



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2014

ANNIVERSARY OF WILKIE'S DEATH AND FUNERAL

The 125th anniversary of Wilkie's death is on 23 September and he was buried four days later on Friday 27th September 1889 in Kensal Green Cemetery in west London.

The Wilkie Collins Society will be holding a short event to mark the occasion on the afternoon of Sunday 28th September by his grave.

Will those who would like to attend please contact Paul Lewis either by email paul@paullewis.co.uk or letter to 4 Ernest Gardens, London W4 3QU. More details will follow nearer the time.

WILKIE'S GRAVE

The Friends of Kensal Green have chosen Wilkie's grave as one of five to be carefully recorded and restored by City & Guilds conservation students. In a long report, student conservators Liza Nathan and Anna Don record the material of the kerbs, four stepped plinths, and cross as Carrara marble with lettering in lead and a brick base. The lettering reads "Wilkie Collins. Author of *Woman in White* and other works of fiction". The lead outline of the cross is missing as well as the iron railings and six posts, possibly taken for scrap in World War II. Although the overall condition is sound, they report some biological growth on the base and plinths, including moss and lichen. The marble has eroded in parts due to acid rain and smog from local industries until the closure of the nearby gasworks in the 1970s.

Although the grave has at times suffered from neglect the bed has now been planted and it looks as good as it has for some while, thanks to the work of the Kensal Green gardeners. Its upkeep is now paid for by Wilkie's great grand-daughter, Faith Clarke. The students plan to restore the grave in the autumn and the Wilkie Collins

Society is considering replacing the railings. A new plaque to mark the grave is being commissioned.

EMAIL LIST

Many thanks to those members who have sent their email addresses. The new emailing list is now working and will be used to update members between newsletters. If you did not get a short email announcing this on 1 August then you are not on it! If you would like to be on the list please send your email address to paul@paullewis.co.uk. Some people did send an email but it did not work for some reason. Some servers are set to reject group emails as spam. So please find an alternative if you can.

THE WILKIE COLLINS JOURNAL

Just a reminder that The WCJ is in the members' area of the Society's website at <http://wilkiecollinssociety.org/>. The current login details are: Username: **count** and Password: **fosco**. Our publications list will also be online in the near future.

WILKIE COLLINS - COURSE 1 - CAMBRIDGE

The University of Cambridge is offering a three day weekend course "Crime and Passion: Wilkie Collins and the sensation novel" starting with a lecture and dinner on Friday 31 October and finishing after lunch on Sunday 2 November. There are seven sessions: the term sensation, *The Woman in White*, *The Moonstone*, domestic crime and the detective, Film adaptations – with excerpts, the social context of sensation, and reverberations in time. The £250 price includes food but accommodation is £120 extra (£100 each sharing). A £100 bursary is available for teachers. More information and an application form see www.ice.cam.ac.uk/component/courses/?view=course&cid=13262&q=wilkie+collins.

WILKIE COLLINS - COURSE 2 - DETROIT

'Collins in the City' is a Midwestern Modern Language Association conference in Detroit 13-15 November 2014. It will explore how urbanisation in the 19th century permeates Wilkie's writing. It is too late to submit a paper but if you fancy a trip to Detroit in November it sounds a fascinating contribution to Wilkie Studies. More details here navsa.org/2014/05/12/cfp-mmla-14-collins-in-the-city-5302014-1113-162014/.

THE RED VIAL

The Red Vial is an unpublished play produced at the Royal Olympic Theatre from 11 October 1858; it starred the then famous Frederick Robson as Hans Grimm, a lunatic cured by kindness, and Mrs Stirling as Madame Bergman. The plot was later expanded and adapted as the basis for *Jezebel's Daughter* published in 1880.

The play was not a great success and was sometimes referred to as 'the most brilliant failure of the day'. During his lifetime, Collins therefore resisted requests to revive the play. For example, he wrote to the playwright J. Stirling Coyne, on 6 May 1859:

I am much obliged to you for your note on the subject of The Red Vial, which I have just received. Considering the reception which this play met with in London, under all the advantages of being interpreted by an admirable company, under the immediate supervision of the author, I must honestly confess that I am unwilling to trust it to the chances of provincial representation by a company of whom I have no knowledge and over whose rehearsals I can exercise no control. On this ground, therefore - though I feel sincerely indebted to you for offering me the opportunity of producing again the play on the stage - I must beg you to excuse me if I abstain from availing myself of the proposal which your note contains.

As far as is known there has been no further performance of *The Red Vial* until fairly recently. A new production by the Department of Drama and Theatre Arts of Birmingham University ran from 10-12 February 2011 and was directed by Dr Caroline Radcliffe, co-editor of *The Lighthouse*. For credits and photographs see www.wilkie-collins.info/play_redvial_2011.htm.

Rather like *The Lighthouse*, there is still no printed version of the text and according to the *Index of English Literary Manuscripts* two copies of the ms survive, one in the British Library (Add. MS 52976D) "Draft, 46 leaves, submitted to the Lord Chamberlain's Office; licensed 2 October 1858"; the other a signed draft dated 11 October 1858 which had been sold at auction in 1891 after Collins's death.

Now, at last, the text of the play is readily available. The British Library version has been transcribed as part of the Victorian Plays Project by Richard Pearson at www.wilkiecollinsplays.net/texts/BLRedVial.html. The website is not complete but other titles currently available are *The Frozen Deep*, *Man and Wife* and *The Lighthouse*.

A NEW PORTRAIT?

Julien Foster's piece on 'Wilkie in Parliament' – enclosed with this newsletter – contains a reference to a portrait of Wilkie sold at Sotheby's in 1973. It was described as "A small portrait of Wilkie Collins...by his painter brother Charles Allston Collins. The portrait measures 10¼ inches by 7 inches and is dated 1850." *The Times* reported that it fetched £2,200. The portrait seems to be one that is not widely known. It is not the Millais in the National Portrait Gallery – which it acquired in 1894 – nor the portrait by Charles in the Fitzwilliam Museum which has been there since 1897. **Both are larger.** Enquiries continue.

The other missing portrait is that by Walter Goodman, mentioned in last summer's Newsletter. Entitled 'The Late Mr. Wilkie Collins at the age of 56', this was exhibited in 1890 at the sixty-seventh annual exhibition of the Royal Society of British Artists. The painting was priced at £42 but was presumably unsold as there were reports in the *Daily* and *Sunday Times* for June 1891 that Goodman was attempting to sell it to the Garrick Club.

'THE WOMAN IN WHITE, BORN IN BROADSTAIRS.

Kent Connections is a 'Knowledge Exchange Project' run by the English and Language Studies Department of Canterbury Christ Church University. The contribution for 19 May by Alyson Hunt, Research Associate, International Centre for Victorian Women Writers at CCCU, had, printed over a nice period photograph, the bold headline "The Woman in White, born in Broadstairs: Wilkie Collins loved the seaside resorts of East Kent, and brought his double life with him." The post of about 550 words begins with an intriguing paragraph:

"It's been a tough year producing story after story with increasingly complicated plotlines, brilliantly illuminated characters and that all important sensation of fear, excitement and suspense. Everywhere you go you are recognised as a celebrity, the public stop you in the street for inside information about the latest cliff-hanger and clamour after each and every word you say as well as write, but you feel the pressures of success and the encroachment of age. Gout brings a constant discomfort and pain, laudanum becomes your trusty friend and companion during the dark times. But stop! There is another way to relieve your mind and embrace your unorthodox lifestyle. A trip to the seaside town you visited as a boy, the place in which your mother declared that you "behaved nobly in the sea", frolicking at the water's edge with your siblings and indulging your passion for sailing."

Alyson Hunt continues with an oblique introduction to Wilkie's unconventional lifestyle, how he took both Caroline and Martha to Ramsgate; where Ramsgate appears in the novels (*Poor miss Finch*, *The Law and the Lady* and *The Fallen Leaves*); and the story of how the North Foreland lighthouse inspired the title for *The Woman in White*. She concludes with "Today, the houses he stayed at are marked by obligatory blue plaques which give no hint of his non-conformist ways and the great genius that inspired them. For the full article, see medium.com/kent-connections/8dfcbd9c6ff1

LOCATIONS IN *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

An enthusiastic new reader of *The Woman in White*, Rob Sawyer from Hampshire has been wondering about the real life settings for the novel.

The likeliest candidate for Limmeridge House in Cumberland is Ewanrigg Hall on the outskirts of Maryport. Closely following the Collins-Dickens route in 'The Lazy Tour', Walter Hartright writes "My travelling instructions directed me to go to

Carlisle, and then to diverge by a branch railway which ran in the direction of the coast..... When I rose the next morning and drew up my blind, the sea opened before me joyously under the broad August sunlight, and the distant coast of Scotland fringed the horizon with its lines of melting blue." Ewanrigg Hall was the home of the Christian family and Fletcher Christian of *Mutiny on the Bounty* fame was born there in 1764. The house was demolished in 1903. For a contemporary illustration, refer to the Lost Heritage website at www.lostheritage.org.uk/houses/lh_cumbria_ewanrigghall_gallery.html.

Glyde's country house at Blackwater Park in Hampshire is more problematical. We do know that an irate correspondent of Collins accused him of describing the landscape of his own estate without permission. Nor do we have a positive identity for Welmingham and Old Welmingham where Glyde meets his death. Rob Sawyer suggests that because of the prefix, Alresford and Old Alresford in Hampshire could be contenders.

FILM AND TELEVISION VERSIONS OF COLLINS'S NOVELS

There are listed details of 47 film and television adaptations on IMDb (Internet Movie Database, www.imdb.com/name/nm0172741). These date from the beginnings of the silent film era with a version of *The Moonstone* in 1909 to a Japanese serialisation in 25 episodes of *The Woman in White* in 2011. Wilkie's appeal obviously remains worldwide with other adaptations in Russian, German, Spanish and Italian. Recently there has been interesting activity in respect of the silent versions - gone but not forgotten.

***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* - THE SILENT FILM**

There were several silent film versions of *The Woman in White*. One of the earliest, originally released on 1 July 1917 and reissued about 1920 as *The Unfortunate Marriage*, is currently available on DVD from Classic Cinema Originals (www.ccoriginals.co.uk, CCO-272) at the very reasonable price of £3.95. There have also been copies on ebay for about the same price.

This version is the same as that recently reissued as part of the Thanouser Collection (volumes 7, 8 and 9, which included as a complete set several other shorter silent films of the era (www.thanouser.org/videos)).

The Woman in White was directed by Ernest C. Warde with the script based on Collins's novel by Lloyd F. Lonergan. The cast included Florence LaBadie as Laura Fairlie and Anne Catherick; Richard R. Neill as Sir Percival Glyde, Arthur Bauer as Count Fosco and Wayne Arey as Walter Hartright.

The film is taken from a copy in the Library of Congress and is now in the public domain. It can therefore also be watched online at various locations. These include www.youtube.com/watch?v=kAL6oZkH5qw as well as <http://vimeo.com/20908725>. Perhaps the most interesting site is www.thanhouser.org/tcocd/Filmography_files/k_8xhq which gives a detailed history of the film with several contemporary reviews.

THE NEW MAGDALEN

A rare poster of the 1912 silent film version of Wilkie's novel *The New Magdalen* (1873) was sold recently for just over \$448 (£285). See <http://movieposters.ha.com/itm/movie-posters/drama/the-new-magdalen-imp-1912-british-one-sheet-30-x-40-/a/7098-84277.s>. The short, approximately 24 minute, silent black and white film was directed by Herbert Brenon and starred Vivian Prescott as Mercy Merrick and William E Shay as Julian Gray, who are depicted on the poster, and Jane Fearnley as Grace Roseberry. It is not known if any copies of the film itself have survived or of the two other silent versions in 1910 and 1914.

The New Magdalen may seem a strange choice for such an early adaptation but the play, originally staged at the Olympic Theatre in 1873, continued to be revived into the twentieth century. There were productions at the Princess Theatre in New York (with the title *Zira*) in 1905, and in London at the Marlborough Theatre in 1906 and the Parkhurst Theatre. The latter closed as a live theatre in 1909 and after purchase by the Biograph Company was converted into a cinema.

THE TWIN PAWNS

Available on ebay has been an advertising 'lobby card' for *The Twin Pawns*. According to IMDb this is another version based on *The Woman in White*. Judging from the description, the connection seems rather tenuous.

Two girls separated nearly since birth by divorce...Daisy and Violet White [both portrayed by Mae Murray] have no knowledge of one another. Violet is the idol of her father's eye. He tries to and succeeds in giving her everything she wants. Harry White has some guilt over his family failures. Daisy, on the other hand, is raised by her indigent mother. She is poorly dressed and obviously underfed. This poor child of the slums is about to unknowingly become part of a scheme of the shady character John Bent. He possesses certain papers and documents which confirm daisy's true relationship to Harry White. By hiding the truth of her existence Bent is able to manipulate the twins to his own best advantage - they become his "Twin Pawns". He places Daisy into a boarding school but soon switches her with Violet whom he has forced into marriage. Soon death visits and Bent has the real Daisy declared insane and locked away. It appears that everything is going Bent's way until Bo Anderson who loves Daisy finds her and gets her out of the asylum.

WILKIE COLLINS, EUGÈNE SUE AND THE 'LITTLE WIFE'

Amongst the surviving 3,000 or so Collins's letters, perhaps the most remarkable correspondence took place with the young Nannie Wynne, daughter of the widowed Mrs Henry Wynne whom Collins probably met through his friend and doctor, Frank Beard. The letters span the period from June 1885 to February 1888, when Nannie was aged between 12 and 15. Even the recent and excellently researched biography by Andrew Lycett sheds no real light on how Wilkie, who had always eschewed marriage, engaged in a light-hearted charade writing to her as 'Dear and admirable Mrs Collins' (5 November 1885) and continued to call her 'wife' or 'Mrs Wilkie'. On two occasions he calls her his 'little wife' (28 December 1885 and 1 July 1886).

There is, however, a strange parallel with one of the French novels which Collins read, *The Mysteries of Paris* by Eugène Sue (1804-1857). In Book 3 of this long and rambling story the chief protagonist, Rodolphe, who is really a Grand Duke in disguise, takes up with a young seamstress who on at least two occasions he also calls "my little wife". Perhaps this is just a coincidence but Collins briefly mentions Sue as early as 1859 in 'Portrait of an Author, Painted by his Publisher (*All the Year Round*, 18 June 1859). There were also several editions of Sue's works in Collins's library with at least two of *The Mysteries of Paris* (See William Baker's reconstruction of Wilkie's Library, pp. 153-154).

NEW LETTERS

A new cache of letters has been unearthed by Wilkie biographer Andrew Lycett. Written to the American actress Mary Anderson, the 19 letters date from 13 March 1884 to 9 June 1888. Previously just seven letters were known – two in American libraries and five from extracts in Anderson's autobiography *A Few Memories* (London 1896). The discovery provides full texts for four of those extracts and a further fifteen new letters. The full texts with notes will be published by WCS in *Addenda and Corrigenda IX* around the turn of the year.

FIRST EDITIONS

A first edition of Wilkie's first published novel, once owned by the famous collector of Victorian novels Morris L. Parrish, is on sale at Blackwell's Rare Books. *Antonina* was published in three volumes in white embossed cloth on 27 February 1850. Parrish's collection of first and early editions of Victorian novelists is located at Princeton University Library. The slightly less than perfect condition indicates that it may have been an early copy owned by Parrish which he later replaced with a finer one, as was his wont.

In its description it appears identical to the one recorded in Parrish's bibliography of his own collection *Wilkie Collins and Charles Reade* published in 1940, pp.11-12. Parrish was the first comprehensive bibliography of Collins's first and early editions and is still used as the standard reference. *Antonina* is in its original cloth and is in

very good condition though “covers slightly discoloured and spotted, spines darkened”. The price is £6000.

Also on sale at Blackwell’s is a first edition of *The Woman in White*. Unlike the *Antonina* this copy is not in its original cloth but is a rare presentation copy ‘From Wilkie Collins August 15th 1860’ which Blackwell’s suggests is to the person to whom the book was dedicated, Bryan Waller Procter. It also contains a letter from Wilkie dated 13 May 1875 which Blackwell’s suggests is to Anne Benson Procter, his widow. The book is priced at £25,000.

ENDEAVOUR MORSE

Followers of the television detective series, 'Endeavour', may have noticed a small homage to *The Moonstone* in the episode 'Nocturne' on 13 July. Reviewing a 100 year old unsolved (fictional) murder investigation, the notes of the time record one of the investigating officers as [detective constable] Cuff. This seems to be a literary habit of the author, Russell Lewis. As noted in 'London Particular', the online Newsletter of the Dickens Fellowship, "The final episode of the latest series of ‘Endeavour’, entitled ‘Neverland’, showed the young Morse entering a firm of solicitors. They were called ‘Vholes, Jaggars and Lightwood’.” LP readers will of course recognise Dickensian lawyers (two shady and one bored!) from *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* and *Our Mutual Friend* respectively."

SUMMER READING

The start of the summer holiday season is the cue for light features in the newspapers on ‘best for the beach’ reading. And Wilkie usually appears – normally *The Woman in White* or *The Moonstone*. Keren Levy gave the latter a full recommendation after re-reading it on a beach in Sicily. “I read it, for the first time, aged 15, as a set text. I chose to read it, on holiday, 20 years later because I wanted to hear those voices again and because I had the time and the space in which to do so.” You could do worse!

Paul Lewis
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