



## ***THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY***

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

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### **NEWSLETTER**

**WINTER 2010/11**

#### **THE HORRORS OF MOVING**

Andrew Gasson has moved and from 1 November his address is as shown above. As Wilkie so stylishly put it when moving to Gloucester Place in August 1867 'Will you kindly cause my address in your books to be altered to the address at the head of this letter, to which I have recently removed.'

Having now experienced the chaos of moving, the conclusion is that Wilkie was right when he wrote on 6 February 1888 'I write surrounded by the horrors of moving.' So far, however, the suffering and chaos have not been as great as his when wrote again on 27 April 1888:

'The horrors of moving (not over yet), and the dire necessity of writing against Time, have been a little too much for me together. And when several thousand patterns of wall-paper (intended to replace a paper in the dining-room which influences my eyes every time I look at it) presenting every variety of hideous ugliness, arrived one after the other in interminable series, my power of endurance gave way, and I became one mass of yellow green Bile from head to foot. I am slowly, slowly getting better under a system of physic and diet...'

#### **A NEW COLLINS BIOGRAPHY**

WCS member, Andrew Lycett, is commencing work on a new Collins biography. It is now nearly twenty years since the definitive work by Catherine Peters, *The King of Inventors*, was published in 1991 and longer than that since William Clarke's more personal biography *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins* in 1988. A great deal of new material has come to light during this time, including the various editions of Collins's letters. The following is the recent press release from the publishers.

'Hutchinson publisher Caroline Gascoigne has acquired UK and Commonwealth including Canada and exclusive Europe rights to publish a biography of Wilkie Collins by Andrew Lycett from Natasha Fairweather at A. P. Watt. The book will be published by Hutchinson in hardback and in Windmill paperback.

'Leading biographer Andrew Lycett is taking a radical new look at Wilkie Collins's unconventional life and increasingly popular work, incorporating a wealth of new material.

'Caroline Gascoigne says 'I have been a great admirer of Andrew's work for many years. His interpretation of the life of Wilkie Collins - like his biographies of Conan Doyle and Kipling - will be a must-read, and sure to appeal to the myriad fans of *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone*. I'm thrilled that Andrew is joining Hutchinson with such an exciting project.

'Andrew Lycett says, 'I am delighted to be publishing with Hutchinson and renewing a much-valued working relationship with Caroline Gascoigne. Wilkie Collins is an extraordinarily colourful Victorian figure whose professional career and private life yield up all sorts of surprises.'

### **THE RACING WILKIE COLLINS**

An unusual form of American recognition for Collins was to have a horse named after him. *Chester's Complete Trotting and Pacing Record Containing Summaries of all Races Trotted or Paced in the United States or Canada, From the Earliest Dates to the Close of 1885*, compiled and published by Walter T. Chester, New York, 1886 shows this other Wilkie Collins's father was George Wilkes and his mother to be Rosa by Rosca. George Wilkes had originally been called Robert Fillingham but had his name changed in honour of the owner of *The Spirit of the times*, one of the more prominent New York journals. By a nice coincidence, this magazine published Christmas stories by the real Wilkie Collins between 1876 and 1887 and most of these were republished in various English periodicals and with different titles collected as *Little Novels* in 1887.

We can also learn from [www.allbreedpedigree.com](http://www.allbreedpedigree.com) that Wilkie Collins was black, stood 15.3 hands high, was born in 1876 - hence perhaps the reason for the equine namesake - and had some 300 brothers and sisters.

Wilkie was aware of his equestrian rival since he wrote to A. P. Watt on 11 March 1887 "You will be amused to hear that a famous trotting stallion in the U.S. has been called "Wilkie Collins". A printed pamphlet sent to me, records his virtues, and says "Wilkie Collins covers mares at \$75 dollars each"!!!!" The 1894 *Book and Table of Sires* compiled by W. H. Golcher shows the equine Wilkie Collins still to be going strong and a later edition in 1903 shows that he had numerous progeny with names like Teddie Collins and Bessie Wilkes.

### **MORE CONFUSION OVER THE REAL WILKIE COLLINS**

The following extract from the *South Australian Advertiser*, Adelaide, on Wednesday 15 June 1870 implies that Wilkie Collins was something of a household name even down under. We know that he liked music and Mozart in particular but there are no notes about his singing capabilities.

'The Best Tenor -"Alpha" asks if "Mr. Wilkie Collins," who sang with Madame Anna Bishop, is the best tenor singer who has visited South Australia. Our correspondent is confounding Mr. Wilkie who accompanied Madame Bishop, with Mr. Wilkie Collins, the celebrated novelist. We should be sorry to be compelled to say who is the best tenor who has visited this colony. Wilkie had a sweet tenor voice, and so had Lascelles, and Squires, and Beaumont, and some others. For our part, we should be glad to hear any of them again.'

### **WILKIE COLLINS'S FURNITURE AND EFFECTS**

The following description is also taken from an Australian newspaper, *The Sydney Morning Herald* of 13 December 1889. It apparently reproduces a piece originally published in London's *St James's Gazette*.

'The Sale of Mr Wilkie Collins's furniture and effects which recently took place in London, is thus described by the *St. James's Gazette* :- "The sale was particularly melancholy. The day was gloomy, the house was gloomy, and the occasion was gloomy.

'Long before I o'clock the rooms were filled with curious visitors, feeling the texture of the curtains, appraising the chairs, and criticising the 'effects.' To be quite candid, it seems a pity that the friends of the dead novelist did not see their way to disposing of the house-hold fragments which were offered to the public by private treaty. It was painful to see the meanest domestic trifles accorded a place in the catalogue. And a walk through the house disclosed bundles of odds and ends which only a dustman would have thought worth the carriage. Upon the second floor was the mournful room where the good old novelist died - a gloomy chamber, with three windows overlooking Wimpole-street. A faded mirror over the mantelshelf reflected the shabby remnants of upholsteries which were allowed to remain in their places while the broker's men wandered in and out discussing the appointments in the husky tones which are their peculiarity. Gentlemen in seedy garments their boots broken out, their necks without collars, and their coats and trousers patched and stained. In his lifetime this room had been filled with books and prints, as indeed one guessed for oneself, for an empty bookcase occupied the whole of one wall. Standing up, all forlorn, was the adjustable reading desk which Mr Collins used at his bedside. The bed itself was iron, and hung round with shabby red curtains.

'The sale was conducted in the front drawing-room, a pleasant enough room, hung with yellow paper and lighted by three tall windows. The folding doors, which opened into the little back drawing-room where Collins worked to the last, were flung open, and the lots were piled up all around. The auctioneer mounted a temporary platform at one end and soon got to work. The room was quite full and he was monarch of all he surveyed. In front of him was a row of fenders in all stages of decrepitude. Ranged alongside of these interesting articles were what a sarcastic furniture-dealer denominated as 'the decent folk, 'the gentlemen in silk hats, and a few enterprising ladies. Beyond were the real buyers, who 'ad come 'ere to hold Collingses sale to turn a 'ones! penny.' 'Silence please,' cried the auctioneer. 'Lot 2, a japanned Oxford washstand basin, ewer, footbath, a japann-' At this moment two brokers,

who were fortunately removed from each other by a bristling row of fenders, quarrelled audibly about a catalogue. 'Now, then, old cock eye,' cried the lesser one, 'shut up, can't yer.' 'Who are you a callin' cock eye of?' Jest wait till I come acrost you. See if I don't put a blacklead brush on one o' your'n.' 'Silence please, or I'll put you out.' 'Yer can't. This is a public hauction. Ask the pleeceman,' turning to a constable on duty. Mr Holcombe, the auctioneer, then laced to again with the japanned foot bath, but the catalogue question was a burning one and not to be quenched.' Now then, Oakum, give us a catalogue, can't yer. I never was treated like this ere before, and I ain't agoin to stand it. Gimme a catalogue. I've come ere to do a day's work, and how can I do a day's work without knowin' wot I'm a buyin'? 'I can't give you one. Lot 4-' 'Well give me my money back.' 'Oh! shut up,' cried a voice from the crowd.' 'Shut up and let's go to business. If e aint got no books you can't 'ave none.' The grievance is settled amicably. The man who is charged with having a cock eye and the man who has come out to do a day's work make a friendly alliance, the fenders rattle, and Mr.' Oakum rattles too till he is hoarse, and sings out' Bring me a glass of water, John.' 'A glass of whisky and water, John' mimics a wag. 'Oh, give him a drop o' gin,' cries another, and at this crisis an alarum goes off with a bang and a whirr to add to the confusion, and no wonder Mr. 'Oakum' asks the faithful John to pass along a jug of water; and so the lots go on. Blankets and bed linen, pots and pans, fenders and fire irons, mattresses and Windsor chairs, champagne coolers and fireguards, coalscuttles and 'Turks' heads, stair rods and Kidderminster carpets, gipsy tables and fire-shovels, &c, &c, until we get to the dozen or so interesting things in the sale. These were the relics with a personal interest. These objects had been handled by everybody. 'Lot 105. The 4ft. 6 in. mahogany table, on castors with four drawers in frame, top lined with leather. On this table (formerly the property of the father of Mr Wilkie Collins) the distinguished novelist wrote all his books.' It was ink-stained, the leather was colourless and worn, and it bore the signs of many a long year's wear and tear. Some enthusiast got it for £10. 'It ain't worth 30 bob,' ejaculated a matter-of-fact broker. Another interesting relic was the writing slope which Collins used, and which brought £3 5s. Another of these slopes had evidently been made after the design of the novelist. Folded up, it looked like a miniature gun case; it contained a compartment for writing materials, and was evidently used for travelling. And so lot by lot the 'effects' were knocked down, and 82 Wimpole-street is once more to let."

An exterior photograph of Wilkie's Wimpole Street home as it was in his time can be seen at [www.wilkie-collins.info/home\\_wimpole.htm](http://www.wilkie-collins.info/home_wimpole.htm).

### **REAL CRIME WITH *THE WOMAN IN WHITE***

*The Woman in White* was in such demand that it tempted at least one thief to steal 12 copies from the publisher Sampson Low and attempt to steal a further six. George Cooper appeared before the Guildhall Magistrates on 11 June 1861 accused of obtaining books on false pretences. He had turned up at Sampson Low's office on Friday 17 May with an order signed 'G. Smart' for six copies of the newly published one volume edition to deliver to rival publisher Smith and Elder. Presumably he sold the six copies himself below their published price of six shillings and he returned a week later on 24<sup>th</sup> with a similar order and took away

another six. Sampson Low became suspicious of his handwritten orders and when he returned for a third time on 7 June asking for six more he was asked if he had written the orders himself. He confessed that they were in his own handwriting and he was taken into custody. The magistrates heard from Smith and Elder that it had not given him an order for the books and Cooper was committed for trial. (*The Times* 12 June 1861 p. 1 IF)

### **VICTORIAN MYSTERIES**

Big Fish Games which had earlier produced a 'hidden object' game for *The Moonstone* has now launched *The Woman in White*. The format appears similar with exceptional graphics and employing, at least by name, the characters from Wilkie's novel. It can be found at [www.bigfishgames.com/download-games/9162/victorian-mysteries-woman-in-white/index.html](http://www.bigfishgames.com/download-games/9162/victorian-mysteries-woman-in-white/index.html). It is, however, an enormous download at nearly 240Mb and the trial version seems unreliable. There is another game entitled *The Haunted Hotel* but this has no connection with the Collins novel.

### **THE ATLAS OF FICTION**

The Atlas of Fiction website gives the geographical locations for many of the places mentioned in the works of numerous authors. The format consists of the place name followed by a one line description of the action occurring there. There is also a link to a world atlas showing the position of all points on the map. The Collins novels so far listed are *The Woman in White* where places from St John's Wood to Honduras are mentioned; and *Armadale* which includes locations from Bad Wildbad to the Norfolk Broads. For the full listing see [www.atlasoffiction.com/list.cgi?all](http://www.atlasoffiction.com/list.cgi?all).

### **SOME SCANDINAVIAN ETEXTS**

In the Summer 2010 Newsletter we mentioned the Swedish bibliography by Lars-Erik Nygren which is still available from the author at [lars-erik.nygren@comhem.se](mailto:lars-erik.nygren@comhem.se). It is interesting to note that Project Gutenberg now has three etexts in Finnish (*No Thoroughfare*, *John Jago's Ghost* and *Sister Rose*) to join the two titles in French which have been available for some while (*No Thoroughfare* and *The Haunted Hotel*).

### **90 GLOUCESTER PLACE**

Wilkie's home between September 1867 and February 1888 at 90 Gloucester Place (now renumbered 65) has been empty and in a terrible state of neglect for several years. It now seems that the Portman Estate which own the building has at last started renovation works. The house has four stories, a large stone staircase and an impressive double drawing-room on the first floor where Collins did most of his writing. Let's hope this will be preserved when building works are completed.

## **'THE DEAD HAND'**

'The Dead Hand' was a short story originally published as 'The Double-Bedded Room' in *Household Words*, 10 October 1857. It forms the second chapter of 'The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices' and was later republished in *The Queen of Hearts* as 'Brother Morgan's Story of the Dead Hand'. In the original, Arthur Holliday arrives in Doncaster during the busy September race-week. The only accommodation he can find is a shared room with a body occupying the other bed. His apparently dead companion revives in the night. He has an uncanny resemblance to Arthur and years later is found to be his illegitimate half-brother. The physical description of the 'dead' man, however, was that of a doctor's assistant Collins and Dickens met on their tour. Collins later used his strange appearance for the character of Ezra Jennings in *The Moonstone*.

'The Dead Hand' was adapted for the stage as a one-off production at the Greenwich Theatre on 31 October 2010. Perhaps with Halloween in mind, the adapter, David Gilbrook chose to add to the main theme an overwhelming Voodoo element. His 'excuse' was based on a quote from Collins's original "You have brought a poor devil back into the world who has no business there." The play, here set in 1850, was well acted by a versatile cast of three (David Martin, Amanda Howard and Nicholas Gilbrook) but there was a great deal that Wilkie would have failed to recognise.

## **AUCTION NEWS**

One hundred and fifty years after it was published a very fine copy of the original three-volume first edition of *The Woman in White* in its original blind-stamped violet cloth with adverts dated 1 May 1860 fetched £21,250 including buyer's premium at Sotheby's in London in October. Sadly the Sotheby's catalogue repeated the error that this edition was published after the American edition which is simply false - see Andrew Gasson's updated account of the publishing history of the book sent with the Summer newsletter. One reason why the price fetched for this first book edition was nearly twice the highest estimate Sotheby's put on it was the early date of the advertisements present in volume III. Their usual date for a true first edition is August 1860 but this copy which had previously been sold at the Bradley Martin sale in 1990 had advertisements for May 1860.

However, even that price was eclipsed by the next lot - *The Moonstone* - a first edition in three volumes bound in the original purple cloth which cost the buyer £67,250. Other highlights in the sale were a first of Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* at £127,250 and a first of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* at £115,250. But the top price was for a copy of the first impression of the first edition of *A Christmas Carol* inscribed by Dickens on New Year's Day 1844 to his friend W. C. Macready which cost the buyer £181,250.

## **THE MOONSTONE ON RADIO 4**

Radio 4 is broadcasting a newly dramatised version of *The Moonstone* in its classic serial slot starting on Sunday 23 January at 3pm. The four episode treatment is by David Lucie and is

the first new radio dramatisation of this story by the BBC since 1979. Eleanor Bron is Lady Verinder and Kenneth Cranham is Sergeant Cuff. Rachel Verinder is played by Jasmine Hyde with Paul Rhys as Franklin Blake and Steve Hodson as Betteredge. The play has music by David Chilton and the BBC says it was recorded "on location".

### **A NEW STAGE PRODUCTION OF *THE MOONSTONE***

Long standing US member, Susan Haynes, writes that her local Lifeline Theatre in Chicago is staging a new three hour production of *The Moonstone* from 4 February to 27 March. It is adapted by Robert Kauzlaric and directed by Paul S. Holmquist. The theatre's blurb reads: 'The Moonstone, an Indian diamond steeped in a history of violence and mysticism, is stolen from Rachel Verinder's sitting room, and no one in her household is above suspicion. Join an unforgettable collection of liars, lovers, addicts and outcasts as they struggle to uncover the truth and reclaim the stone before its curse destroys them all. This thrilling mystery, regarded as the first detective novel in the English language, is re-imagined by the award-winning adaptor and director of *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *Nowhere*.' (See [www.lifelinetheatre.com](http://www.lifelinetheatre.com)).

### **SOME NEW COLLINS LETTERS**

Jamdyce, the specialist London bookseller, has for sale the archive of the actor Frank Archer (1844-1917) which includes 28 letters from Wilkie Collins. The whole collection, which fills three trunks, is believed to have been purchased from the actor's family. Archer, whose real name was Frank Arnold, played Julian Gray in the original production of *The New Magdalen* at the Olympic theatre in 1873. He reprised the role in 1884 and was a friend and correspondent of Collins for more than fifteen years. They last met in December 1887 less than two years before Collins died. Fourteen letters from Archer to Collins are known in full and six in part from Archer's autobiography *An Actor's Notebooks* (1912) and from Kenneth Robinson's 1951 biography of Collins. Robinson notes that he was lent the letters by Archer's son Frank H. Arnold. As well as the letters, the archive includes Archer's diaries and details of theatrical expenses and his pay. There is also a lot of other material, including a box of beards, of less interest to Wilkie scholars. The price is £38,000.

### **THE OTHER DICKENS**

WCS member Professor Lillian Nayder has just published her biography of Dickens's wife Catherine Hogarth. With numerous references to Wilkie and his family the book follows a modern tradition of resurrecting the lives of women who lived in the shadow of famous men. Nayder, who has written extensively on Charles Dickens, Wilkie Collins and their relationship, provides extensive footnotes in her comprehensive and fascinating account of Mrs Charles Dickens. Lillian Nayder, *The Other Dickens*, Cornell University Press, 2011 ISBN 978-0-8014-4787-7, price £22.95.

## **YELLOWBACKS**

Victorian 'yellowbacks' were the small format 19<sup>th</sup> century editions of literature with a sometimes lurid illustration on the front board which sold for two shillings at railway bookstalls. Collectors have relied on Chester W. Topp's nine volume catalogue as the definitive bibliography. Collins titles feature mainly in volume III which includes Chatto & Windus but they are also scattered throughout the collection. Now, 4000 of Topp's original yellowback and paperback volumes from 1849 to 1905 have been bought by the Manuscripts, Archives, and Rare Book Library of Emory University in Atlanta, Georgia. Librarian David Faulds plans to re-catalogue and digitise the volumes in a project scheduled to take three years - see <http://goo.gl/ikYel>.

## **AUTHOR OF THE FIRST DETECTIVE NOVEL UNMASKED**

We have known for some time that *The Notting Hill Mystery* predated *The Moonstone* by five years and has a strong claim to be the first detective novel (though some might say it owes much to *The Woman in White*). But when it was identified by Julian Symons in 1975 its author was given as 'Charles Felix', a name known to be a pseudonym. Now an American writer, Paul Collins, claims to have established that his true identity is Charles Warren Adams (1833-1903) of the publisher Saunders, Otley & Co which published his books! Read his conclusions in *The New York Times* Sunday Book Review, 9 January 2011, p. BR23 or online at [goo.gl/EsqnA](http://goo.gl/EsqnA).

## **THE LAKE**

BBC 7 which never ceases to surprise with its repeats of often forgotten drama featured on 2 October *The Lake* by Ellen Dryden. This tale of a long ago death and its cover up, although with no direct Collins content, was interesting for one of its main characters who adopted the name Moonstone.

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