



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER2013

WILKIE COLLINS A LIFE OF SENSATION, ANDREW LYCETT, 2013.

The main Collins event of the autumn is the publication of Andrew Lycett's eagerly awaited biography which has been comprehensively reviewed by the press. Paul Lewis writes:

There have been around twenty book length biographies of Wilkie Collins - the first by Wolzogen in 1885. Add on two major editions of his letters and two dozen critical analyses of his work and nearly 50 books - and many shorter works - have ploughed the field of Wilkie's life in all directions.

So Andrew Lycett faced a major task to produce a new authoritative account, not least because his is the third biography in three years - following Peter Ackroyd in 2012 and Melisa Klimaszewski the year before. He has succeeded. This book is certainly the best life of Collins since *The King of Inventors* by Catherine Peters in 1991 and quite possibly the best ever.

Lycett had the advantage of more than twenty years of subsequent scholarship and analysis and was able to dip electronically into many resources that Peters had to fly around the world to see, though he did his share of travelling too. But he has discovered many new details about Wilkie's two lovers and their families, about his closest friends and his education and has made good use of the newly obtained Coutts bank accounts to illuminate parts of his life.

The book has excellent short summaries of Wilkie's books and stories and Lycett's analysis of Wilkie's later works - often dismissed by other biographers

- is masterful. The summary of his life in the last few pages is as good as anything I have read. At the outset Lycett sees Wilkie plunged into a world which he had to grasp and develop in and then adapt to succeed. He chronicles Wilkie's struggle to do this and shows how he mainly succeeded right to the end. Lycett also pins down convincingly Wilkie's attitude to the church and his own simple Christian belief.

Lycett writes beautifully and his engaging story carries the reader along, not quite like a Wilkie novel but certainly a lot better than Wilkie's biography of his father!

Of course I had niggles - a few minor errors and inevitable moments when I disagreed with his analysis. And despite a 46 page index and 56 pages of notes referenced to each page of the book I missed detailed footnotes and on occasion found references hard to follow up. But if you want a Christmas present, or to treat yourself, or to introduce someone to the Life of Sensation that was Wilkie Collins, then Lycett's book is well worth even its full price. But look for big discounts on the £20 cover price and there is an almost half price Kindle edition.

Andrew Gasson adds: The book is very handsomely produced with numerous illustrations, many of which have rarely been seen or are completely new to Collins studies. Where the text is particularly good is the intelligent way in which Lycett has used the *Letters* to draw subtle inferences which have filled in at least some of the previous blanks in Wilkie's life. If you want an entirely readable account which gives an immense amount of detail compared with the other recent biographies, then this is the biography for you.

There is a complete list of all book length biographies and studies of Collins at www.wilkiecollins.com/biogs.htm.

THE WILKE COLLINS JOURNAL

The journal's new editor, Ann-Marie Beller, writes the following:

The next issue of the *Wilkie Collins Journal* will be online and available to Society members in mid-December. In addition to new articles on Collins's work, this issue will include an essay on Collins scholarship - past, present, and

future - by Professor William Baker (Northern Illinois University); a 'roundtable' discussion of the current *No Name* online reading project; and a range of book reviews, including the recent new edition of Collins's *The lighthouse*.

The WCJ will be in the members' area of the Society's website at <http://wilkiecollinssociety.org/>. The login details for the next twelve months are: Username: **count** and Password: **fosco**.

For those members who do not have ready access to the internet or are unable to download the *Journal*, we will on request arrange to provide a printed version.

EMAIL ADDRESSES

Paul Lewis writes: An annoying computer malfunction has led to the destruction of the database of email addresses of members. I use this to send Wilkie information to members in between Newsletters. I intend to reinstate this service and if you would like to be on the list please send an email to me at paul@paullewis.co.uk and I will add your name. Addresses will not be used for any other purpose and will not be passed on to any third parties.

THE INVISIBLE WOMAN

The film of Claire Tomalin's book about Dickens's affair with Nelly Ternan will be released in the UK on 14 February 2014. Directed by and starring Ralph Fiennes as Dickens with Felicity Jones as Nelly, the film also depicts Wilkie himself (played by Tom Hollander) and his live-in companion Caroline Graves (Michelle Fairley). Several other people Wilkie knew well also appear including, Dickens's wife Catherine, Francesco Berger the composer who wrote the music for *The Lighthouse* and the overture for *The Frozen Deep* as well as some Dickens children.

The film was first shown in the UK at the London Film Festival on 17 October and has been seen at various festivals in the USA. Reviewers have praised it highly. Clips from the film and a two minute trailer can be seen at www.imdb.com/title/tt1700845 but none shows Wilkie.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE-A BIBLIOGRAPHICAL POSTSCRIPT

In the 2011 analysis of *The Woman in White's* publishing history, three states of the US first edition were described. Two of these, (1) and (3), are noted in Parrish's 1940 bibliography whereas (2) had originally been identified in 1942 by the American bookseller and bibliographer, Howard Mott. Now a fourth state has come to light in a copy in red-brown cloth. Other bindings for the various states exist in paper wrappers; or brown or black cloth.

The advertisements form part of the collation and the three states already described are:

1. p [261] has 'Muloch' for 'Mulock' and lists nine titles; p [262] advertises *The Mill on the Floss*.

2. 'Mulock' is correctly spelled on p [261], eleven titles are listed and p. [262] advertises *The Mill on the Floss*.

3. 'Mulock' is correctly spelled with eleven titles listed, but p [262] advertises nine titles by Thackeray.

This latest state has:

On p. [261] 'Muloch' for 'Mulock' and lists nine titles; p. [262] advertises nine titles by Thackeray.

With the uncorrected 'Muloch', this version presumably lies between (1) and (2) or (3). One theory to explain the different advertisements and bindings is that because of the huge demand for *The Woman in White* the novel was produced at different sites or on different presses. Whatever the explanation, we can now record four states for the first US edition although none of these precedes - as often stated erroneously - the first English edition in three volumes.

WILKIE AS A THEATRE DIRECTOR

The tough side of Wilkie's character comes out in a recently discovered eye-witness account of how he dealt with dissent by an actor in one of his plays. Henry Herman (1832-1894) knew Wilkie as stage manager for the revival of

The New Magdalen in 1875 and then prepared *Miss Gwilt* for its first production at the Alexandra Theatre on 9 December 1875. Wilkie wrote to him on 8 November "I can only leave it to your knowledge and experience - in which I have perfect confidence - to prepare the piece for production. I hope to attend all the later rehearsals myself." Wilkie did so, arriving in Liverpool on 6 December and leaving on 11th.

Herman collected anecdotes from his literary and theatrical life in a book published towards the end of his life that is exceedingly rare and has been missed by every scholar so far. Here is Herman's account of Wilkie dealing with an actor who altered the words in his script.

When Wilkie Collins's *Miss Gwilt* was rehearsed for the first time on any stage, at the Alexandra Theatre, Liverpool, it contained a part omitted at its production - namely that of the old gardener, Abraham Sage. The role was allotted to a young man who was then the second comedian of the theatre, and who has since made a name for himself both in England and the Colonies. The aspirant for stage honours was dissatisfied with his part - a very short one - and at one of the final rehearsals he interlarded his principal speech with a copious admixture of the word "sir." When he had got through, Wilkie Collins looked at him over his spectacles and said sternly: "Young man, I have written the word 'sir' four times. You have used it thirteen times. Please understand that I want my words spoken as I wrote them." "I am very sorry, Mr. Collins," replied the young comedian; but, you see, the part's such a poor one, and I wanted to give it character."

"Thank you," Wilkie Collins replied quietly; "I will look into this." When the rehearsal of the act was finished, Wilkie Collins turned to Miss Cavendish's stage manager, who had charge of the production, and asked him for a pencil.

"I think, **Mr -----**," he said "if we put our heads together, we may do without Abraham Sage," and **m** the result every line of the gardener's part was struck out of the piece.

When the Alexandra Theatre Company, including Edmund and Robert Lyons, A. W. Pinero, and others, were engaged for the London

production, that young comedian regretted his inconsiderate speech, and three years elapsed before he found a London engagement. He has made up for it since.

(Henry Herman, *Between the Whiffs*, Bristol, [1890], pp. 108-109.)

There are more than 100 contemporary accounts of Wilkie, updated to include all of those now mentioned in Lycett's biography, at www.wilkiecollins.com/biography/biographies.htm.

ANOTHER LIGHTHOUSE

Hot on the heels of the WCS book publication of *The lighthouse* comes another version by Robert C. Hanna, Professor of English, Bethany Lutheran College, Minnesota. *The Storm at the Lighthouse* - the longer version in Collins's hand held by the Victoria & Albert Museum - is published on pp. 289-364 of *Dickens Studies Annual*, Vol. 44, no.1, July 2013 (AMS Press, ISSN 0084-9812, Online ISSN: 2167-8510). The rather enormous price of £X is currently discounted online by the Book Depository and Amazon at £134.57.

The online blurb suggests that Hanna has taken a slightly different approach:

"Charles Dickens was the first to recognize the play's dramatic possibilities, producing, directing, and acting in its premiere at Tavistock House in June 1855. An introduction includes a summary of *The Storm at the Lighthouse*, an examination of its themes of guilt and forgiveness in writings of both Collins and Dickens, influences of the 1827 play *Trente Ans* on both Collins and Dickens, a summary of major differences between Collins's 1853 short story "Gabriel's Marriage" and his reworking of that story into *The Storm at the Lighthouse*, and an examination of the four surviving manuscripts, including locales mentioned therein. An appendix contains the play's performance history during Collins's lifetime."

THE LIGHTHOUSE - POSTSCRIPT 1 - COLONEL WAUGH

Following performances of *The Lighthouse* at Tavistock House, there was one further, charitable performance at Camden House in aid of the Brompton Consumption Hospital, courtesy of Colonel Waugh. The subsequent history of

the house and its occupant make fascinating reading, and could have been taken from the annals of our current financial crisis.

The munificent Colonel Waugh, famed member of London society at the time of *The Lighthouse* turned out to be a swindler of gigantic proportion. According to *The Times* of 29 October 1859, he had until 1847 been a Captain in the Indian army "mentioned in despatches, but who has since been more noticeably mentioned in Gazettes" [for bankruptcy]. He "confederated with one Stephens to start a joint-stock bank, - not with the intention, as events showed, of initiating an honest banking establishment, but for the purpose of acquiring access to a large heap of other people's money, in order that he might abstract and squander it." Stephens, a cavalry surgeon, became Managing Director of the London and Eastern Bank whilst Waugh became one of its directors. "Deposits flowed in, and as they flowed in so Colonel Waugh made them flow out. Colonel Waugh now burst forth upon the town in a career of magnificent expenditureTime, and fashion, and extravagance, and Colonel Waugh ran their course, and one morning the doors of the London and Eastern Bank were closed and Colonel absconded to the Continent." In fact he travelled to Spain "for the benefit of his health." With the connivance of Stephens, Waugh had taken a loan from the bank of £280,000 with "securities of merely nominal value." The Colonel's formal description was "William Petrie Waugh of Branksea Island, brick and tile maker, limeburner, dealer and chapman."

According to *The Public Ledger* of 12 January 1858 "A warrant is out for the apprehension of Mr John Edward Stephens" who had similarly absconded from the Edinburgh Court of Bankruptcy. As the *Ledger* put it "The public will never learn wisdom. Experience stands no chance against I O per cent. And an Eastern Bank How it all ends we have, among other interesting illustrations, the bursting of the last bank bubbles." Plus i;;a change.

THE LIGHTHOUSE - POSTSCRIPT 2 - CAMPDEN HOUSE

Campden House was built in 1612 by a wealthy silk mercer named Baptist Hickes who subsequently became Viscount Campden. In 1691 the house was occupied by Princess (later Queen) Anne and her son, William Duke of Gloucester. Around this time was built the adjoining Little Campden House, much later to be occupied by Wilkie's artist friend Augustus Egg. In 1704, the

mansion came into the possession of the Burlington family and was subsequently owned by Lord Lechmere and a Mr Stephen Pitt who, in the middle of the eighteenth century converted it into a fashionable boarding-house. A full description and illustration of the magnificently built mansion can be found at www.thebookofdays.com/months/march/23.htm which also describes its fate in detail and how in 1862 "Within the last dozen years, large sums had been expended upon the restoration and embellishment of the interior: a spacious theatre had been fitted up for amateur performances, and the furniture and enrichments were in sumptuous taste, if not in style accordant with the period of the mansion; but, whatever may have been their merits, the whole of the interior, its fittings and furniture, were destroyed in the conflagration of March 23rd; and before the Londoners had risen from their beds that Sunday morning, all that remained of Campden House, or 'Queen Anne's Palace,' as it was called by the people of Kensington, were its blackened and windowless walls."

The house had since 1847 been leased to a Mr Woolley of mysterious origins who according to *The Daily News* of December 1863 had married well and used his wife's fortune to convert a dilapidated mansion into a palace, spending an estimated £50,000. "There was no more fashionable resort than Campden-House. The small theatre and spacious ball-room which it contained afforded peculiar facilities for large entertainments, whilst good nature or ambition constantly induced the proprietor to place his house at the service of the charitable public or of his private friends." The notorious Colonel Waugh stepped into Woolley's place when the latter retired for a season during 1855 and permitted a charitable performance of *The Lighthouse*.

Woolley had no money of his own, borrowing £17,000 from his sister-in-law, and insuring the house in November 1861, just four months before the fire, for £29,000 spread over three separate companies. These obviously thought that Woolley had perpetrated an insurance fraud to recover £12,000 in rebuilding costs and repayment of his debts so that "after some hesitation [they] determined to resist his demand." Woolley therefore brought actions which became known as The Great Insurance Case against the companies. They attempted to show that he had "wilfully set fire to the house by showing that Mr Woolley had given a false account immediately after the occurrence;

that the house had burned with such marvellous rapidity that it must have been set on fire in several places, and on both floors at once." However, after a trial lasting a full five days the jury found "little difficulty in coming to a conclusion in favour of Mr. Woolley and against the insurance companies."

Campden House was rebuilt as a reasonable facsimile of the original, presumably from the insurance money, but was eventually demolished about 1900 and became part of the general redevelopment of the area.

NINETEENTH CENTURY MERCHANDISE - *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

The Woman in White firmly established Collins's reputation with the reading public and helped raise the circulation of *All the Year Round*. As Smith, Elder found to their cost, 'everyone was raving about it.' S. M. Ellis in his 1951 *Wilkie Collins, Le Fanu and Others* (Constable) described how *The Woman in White* was so popular that 'every possible commodity was labelled "Woman in White". There were "Woman in White" cloaks and bonnets, "Woman in White" perfumes and all manner of toilet requisites, "Woman in White" Waltzes and Quadrilles.'

Copies have certainly been seen of 'The Woman in White Waltz' and 'The Fosco Galop' but we are unaware of any examples of the other items. There have been numerous references in articles and the biographies to the merchandise but they all seem to refer back (with or without acknowledgement) to the paragraph on pp. 29-30 in Ellis. This appears to be the only source for reports of merchandise.

Ellis in his essay refers to Thackeray who was said "to have sat up all night in order to read the exciting tale he could not put down" although Page in *The Critical Heritage* (1974, pp. 121-122) suggests that "the only source for the legend" is a passage from 'De Finibus' in the *Cornhill* of August 1862: "Think of a whole day in bed, and a good novel for a companion. No cares: no remorse about idleness: no visitors: and the Woman in White or the Chevalier d'Artagnan to tell me stories from dawn to night."

Ellis does quote accurately a letter from Edward Fitzgerald "I really think of having a Herring-lugger I am building named 'Marian Halcombe', the brave

Girl in the story." (To Frederick Tennyson of 29 January 1867, *letters and literary Remains of Edward Fitzgerald*, London: Macmillan, 1889). But **it** was Gladstone (not mentioned by Ellis) who wrote in his diary of **18** October 1860 "I did not get to the play last night from finding *The Woman in White* so very interesting (*The life of William Ewart Gladstone* by John Morley, Macmillan: London, 1903).

The only other, earlier reference found to merchandise is in the 1935 *Victorians and their Books* by Amy Cruse (George Allen & Unwin, p. 322). This is unacknowledged by Ellis and may have been somewhat embellished.

With these doubts we would therefore be interested to hear from any members who know of any other sources which independently corroborate the Cruse/Ellis story or who have actually seen examples of merchandise for *The Woman in White*. Have they simply not survived or did they never exist?

A VERY BRITISH MURDER

'A very British Murder' was a BBC2 series about the British national obsession with murder. It was stylishly presented by historian Lucy Worsley in three parts from 23 September. Collins featured largely in the second episode which narrated details of the 1860 Road House murder by Constance Kent which gave some inspiration for *The Moonstone* (1868). Viewers were also introduced to the notion of the Sensation Novel of which Wilkie was the prime exponent. The programmes were accompanied by the elegantly produced and well illustrated book of the series, also by Lucy Worsley (BBC Books, ISBN 9781849906340, £20).

THE TEN GREATEST LIVING ENGLISHMEN

Professor Graham Law of Waseda University, Japan, has sent us the *Pall Mall Gazette* for 19 January 1885. Here we have the results on page 6 of its prize competition 'Who are the ten greatest living Englishmen? The contest was subdivided into ten groups including Statesmen, Painters, Actors and Men of Science.

"We offered ten guineas for the best list of the ten greatest living Englishmen. As we pointed out, it would have been manifestly unfair to allow the preferences or prejudices of any single judge, or even a committee of judges, to decide who are the ten greatest of their contemporaries. The prize has, therefore, been awarded on the following principle. Each coupon has been treated as a ballot paper, and the ten notables who have gained the greatest number of votes we have regarded for the purpose of settling the competition as the ten greatest among us.

In the Novelist's group Wilkie is a clear winner with 346 votes compared with William Black (329) and Walter Besant (289). Other notable contenders were well behind with Thomas Hardy (20), Anthony Trollope (5) and Charles Reade (3). There was a separate Writers group led by Ruskin (568) and Tennyson (262).

These results perhaps give the lie to the view sometimes held that Wilkie's popularity declined during his later years. He had published *Heart and Science* in 1883 and *I Say No* in 1884 with the serialisation of *The Evil Genius* to come at the end of 1885.

JOHN SUTHERLAND AT THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP

On 24 July Professor John Sutherland gave a talk to the Dickens Fellowship on 'Great Expectations and All the Year Round - What did Dickens learn from Wilkie?' Sutherland has edited *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* for Oxford University Press and provided the introduction for the Penguin edition of *Armada*. His talk began with some interesting reminiscences about how he became interested in Victorian fiction, then a rather neglected area of English literature.

Dickens and *All the Year Round* created the journalistic environment in which Collins could flourish and added that all of the great Victorian novelists were affected by and learned from each other. Collins learned from Dickens the notion of the detective story. Dickens, on the other hand, learned two things from Collins - *Eruption* and *the Secret*. This was typified by *The Woman in White* where we have the dramatic opening with the meeting with Anne

Catherick; and the continuing theme of Glyde's secret. Overall an excellent evening with the doyen of Victorian fiction.

LETTERS SUPPLEMENT

The eighth supplement to the *Letters of Wilkie Collins* will be sent out with the next mailing, early in 2014. It will add 32 letters to the database taking the total to 3226. Among the new finds is an important group of letters to Wilkie's friend George Russell, a letter to Dickens's eldest son Charles, the first known letter to the publisher William Tillotson, and letters to the actor Arthur Pinero. *Addenda and Corrigenda (8)* also corrects a dozen previously published letters using new evidence.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press still has eleven Collins titles available in their World's Classics Series. Apart from the big four they include *Basil, Man and Wife* and *Poor Miss Finch*. The full Collins list can be found from www.oup.co.uk/academic/series/owc/completelist/.

THE HAUNTED HOTEL

BBC radio 4 broadcast an adaptation by Rod Beacham of *The Haunted Hotel* on 9 July. This was a repeat of its first appearance in May 2012 with Jasmine Hyde as Agnes Lockwood, Adjoa Andoh as Countess Narona and Harry Lloyd as Henry Westwick. Limited to one hour, it somehow didn't quite capture the flavour of the original but it is always encouraging to have adaptations of Wilkie's lesser known works.

<http://wilkiecollinssociety.org/>

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