



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

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SUBSCRIPTION FOR 2012

Reluctantly we have decided that the continuing rise in postage costs necessitates an increase in the annual subscription for 2012. It will be £12 for the UK and Europe and £21 for the rest of the world. The increase is still well below the rise in postage and other prices since we last increased it ten years ago. Those who have already paid for 2012 will not, of course, be asked for the extra this year. Those who haven't will find a form with this mailing.

THE WILKIE COLLINS JOURNAL

We hope that the first issue of the Third Series of the *Wilkie Collins Journal* will be available online from early 2012. We have already placed searchable archives of the Second Series on the Wilkie Collins Journal website (<http://acc.wilkiecollinssociety.org/articles>). Editorial assistant, Verity Burke, provides the following write up of the *Journal's* official launch in November.

A bunch of enthusiastic academics, a wonderful paper, and a Wilkie Collins cake henceforth known as Wilkie Cakeins was the perfect way to relaunch the prestigious *Wilkie Collins Journal* on Monday 14th November. Set in motion by the editor of the *WCJ*, Dr Andrew Mangham, and held in the Humanities and Social Sciences building of the University of Reading, the launch served to draw together those interested in the world of one of the most influential sensation writers of the nineteenth century, and was attended by many, including Society Secretary Paul Lewis and Chairman Andrew Gasson.

The relaunch incorporates a brand new website, which as one guest aptly commented, provides the air of sitting in a Victorian parlour, reflecting the manner in which the publication aims to draw together those interested in the writer and in sensation fiction generally, whilst retaining its high standing in the world of academic research. The *WCJ*, formerly the *Wilkie Collins Society Journal*, continues to provide a forum for the publication of new research on

Collins, and the Wilkie Collins Society itself continues to publish a reprint of one of Collins's lesser known works once a year. The *WCJ* also includes useful reviews of other academic works on Collins and related topics.

Due to the *Journal's* online rather than paper presence, it can avoid many of the pressures which routinely face academic publications, and alongside the Collinsian emphasis, the publication is also interested in articles on other sensation authors and the genre in its more broadly defined sense. It is also particularly keen to delve further into the vast wealth of Collins's lesser known work. Despite the focus on expanding the canon of studied Collins texts, the evening's paper, given by Dr Tatiana Kontou of Oxford Brookes University, reflected the continued interest of the Society in Collins's best known works, and incorporated the *WCJ's* main aim: "to promote new methodological approaches to Collins's writings as well as to broaden our understanding of the larger context from which those works emerged".

Dr Kontou's paper focussed on the relationship between Collins's 1868 novel *The Moonstone* and the public interest in the Koh-I-Noor diamond, examining the use of ekphrasis to convey the form and lustre of the diamond through Collins's written "eye-witness" accounts. Drawing parallels between the uncut Koh-I-Noor, the danger of division to the Moonstone itself, and the troubling multifaceted nature of the novel's first person narratives, Kontou refers to the legend of the Koh-I-Noor in contemporary publications to inform close readings of passages in which the Moonstone is the main focus of description. The paper was well received and ended in an insightful discussion about Collins's intentions regarding his representation of the jewel, and an impressive use of technology by Paul Lewis to investigate the plover, a wading bird featured in a passage of close analysis during the talk!

As the paper and the Q&A session wrapped up, the launch relocated to the reception. Featuring a cake (Victoria sponge, naturally) decorated with a cartoon of Collins (specifically, 'Caricature Portraits of Eminent Men', *Once A Week*, 24 February 1872), the discussion on all things Collinsian continued with great enjoyment. Dr Mangham summed up feelings about the event, and had a few words of gratitude for those involved: "It was fantastic to see friends, colleagues and fellow Collins enthusiasts celebrate the relaunch of the *Wilkie Collins Journal*. I'd like to say a special 'thank you' to Kate Gazzard, Diane Watts and Jan Cox for their help in organising the launch. Volume 1 of the third series is well on its way to being ready and will be appearing in the new year with some fantastic new approaches to Collins's life and works. I'm very grateful to the Wilkie Collins Society and my editorial colleagues, Tatiana Kontou and Verity Burke for their sustained enthusiasm for the Journal and for Collins research in general."

DEATH COMES TO PEMBERLEY

Our apparently indefatigable Patron has taken a trip back in time to 1803 for her latest novel. Never far from the scene of the crime, P. D. James has recreated the world of her favourite novel, Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, introduced us once again to the main characters and added a good murder. Her usual storytelling skills are then nicely employed to unravel the intriguing mystery. *Death Comes to Pemberley* is published by Faber & Faber at £18.99, (hardback ISBN 978-0-571-28357-6).

THE ARCHER ARCHIVE RESCUED

Frank Archer (1844-1917) was an actor of some note for twenty years from 1868 to 1888. Born Frank Bishop Arnold he was attracted to the stage rather than the commercial job his family arranged and eventually paid for training and gave up his work. He appeared originally on the provincial stage but soon made it to London. Wilkie met him in 1873 when he was recommended by the theatrical actors and impresarios Squire and Marie Bancroft to play the lead in Wilkie's stage version of *The New Magdalen*. Archer and Wilkie remained friends and corresponded over 14 years.

Archer was a methodical man who kept diaries for most of his life and press cuttings throughout his theatrical career. He also kept hundreds of letters neatly sorted into bundles including 32 from Wilkie and four from Wilkie's stepdaughter Carrie Graves. The existence of the letters was known but their location remained a mystery to scholars until they appeared as part of the Archer Archive in a dealer's catalogue in 2010.

This Archive has now been obtained by Wilkie Collins Society Secretary Paul Lewis. Transcripts of the letters will form part of the 2011 *Addenda & Corrigenda* to the complete letters which will be sent out shortly to WCS members.

The whole archive, which filled three Victorian trunks, is a unique and detailed record of a middle-ranking actor's career. His diaries cover more than 40 years with details of meetings - some with Wilkie - and journeys he made. The archive records every part he took in every play with cuttings, playbills and tickets - including special train tickets to the theatre in one case. His notebooks record what he was paid and the sometimes lengthy periods he was without work. They also reveal that in many cases he had to buy his own costume and props and what he paid for them. Two beards and a moustache remain in a cardboard box. More than 200 letters from friends, relatives and theatrical figures cover much of the nineteenth century.

From 1886 he tried to change career to become a writer. Although Wilkie advised and recommended him, Archer met with little success. Details of his rejections by publishers - and the rarer acceptances - are in a separate notebook. His letters from this period include many from publishers.

The Archive awaits a scholar of Victorian theatre to analyse it in detail.

DICKENS TO THE FORE

Anticipating 2012's 200th anniversary of his birth, there is much Charles Dickens in the press and on the bookstalls.

The latest, full-length biography is by Claire Tomalin. As the blurb says, "*Charles Dickens: A Life* is the examination of the Dickens we deserve. It gives full measure to his heroic stature – his huge virtues as a human being – while observing his failings in both respects with an understanding but unblinking eye." It is a handsome volume of 500 plus pages with numerous illustrations including the Millais portrait of Collins. The index gives twenty-five or so references to Wilkie but for WCS members they will prove something of a disappointment. The great majority give only a passing comment on his interaction with the Inimitable's life unlike, for example, Michael Slater's recent and truly definitive biography where Wilkie is accorded his proper place. Nineteenth century enthusiasts will enjoy reading this well written book about Dickens but will learn little if anything new about Collins.

Claire Tomalin's *Charles Dickens: A Life* (ISBN 978-0-670-91767-9) is published by Viking at £30 but can be had at a considerable discount from either The Book Depository or Amazon.

Also published recently is *Becoming Dickens: The Invention of a Novelist* by Robert Douglas-Fairhurst (ISBN 0674050037, Bellknap Press). Here the publicity material claims "This provocative biography tells the story of how an ambitious young Londoner became England's greatest novelist. Focused on the 1830s, it portrays a restless, uncertain Dickens who could not decide on a career path. Through twists and turns, the author traces a double transformation: in reinventing himself Dickens reinvented the form of the novel." Priced at £20, this volume is also available from the above discount suppliers.

OUP have now reissued an 'Anniversary Edition' of *The Oxford Companion to Charles Dickens*, originally published in 1999. Edited by Paul Schlicke, this comprehensive reference work contains 500 articles in an A-Z format covering Dickens's life, works and cultural context.

DICKENS ON DICKENS

Lucinda Dickens Hawksley's new book is called simply *Charles Dickens* but it is the most unusual of the bicentenary offerings. Produced in association with the Charles Dickens Museum it is a brilliant collection of pictures, play programmes, letters and manuscripts reproduced with great care and set in a broadly chronological sequence.

The 39 bite-sized chapters take you through the events of Dickens's life in a straightforward and engaging manner written with great style by his great-great-great-granddaughter. The highlights are the little pockets which contain separate reproductions of key printed artefacts from his life. Behind a fine reproduction of the playbill for *The Frozen Deep*, for example, a pocket contains pages from the manuscripts of *Oliver Twist* and *Pickwick Papers*, Charles and Catherine's marriage licence, a reproduction with a couple of pages of Dick's Standard Plays, and a whole four page letter from Dickens to Georgina Hogarth. There are 21 of these separately reproduced items, all taken from the collection of the Charles Dickens Museum. The text is full of quality images of places he visited, wrote about or which saw key moments in his life. Most of them you will not find anywhere else.

There are many references to Wilkie and his brother Charles including a very fine small reproduction of the 1853 portrait of Wilkie by Charles now hanging in the Fitzwilliam Museum. Wilkie's name or image also appears on playbills and photographs. It is a marvellous Christmas book ideally suited to dipping into. But it could also profitably be read from cover to cover for those who want a clear and straightforward guide to Dickens's life. Although a descendant, Hawksley does not demur from the difficult aspects of his life - referring consistently, for example, to Ellen Ternan as his mistress. At £30 (and cheaper at some outlets) it is amazing value and worth the price for the reproductions and photographs alone. Warning - at 310x270mm it is a bit big to read on the train! ISBN 978 0 233 003290.

ALL THE YEAR ROUND AND HOUSEHOLD WORDS ONLINE

One of the major projects for Dickens bicentenary is Dickens Journals Online. Masterminded at the University of Buckingham by John Drew, the project has digitised the entire run of Dickens two weekly journals *All The Year Round* and *Household Words*. Wilkie of course contributed widely to both and this project enables us to read the original form of many of his stories and non-fiction pieces as well as his novels *The Dead Secret*, *The Woman in White*, *No Name*, and *The Moonstone*. You can find the references to his contributions at www.wilkiecollins.com and go to menu item 1 e-texts. The DJO images have been converted to e-texts though many of them still need proofreading. Wilkie Collins Society members who want to help with that process can create an

account and join in. The project and the website are due for a formal launch at the end of March. More at www.djo.org.uk.

A COLLINS BIOGRAPHY – IN BRIEF

If the recently published biography of Collins by Melisa Klimaszewski in the Brief Lives series is still too long, then Professor John Sutherland's three or four page entry in his *Lives of the Novelists* may appeal as a lightning summary of Wilkie's life. The whole book of 704 pages provides brief biographies of 294 novelists writing in English, from the seventeenth-century to the present day. It is published by Profile Books Ltd at £30 (ISBN 9781846681578).

ACKROYD ON COLLINS

The forthcoming biography of Collins by the also indefatigable Peter Ackroyd is due to be published on 1 March 2012. It is now advertised to consist of 144 pages with eight pages of black and white illustrations. The illustration on the front cover is the same portrait of the young Wilkie painted in oils by his brother Charles which had previously been used for the rather speculative *The Life of Wilkie Collins* by Nuel Pharr Davis in 1956. This is the last known portrait of Collins which shows him without a beard. With the publication of *The Letters* and so much research on Collins over the last 50 years, any new biography is likely to be grounded on rather more solid facts. The cover price of £12.99 is already being discounted by the major online booksellers.

SOME FINANCIAL QUOTES FROM WILKIE

The nineteenth century possibly had the same financial crises as those hitting the modern world. Here are some quotations from Collins's works which might just as well have been written with today in mind.

Rosanna Spearman had been a thief, and not being the sort that get up Companies in the City, and rob from thousands, instead of only robbing from one, the law laid hold of her (*The Moonstone*).

Reckless speculation which is, so to speak, the national sin of the United States (*Poor Miss Finch*).

What right has anyone to be rich? (*Poor Miss Finch*).

I am not rich enough to care about money (*Poor Miss Finch*).

I thought a contract was the sort of thing a builder signs, when he promises to have the workman out of the house in a given time, and when the time comes (as my poor mother used to say) the workmen never go (*Armada*).

THE SWEDISH BIBLIOGRAPHY

Lars-Erik Nygren who compiled the first bibliography of Wilkie Collins titles in Swedish has now issued another supplement of newly discovered titles to add to the original 200. *Wilkie Collins på svenska – en bibliografi* can be obtained from the author price SEK160, £13.50 or €16.50. You can pay by PayPal – contact lars-erik.nygren@comhem.se for details.

SHORT STORIES ON YOUTUBE

Readings of some of Wilkie's short stories are now available on the internet on the Youtube website. 'The Dead Hand' which was originally published in *Household Words* in October 1857 as 'The Double-Bedded Room' as part of 'The Lazy Tour' and included in *The Queen of Hearts* (1859) can now be found at www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX7Qq9PP4Ps. This page in turn provides links to 'A Terribly Strange Bed' and 'Who Killed Zebedee?'

'FIE! FIE! OR THE FAIR PHYSICIAN'

The original manuscript of Collins's short story 'Fie! Fie! Or the Fair Physician' was sold as lot 182 on 3 December at the US auction house of Ira and Larry Goldberg for \$24,000. Although a considerable sum, this was significantly lower than the rather ambitious estimate of \$40-\$45,000. A full description and photographs of Wilkie's barely legible manuscript may still be available on the website: images.goldbergauctions.com/php/lot_auc.php.

'Fie! Fie!' was originally published simultaneously in the US in the special Christmas supplement to *The Pictorial World* and in *The Spirit of the Times*, 23 December 1882. It was not issued in England during Wilkie's lifetime. Along with 'Love's Random Shot' and 'The Devil's Spectacles' Collins wrote "These stories have served their purpose in periodicals but are not worthy of republication in book form. They were written in a hurry and the sooner they are drowned in the waters of oblivion the better. I desire that they shall not be republished after my death."

COLLINS IN THE PRESS

Wilkie has often cropped up in the most unlikely places and at the Leveson Enquiry into the murder of Joanna Yeats at the end of November the *Independent* reported on the testimony of the wrongly accused Christopher Jefferies. "It was also suggested that he was particularly fascinated with the Victorian "murder novel" *The Moonstone* by Wilkie Collins. Mr Jefferies said: "It is not a murder novel. It is quite well known as being the first significant detective novel in English." The full report is at www.independent.ie/world-news/europe/phone-hacking-inquiry-jo-yeatesrsquos-landlord-tells-how-he-used-safe-houses-2947560.html.

Wilkie receives another mention in a review of Anthony Horowitz's Sherlock Holmes revival, *The House of Silk*. "The question's a no-brainer. A Study In Scarlet is a mess. The Sign Of Four isn't a patch on the book it was so plainly modelled on: Wilkie Collins' *The Moonstone*. As for *The Valley Of Fear*, well it is a nice primer on American mining but the reader in search of deductive thrills would do well to steer clear." For the full review see www.express.co.uk/posts/view/281686/Book-review-The-House-of-Silk-by-Anthony-Horowitz-Orion-18-99/.

An article in *The Guardian* (16 December 2011) about Catherine Dickens's book of menus *What shall we have for dinner* published under the pseudonym Lady Maria Clutterbuck quotes Wilkie referring to a dinner at the Dickens home with a nosegay by each napkin. In fact the reference is to a dinner in late August 1853 at the house in Boulogne where Dickens stayed. Collins joined him for a month and wrote to his mother, Harriet Collins, on 1 September 1853:

"The grand-dinner" (which Dickens had pledged himself should be the best that Boulogne could supply) was a banquet to make a classical epicure's mouth water. The table was charmingly decorated with flowers, and a nosegay was placed by each guest's napkin. As for the dishes, I say nothing; having preserved my Bill of fare, as a memorable document for my family to peruse when I come home.'

Recommendations of Wilkie's work are normally confined to the better known three or four books, but others occasionally appear. Not quite a recommendation but John Mullan writing in *The Guardian* (18 November 2011) listed *Miss or Mrs.?* as one of the few books with a question mark in the title, though he omitted the full stop which was the Victorian style and is found in contemporary editions.

Two short stories have had small mentions recently. The first was listed as an also-ran by Jess Nevins in her backdating of the Hugo Award for science fiction to 1887, found on the website io9.com/5860335/the-victorian-hugos-1887?tag=jessnevins. Among stories which "would have received votes" she included 'Mr. Percy and the Prophet' as "quite minor Collins of indifferent quality, written when he was in poor health but it was by Wilkie Collins."

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