes, setting for many scenes in the Mahabharata, and the background for one of the Vishnu Puranas concerning the legendary Syamantaka, a sacred diamond, gift of the sun God. These features are woven into the story, too, embracing the East in a way of which Collins might well have approved.

Tony Wild explored the Indian subcontinent as a young man, and wrote his popular histories for HarperCollins - *The East India Company: Trade and Conquest from 1600* (1999) and *Remains of the Raj* (2001), nominated Jan Morris’ Book of the Year. A one-time actor, filmmaker and screenwriter, this collaboration is his first novel.

Diana de Gunzburg was born in Pakistan and is Anglo-Russian-Afghan. Her great-grandfather was the last person to be publicly hanged for insurgency by the British in the North West Frontier of Pakistan, where her father still farms his estate. Diana was brought up between the North West Frontier and her mother’s native Yorkshire. She has recently published articles about her upbringing in *Alef* magazine and *Afghan Scene*. She lives with her husband and teenage daughter in Paris where she teaches yoga. This is her first book.”

The Moonstone Legacy is written mainly for younger readers in an exciting, easy to read style and with a nicely ambiguous ending. The book is set in the twentieth century with a new cast of characters although two of the minor

players are called Franklin and Penelope - apparently an unconscious homage to the original. And by yet another coincidence the Indian meaning of Shalimar (the name of the Yorkshire mansion) is Abode of Love.

Further details are given on the enclosed flyer from Pushkin which gives WCS members a small discount off the published price of £8.99. (Pushkin Press, ISBN 978 1 906548 21 6). Pushkin Press have also published *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* by Charles Dickens.

ELECTIONS, PARLIAMENT AND SPEAKERS

In these unusual electoral times, It might be worth noting some of Collins's words on parliament and elections:

“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]

“Nobody seems to know whether there is to be another general election - or a Civil War - and your old Literature hides her diminished head.” [Letter to Charles Kent, 11 May 1886].

“Parliament and hereditary legislators don't care a straw about us or our interests - we must somehow make them care.” [Letter to E. M. Ward, 20 March 1855].

“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!]*.

“If you had been the wife of a Cabinet Minister”, she said to her daughter, “you would have been too well used to telegrams to let them frighten you.” *[The Evil Genius]*

“Please enclose it to T[illotson] merely saying that you draw his attention to a new mistake! Are they all drunk in honour of the election? [Letter to A. P. Watt, 2 December 1885].

In Wilkie’s time, when writing *The Woman in White*, the UK had its first Liberal Prime Minister. Viscount Palmerston, the MP for Tiverton, lost office as a Whig Prime Minister in 1858. He brought together an alliance of Whigs, Peelites, Radicals and Irish Brigade to defeat the Conservatives in the General Election of May 1859 (in which Wilkie almost certainly did not have a vote as he was not qualified as a property owner). After the election, the alliance was known as the Liberals and the party won again in the summer of 1865 for the first time under the Liberal banner. Tiverton & Honiton remained Conservative in the 2010 election with almost no swing from Conservative to Liberal Democrat.

With so much recent oratory, here are a few additional comments on speakers in general:

“Telling the truth...is a more complicated affair than you seem to think.” [*Hide and Seek*]

“There is only one kind of speaker who is quite certain never to break down under any stress of circumstance - the man whose capability of talking does not include any dangerous underlying capacity for knowing what he means.” [*The Dead Secret*].

“Without the slightest comprehension of the subject to embarrass him in the flow of language.” [*Hide and Seek*].

A COLLINS OBITUARY IN *TYPO*

Typo. A Monthly Newspaper and Literary Review was written, composed and distributed by Robert Coupland Harding from 1887-1897. The eleven volumes are mainly directed at domestic and international news about printing and allied book trades and include a series of articles on ‘Design in Typography’. There are also book reviews and obituaries. The issue for 28 September 1889 (p. 107) prints the following:

“All readers of fiction will regret to hear of the death of Mr Wilkie Collins, one of the most original and popular novelists of the Victorian era. Mr Collins, who was born in January, 1824, had been in failing health for some time past, but the later telegrams had recorded an improvement. He was not only a novelist, but a successful dramatist, and his stories, of which the most popular is *The Woman in White*, are marked more by skilful plot and dramatic situations than by portrayal of character. One of his stories, *Armadale*, has, we believe been oftener reprinted in New Zealand weeklies than any other serial. Collins was a friend of Dickens; and was often associated with him in literary work; but there is a well-marked difference in the work of the two writers. A story by Wilkie Collins is now current in the *Illustrated London News*, and the author’s admirers will be glad to know that the MS. is complete.”

A further note on 28 June 1890 (p.69) records that “*The New Zealand Graphic* is the name of an attractive weekly issued by Mr H. Brett, the enterprising publisher, of Auckland. For the information of those who may hereafter desire to complete their files, it should be noted that the first number is « marked and numbered» Vol. vi, No. 32. The new weekly has a neat engraved heading, and the original matter is well written. It begins the serial « Blind Love, » by the late Wilkie Collins, the illustrations to which-as, in fact most of the engravings-are from imported blocks. Presswork and paper are excellent; but the composition and arrangement of the matter are open to improvement.”

Typo is the centrepiece of a three-year research project on typographical journals funded by the Marsden Fund of the Royal Society of New Zealand. The journal plus a note on sources can now be found online at <http://www.nzetc.org/tm/scholarly/tei-corpus-typo.html>.

BRIEF LIVES: WILKIE COLLINS

Latest in the Hesperus Press series, ‘Brief Lives’, is a new biography of Collins by Melisa Klimaszewski. It is a short 112 page introduction to Collins’s life with the following advertising blurb: “A close friend and collaborator of Charles Dickens, Collins secured his own fame with sensational novels that feature intricate legal plots, mistaken identities, and complex crimes. Collins was also one of the most unconventional public figures of his day. This

biography presents his life story.” Published by the Hesperus Press at £7.99 (ISBN: 9781843919155).

Hesperus have also published *The Frozen Deep, A Rogue’s Life, Who Killed Zebedee and John Jago’s Ghost* and *The Lazy Tour o/Two Idle Apprentices*.

DECORATE WITH WILKIE

Cafepress seems to specialise in decorating everything from T-shirts to wall clocks. So if you fancy a Wilkie Collins mug, apron, mouse mat or even a teddy bear, these plus various other items are available to order. The picture used for decoration is the Rudolf Lehmann portrait of Wilkie painted in oils during 1880. For further details see <http://shop.cafepress.co.uk/wilkie-collins>.

THE GUERNSEY LITERARY AND POTATO PEEL PIE SOCIETY

The Guernsey Literary and Potato Peel Pie Society by Mary Ann Shaffer, and Annie Barrows is a recent epistolary novel about the island of Guernsey during the German occupation and of the strangely named society. The heroine, Juliet Ashton, in one letter contains an odd but inaccurate reference to Collins. Referring to another character, Markham Reynolds, she writes: “We talk of higher matters, such as Victorian literature. He’s an expert on Wilkie Collins of all things. Did you know that Wilkie Collins maintained two separate households with two separate mistresses and two separate sets of children? The organisational difficulties must have been shocking. No wonder he took laudanum.” (Random House, paperback ISBN: 978-0-385-34100-4).

WILKIE EN FRANÇAIS

Gallica, <https://gallica.bnf.fr/accueil/en/content/accueil-en> is a full-text project of the Bibliothèque Nationale de France which enables one to find the original translations of many of Wilkie’s works. Twenty of his books were translated in his lifetime and published largely by Hachette in Paris. The Bibliothèque has copies of all of them and Gallica has many of them on its database in full text with images of the original pages.

NO FT NO WILKIE

The *Financial Times* used a quote from Wilkie's *Rambles Beyond Railways* to describe the Cheesewring on Bodmin Moor:

"Soon, moorland stretches as far as the eye can see. After an easygoing mile followed by a short climb adjacent to an old quarry, you reach the Cheesewring. According to local myth, this outlandish geological formation is the result of a rock-throwing contest between a giant and a diminutive saint - the giant, inevitably, was beaten by divine powers. Wilkie Collins described it well in *Rambles Beyond Railways or Notes in Cornwall Taken A-Foot*: "If a man dreamt of a great pile of stones in a nightmare, he would dream of such a pile as the Cheesewring." (*FT* 27 March 2010).

RAMBLES BEYOND RAILWAYS

There is also quite a nice summary of *Rambles Beyond Railways* at <https://fleurfisher.wordpress.com/2010/01/21/rambles-beyond-railways-by-wilkie-collins/>. Fleur Fisher is apparently a self-confessed Comish bookworm and her pages give several quotes and illustrations from the book, including the Cheesewring.

YELVERTON AND WIFE

Wild Romance: the true story of a Victorian Scandal is an account by new writer Chloe Schama of the famous Yelverton divorce case which Wilkie used in the plot of *Man and Wife*. In 1868 he wrote to his lawyer Benham: 'I want to find out what "Mrs Yelverton's" grievance is - in "a nutshell" - with a view to making it the starting point in a play (this between ourselves). Can you tell me, in what point her marriage, was "null and void"?' (To Benham 25 September 1868). Published by Bloomsbury at £15.99 the book uses long passages from the correspondence of Charles Yelverton and Theresa Longworth whom he married twice under Irish and Scots law but not in England and then married someone else. After several inconclusive court cases the ex-couple retired abroad separately.

BARCELONA ONE MORE TIME

Longstanding WCS member, Richard Lewis, whose adaptation of *The Woman in White* for foreign learners of English was mentioned in the last Newsletter, has now created a website www.barcelonaonemoretime.co.uk. *Barcelona One More Time* tells the story of a language teacher who leaves England in 1976 to take up a job teaching English in Barcelona. The first sentence of the book is written in homage to *The Woman in White* and on the website can also be seen the striking cover of his adaptation for Oxford University Press. There is a further mention of Wilkie Collins in Richard's *Artistic Thanet* which reveals the connection of various authors and artists with the area.

LEDBURY POETRY FESTIVAL

This year's Ledbury Poetry Festival takes place from the 2-11 July. There will be the usual performances, readings, talks, walks and music plus writing workshops and the annual poetry competition. Further information from 0845 458 1743 or at <https://ledburypoetry.org.uk/>.

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