



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

WINTER 2014

BARONESS JAMES OF HOLLAND PARK (P. D. JAMES)

Members will no doubt have heard the sad news of the passing of Baroness James of Holland Park at the end of November at the age of 94. Better known as crime writer extraordinaire, P. D. James and creator of detective policeman Adam Dalgleish, she has been a distinguished Patron of the Wilkie Collins Society since 2002. Her name will sadly appear for the last time at the head of this Newsletter.

Born in Oxford in 1920, her family moved to Cambridge when she was eleven and with holidays taken at Lowestoft, East Anglia has become a frequent setting for her novels. P. D. James worked for the National Health Service and Civil Service for several years where she secured a senior promotion to the criminal policy department at the Home Office. In this position she was responsible for appointing forensic scientists and advising ministers on juvenile crime, also issues which reappear in her novels.

P.D. James's first novel, *Cover Her Face*, was published in 1962 and has been followed by seventeen other equally successful novels. Her enduring fame was established with the 1977 *Death of an Expert Witness* and she began writing full-time in 1979. Since then, the books and television adaptations have thrilled us all and both she and her characters have become household names.

Since honouring the Society by becoming its patron, she wrote the equally successful *The Murder Room* (2003); *The Lighthouse* (2005), a title she shared with Wilkie; *The Private Patient* (2008); and her final novel, *Death Comes to Pemberley* (2011), a mystery sequel to *Pride and Prejudice* by her favourite author, Jane Austen. In addition she wrote the non-fiction *Talking about Detective Fiction* (2009) which of course featured references to Wilkie and *The Moonstone*. In 2013 P. D. James graciously consented to write a Foreword to Collins's *Lighthouse*, his previously unpublished play, issued by the WCS.

P. D. James was awarded the OBE in 1983, became a magistrate in 1989 and was created a Life Peer in 1991. She chaired the Booker Prize panel in 1987 and from 1997-2013 was President of the Society of Authors - of which Wilkie was a founder member but only a vice-president. Throughout her writing career, there have also been numerous awards which include *Shroud for a Nightingale* (1971), Silver Dagger Award (Crime Writers' Association) and Best Novel Award (Mystery Writers of America); *An Unsuitable Job for a Woman* (1973) Best Novel Award (MWA); *The Black Tower* (1975) Silver Dagger Award (CWA); *A Taste for Death* (1986) Best novel Award (MWA); Diamond Dagger Award (CWA 1987); *The Children of Men* (1992) Deo Gloria Award for a science fiction story; the Grandmaster Award (MWA 1999); and more recently the Best Critical Non-Fiction Anthony Award for *Talking about Detective Fiction*.

Wilkie would have been delighted to know he had as a patron such an illustrious successor in the art of crime fiction as Baroness James. There is also no doubt that he would have agreed with her writing philosophy that "a first-class mystery should also be a first-class novel." We shall all mourn her passing.

Phyllis Dorothy James, 3 August 1920 - 27 November 2014.

THE HAPPY READER

The Woman in White elegantly fills the second half of *The Happy Reader*. This is a new magazine published by Penguin Classics in collaboration with the creators of the award-winning *Fantastic Man*. As its blurb says "For avid readers and the uninitiated alike, it is a chance to reengage with classic literature and to stay inspired and entertained. The concept of the magazine is excitingly

simple: the first half is a long-form interview with a notable book fanatic and the second half explores one Penguin Classics title from an array of surprising and invigorating angles, through fashion, art, lifestyle, history, film and more."

The first half of the issue for Winter 2014 has a lengthy interview with actor and bookworm Dan Stevens. We are then treated in the second part to 30 or so pages with features devoted entirely to *The Woman in White*. Editor-in-Chief, Seb Emina, introduces the title with 'An Inferno of Suspense': "There's a reason why *The Woman in White*, the nerve-racking novel by Wilkie Collins, first published in 1860, is regarded as the ultimate winter read.... Do not start *The Woman in White* if you have other things you should be doing."

The next article by Henry Jeffreys, 'The Year Eighteen-Sixty', sets the novel into its historical and literary perspective. This was the year that cocaine was developed although Wilkie, of course, maintained his loyalty to laudanum. 'Bon-Bons de Chocolat à la vanille' by food writer Hattie Ellis gives a dark chocolate recipe inspired by Fosco's box of sweets. Lilie Ferrari contributed 'To Write a Soap' since "After *The Woman in White* was published, the appetite for serialised stories kept growing. Eventually they just made them endless." In 'White Gothic', "To make an appearance in head-to-toe white is always a strong statement" notes fashion critic Tim Banks, supporting his piece with stylised black and white photographs.

'Walter's Walk' is based on the route researched and mapped by Paul Lewis for the WCS in 2010. "Our first encounter with the woman in white takes place during Walter's now-legendary stroll across Hampstead. It is evoked in beautiful but also painstaking detail. The distances between landmarks, the weather, and even the angle and intensity of moonlight are plotted. The excellently drawn map is accompanied by six of Google's Streetview photographs, as the scenes appear today.

In 'White, Red, Green, Yellow, Purple and Blue', author Emily King discusses "single-colour outfits in art and discovers women being pigeon-holed and men revealing their identity." 'Unputdownable' was a joint piece by detective duo Nicci French (married couple Nicci Gerrard and Sean French). "To remember exactly where, when, and how one read a cherished novel is an art in itself."

These various essays are followed by an appendix which includes the Frederick Walker poster of *The Woman in White*; Wilkie's WC monogram which the WCS uses; screen shots from the video game of the Victorian Mysteries series; stills from television and cinema adaptations of the novel; and the William Collins portrait of Wilkie as a baby.

Overall *The Happy Reader* provides a feast of *Woman in White* and Collins related material from an entirely new perspective. It is available by free subscription plus £8 a year to cover the cost of postage from Penguin at <https://thehappyreader.com/>; or the Collins issue can be obtained from www.antennebooks.com/books/happy-reader-issue-1.

THE MYSTERY PORTRAIT

The 'mystery' of the portrait of Wilkie mentioned in the Summer Newsletter has now been solved. It was sold at Sotheby's in 1973 and 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 painting was in fact bought by Faith Clarke, Wilkie's great granddaughter and can be seen as the cover illustration to William Clarke's 1988 *The Secret Life of Wilkie Collins*.

The other missing portrait, 'The Late Mr. Wilkie Collins at the age of 56' by Walter Goodman remains untraced.

CHARLES COLLINS WATERCOLOUR

A rare watercolour by Wilkie's brother, Charles, was sold at Christie's on 4 September. Described as 'Lost Love' it fetched £2750. The small picture is a portrait of a kneeling woman in a pink gown with a green scarf in a rural landscape and inscribed "Idolo de] mio cuor | Nume adorato" (Idol of my heart, beloved name). It was previously sold by Christie's as 'A Cry for Help' in May 2012 for £1125. The buyer then – Neil Wilson – died in June 2014 and this sale was of his collection of romantic pictures.

KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY

WCS members including Faith Clarke gathered on 28 September by Wilkie's grave at Kensal Green Cemetery to mark the 125th anniversary of his death on

23 September and his burial four days later on Friday 27th September 1889. Also in attendance were members of Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery. As well as their kind hospitality afterwards in the Dissenters' Chapel, they exhibited the results of their detailed research. This included numerous reports of the funeral from the major London newspapers and from those as far afield as Aberdeen and Belfast; extracts from Wilkie's will; and copies of the early entries in the Register of the then General Cemetery Company. The grave is already looking much better but artist plans to restore all aspects were also on display.

A GREEN PLAQUE FOR WILKIE COLLINS

On 23 September, exactly 125 years to the day since Collins died, a Westminster Council green plaque was unveiled to his memory by Faith Clarke at 96-100 New Cavendish Street. This address, originally number 11, was the spot where Wilkie was born in 1824. The present block of sixteen flats was built in 1932.

Cllr Robert Davis, deputy leader of Westminster City Council, made a short introductory speech before the official unveiling. "He becomes the sixth novelist to be remembered with a Westminster green plaque, following other greats such as Jane Austen and Arthur Conan Doyle. He truly embodies exactly the kind of individual I am keen to celebrate - a great talent combined with great character. This is the twenty-fifth year of Westminster's green plaque scheme, which has seen over one hundred commemorations dotted across the city. They give recognition to the diverse range of individuals and organisations who have made a lasting contribution to the City of Westminster. The scheme plays a pivotal role in giving communities access to their history."

Faith Clarke said he would have appreciated the pomp and ceremony. "I think he would think it great fun," she added. "He was very much a man of the theatre, he was quite a showman."

Jacqueline Glasser, who lives in a flat in the building, campaigned for the plaque to be placed there and kindly provided refreshments for the 30 people attending who included several members of the Society.

Further details with photographs were published by *West End Extra* on 26 September and can still be found on their website.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE ON STAGE

Members may recall the adaptation of *The Woman in White* by Nicola Boyce which was staged at the Cambridge Arts Theatre as well as several other provincial theatres around the country between July and October 2011. The cast then included Colin Baker as Fosco, Peter Amory as Glyde and Isla Carter as both Laura and Anne Catherick. This adaptation has now been published in paperback during 2014 in book form by Josef Weinberger Plays (ISBN 978 0 85676 342 7; £8 but less expensive from the Book Depository or Amazon).

Until now the standard adaptation has been that by Constance Cox, written many years ago but not actually published until 2005 by theatrical publishers, Samuel French (ISBN 0 573 11578 8; 52 Fitzroy Street, London, W1P 6JR). French also publishes a spoof version of the play with the title *Egad!, The Woman in White: an Astonishing and Inspiring Melodrama* by Tim Kelly (ISBN 0 573 60870 9). Kelly (1931- 1998) was an American who wrote more than 300 comedies, dramas, mysteries and melodramas.

We are unaware of any previous performances but *Egad!* has now been staged by the Richmond Shakespeare Society at their own Mary Wallace Theatre in Twickenham, directed by Simon Bickerstaffe. "A phantasmagorically festive feast of farce and fun. You know the story. Well you think you do a lunatic, multi-layered play within-a-play....." The adaptation was performed from 13 to 20 December.

Egad! is essentially a pantomime based on *The Woman in White*, complete with deliberate over-acting, bad puns and asides to the audience. There is indeed a woman in white but Glyde's villainous accomplice has become Countess Fosco, dressed throughout as a woman in black. The production cleverly blended in clips from the 1948 Sydney Greenstreet film version of *The Woman in White* between the various scene changes. Would Wilkie have approved? Probably not but he might have thought it good fun.

THE SONG OF THE WRECK FROM *THE LIGHTHOUSE*

'The Song of the Wreck' was written by Dickens for *The Lighthouse* and set to a tune composed by George Linley for Charlotte Young's ballad 'Little Nell'. It has now been reconstructed by Caroline Radcliffe and performed by soprano Philippa Althaus and pianist Steven Teo, originally for a performance at the Book to the Future Festival at the University of Birmingham on 27 October 2013. It was repeated in part for the Dickens Fellowship meeting in Central London on 20 May 2014 but the performers were unavailable to attend. They therefore kindly agreed to make an informal recording of the song to be played for the meetings.

This recording is now available on the WCS website together with an introduction and a more detailed history by Caroline at wilkiecollinsociety.org/publications/the-song-of-the-wreck/.

The recording was made in one take on very basic hand-held recording equipment in a small practice room with a rather out of tune piano! Listeners are asked to bear this in mind and to view the recording as an informal and spontaneous rendition that does not aim to meet professional standards. We are very grateful to Philippa and Steven, who agreed to release the recording, but if anyone would like to sponsor a higher quality recording please contact c.radcliffe@bham.ac.uk.

THE BEARDED WILKIE

The fine Rudolph Lehman portrait of Wilkie, executed in 1880, heads an article by Lucinda Hawksley in the BBC News Magazine on the growth of the beard in the nineteenth century.

"The beard fashion of the past 10 years on both sides of the Atlantic mirrors an earlier facial hair craze, which started during the Crimean War, lasted for three decades, and was only entirely stamped out with the invention of the disposable razor in the early 1900s."

The portrait appears in company with Charles Darwin and Holman Hunt, all in colour. There is no further mention of Wilkie nor how at one point he and Dickens were growing facial hair at the same time in preparation for the

amateur production of *The Frozen Deep* in 1857. The full piece can be found at www.bbc.co.uk/news/magazine-30037914.

THE SOCIETY OF AUTHORS

The Society of Authors journal *The Author* in its Summer 2014 issue also shows the bearded Wilkie in a piece by Jane Casey on the Society's archives where for "the earliest members, a luxuriant beard was essential." This time Wilkie is shown in black and white in the company of fellow founders and leading lights, Tennyson and Walter Besant.

The Author has another mention of Collins in an article on 'Exceptional Blindness' by Selina Mills in its Autumn issue. "Wilkie Collins' *Poor Miss Finch* (1872) relied on the heroine's blindness to show how she was not 'poor' at all, but in fact self-determined, single-minded and, horror of horrors, possibly at peace with her blindness."

A LAZY TOUR IN CUMBERLAND

The Lazy Tour of Two Idle Apprentices is a humorous account of Collins's and Dickens's walking tour of Cumberland during September 1857. Written in collaboration, it was originally published in five parts in *Household Words* from 3-31 October 1857.

Stephen Mathews in his *A Lazy Tour in Cumberland* as well as reproducing the original text succeeds in tracing the journey of Collins and Dickens as closely as possible and portraying the communities they visited as they were at the time. The book is well illustrated with commendable attention to detail in all eight chapters following the route. There is, for example, a lengthy analysis of the possible location for Limmeridge Hall in *The Woman in White*. *A lazy Tour in Cumberland* was 'Lakeland Book of the Year for 2013'. It is published by Bookcase at £12 paperback (ISBN 9781904147688).

A MODERN MOONSTONE

Collins's fabulous *Moonstone* was probably based on a combination of the priceless Koh-i-Noor, Orloff and Pitt diamonds. The recent Sale of Important Jewels at Sotheby's New York on 23 September featured an "18 Karat White Gold, Moonstone and Diamond Necklace of graduated design, composed of 31

moonstone beads measuring approximately 21.7 to 14.8 mm, the clasp accented by small cabochon moonstones weighing approximately 4.75 carats, accented by round diamonds weighing approximately 1.15 carats." This particular necklace sold for \$6,250. Franklin Blake in the original summed it all up, however: "Carbon, Betteredge! Mere carbon."

MISS GWILT

WCS member, Susan Hanes from Chicago, writes that on 15 October the Real Thing Reading Group met to discuss Collins's play, *Miss Gwilt*.

Wilkie Collins's supernatural mystery novel *Armada* was first serialized in English and American magazines from 1864 to 1866, and was published in book form in both countries in 1866. That same year, Collins adapted it for the stage in order to protect dramatic copyright, though it was never produced. A later adaptation, called *Miss Gwilt*, was first performed in Liverpool in 1875 and in London the following year. It opened in New York in 1879.

The prompt copy of *Miss Gwilt*, held at the Rare Book & Manuscript Library of the University of Illinois, contains copious notes, diagrams, and even a drawing of the set, all done by the producer of the play at London's Globe Theatre, Henry Herman. Included are four letters to Herman from Collins regarding the production. A digital version of the Library of Congress copy of the play can be found at <https://archive.org/details/missgwiltmain00coll>. A facsimile of the text is also published by the British Library as one of its Historical Print Collections in the Poetry and Drama category (£13.20 from the Book Depository).

Three of the Herman letters were published in *The Public Face* and one further letter is in the latest *Addenda* enclosed with this newsletter.

COLLINS IN RUSSIA

Ralph Fiennes's recent film, *The Invisible Woman*, which features Tom Hollander as Wilkie Collins, was shown at the New British Cinema festival in Moscow from Tuesday 28 October to Thursday 6 November.

Wilkie's books were widely translated into Russian where he seems to have been very popular. Andrew Gasson's *Illustrated Guide* lists a number of early

editions, many of which appeared very shortly after they were published in England. Translations throughout the 20th century can easily be found with *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* being constantly republished, sometimes in editions of several hundred thousand copies. Collins has an entry in the *Great Soviet Encyclopaedia* of 1979.

WCS Russian member Zlata Antonova published her 2006 thesis *The Life and Work of Wilkie Collins* in Russian and its three sections look at childhood and youth and the early work 1843-1860; the Golden Ten Years (1861-1870); and the third period and his 'second manner' of writing 1871-1889.

Marcia Morris wrote a lengthy article on the influence of *The Moonstone* on Boris Akunin's detective fiction in the 2012 *Wilkie Collins Journal* <http://wilkiecollinssociety.org/wilkie-collinss-legacies-the-moonstone-in-boris-akunins-murder-on-the-leviathan-and-childrens-book/>

Уилки Коллинз is the transliteration of Wilkie Collins's name in Russian and from time to time Russian language editions are to be found for sale on eBay.

A recently discovered edition of *No Thoroughfare* in Russian shows how rapidly Collins and Dickens appeared - presumably with no copyright paid! - in Russia in the 19th century. The translation was passed by the Imperial censor on 3 January 1868, just weeks after it appeared as the Christmas number of *All The Year Round*. It was published in St Petersburg under the title (in old Russian script) БЕЗЪ ВЫХОДА which literally means 'no way out' and subtitled in Russian 'Christmas Story'.

THE MANUSCRIPT OF *BASIL*

The manuscript of Wilkie's novel *Basil* featured in a new exhibition at the British Library 'Terror and Wonder -the Gothic Imagination'.

It is a chronology of 250 years of gothic fiction and thought, beginning with Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) and ending with photographs from the Goths Weekend in Whitby in April 2014.

Wilkie reports reading "the most terrible portions of the Monk and Frankenstein" in a letter to his father 24 August 1842 recounting how he had scared the company when staying with his aunt Catherine Gray. M. G. Lewis's gothic novel *The Monk* published in 1796 and Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus* (1818) feature among many gothic works in the exhibition. In 1874 Wilkie ordered unabridged editions of both *The Monk* and *Mysteries of Udolpho* (1794) by Anne Radcliffe from a book dealer. The latter four volume illustrated edition dated 1803 was still in his library at his death. Wilkie did later, of course, go to Whitby himself in 1861 writing part of *No Name* while there before leaving due to the excessive noise.

The exhibition was full of amazing artefacts, mainly books and periodicals from the Library's own collection, but some short extracts from films - including Sarah Waters explaining the importance of sensation fiction and Wilkie Collins to her own work - as well as posters tracing gothic and horror fiction through to the present day.

Wilkie appeared several times in labels and accounts of how the gothic novel moved from distant medieval castles to the 'secret theatre of home' - the shiny new suburbs with their neat front doors. Quite rightly that was represented by the manuscript of *Basil* which for Collins fans was the most important artefact in the exhibition. Catherine Peters in her 1991 biography of Collins, *The King of Inventors*, argued the case that *Basil* was the first sensation novel. A neighbouring label explained the significance of *The Woman in White* but it was only represented by the cover of the sheet music called *The Fosco Gallop* by George Richardson.

MY DEAR COLLINS

A fragment of a letter from Charles Dickens to Wilkie Collins was recently sold at auction. It contains just the valediction, signature, and addressee

Faithfully yours always | Charles Dickens | Mr. W. Wilkie Collins Esquire

Wilkie stopped signing himself off 'W. Wilkie Collins' at the end of 1854 so it is likely Dickens would not have used this form much later. Dickens signed himself off to Wilkie 'Faithfully yours always' on only two occasions during

this era - 12 May 1851 and 24 February 1854 (Pilgrim VII 280). Pilgrim records one letter dated 14 December 1853 as 'sig. cut off' (VII 226). It is possible this is the missing portion of that letter - or the end of another which is unidentified.

WALKING WITH WILKIE

WCS member Jak Stringer is pursuing her Walking with Wilkie events celebrating and retracing Wilkie's walk in 1850 around Cornwall which he recounted in *Rambles Beyond Railways*. Her Facebook page now includes videos and extracts from letters written to his mother and others during the walk. And she has put several videos on YouTube. Search 'Walking with Wilkie' to find them both.

WILKIE, CONAN DOYLE, AGATHA CHRISTIE

Many reviews of current detective stories reference their debt to Wilkie. Critic Mark Smith followed the pattern in the autumn with a critique of !TV's Morse spin-off drama *Lewis*. "The format was invented by Wilkie Collins. . .Look carefully at any detective show and you can always see something of Wilkie, Arthur, or Agatha." (*The Herald* 11 October 2014).

EDWIN DROOD AND "I SAY NO"

WCS member, Kishor Kale, notes an article in the *Times* of 5 January 2014 about Edwin Drood. Kishor, reminds us that his article 'Intentionality and Generic Conventions' extends the argument in his earlier 1998 WCSJ paper 'Yes and No: Problems of Closure in Collins's "I Say No"' to include Edwin Drood. It was published last year in the refereed online journal, *The Victorian*, and can be found at <http://journals.sfu.ca/vict/index.php/vict/issue/view/1/showToc>.

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