



THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY

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NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2017

NEW BANK ACCOUNT DETAILS FOR THE WCS

HSBC have changed our WCS bank account details to the following:

SORT CODE:	401158
ACCOUNT NUMBER	60113743
NIC	HBUKGB4194P
IBAN	GB63HBUK40115880121908

In theory, HSBC will allocate any payments made to the old account to the new one but members paying for their subscriptions or items from the Publications List by bank transfer should use the new account details from now on.

A PERFORMANCE OF *THE LIGHTHOUSE*

The details for the performance of *The Lighthouse*, organised by Jak Stringer, have now been finalised. It will take place on Saturday 14 October 2017 at the Acorn theatre, Parade Street, Penzance, Cornwall, TR18 4BU.

The evening will commence with a lively performance lecture by **Jak**, who will transport us back to 1855, followed by a reading of '*The Lighthouse*' by the *Speakeasy Players*. This event will be the first full reading of *The Lighthouse* for 146 years and the performance aspires to recreate its opening night in the nursery of Charles Dickens's home, where you will be immersed in a very Dickensian evening.

Tickets are currently on sale at £6 and for further details and advance booking see the Acorn website at theacornpenzance.com/events/the-lighthouse-by-mr-wilkie-collins/.

This will not quite be the first modern performance of *The Lighthouse* as Caroline Radcliffe of the University of Birmingham directed most of Act 1 including her reconstruction of ‘the Song of the Wreck’ as ‘Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens, *The Lighthouse*: A dramatic situation never before exploited’ in the *Book to the Future* Festival, University of Birmingham, Barber Institute of Fine Arts on 27 October 2013. This particular event brought to life the first published edition of *The Lighthouse* - with newly discovered music, illustrations, and scenes from the play including Dickens’s prologue and his ‘Song of the Wreck’, acted and sung by students from the University of Birmingham’s Department of Drama and Theatre Arts and the Department of Music.

DUNKIRK AND THE WILKIE CONNECTION

We are always impressed at how observant some of our WCS members are. Jackie Irwin writes:

I went to see the Dunkirk movie today and spotted what I think may be a Wilkie Collins connection. The owner of the small boat going to rescue people in Dunkirk is called ‘Moonstone’. Its owner /captain is called Mr Dawson and the pilot he rescues is called Collins. There may be other references that I may have missed but perhaps the Director or the screen writer is a Collins fan?

If any other member has noticed Wilkie references in the film please let us know!

WILKIE IN THE SHETLANDS

Wilkie seems to get in everywhere. On a recent trip to the Shetland Isles, Sumburgh Head was on the itinerary. This is the most southerly point on the main Island and next to the old lighthouse building is a display sign for tourists about the multitude of sea-birds; and there, running along the base is a quote from the 1848 *Memoirs of the Life of William Collins, R.A.*

“The immense precipice of Sumburgh Head, hanging over as if it would fall into the sea, with the waves writhing about its jagged base, and hundreds on hundreds of sea-birds whirling above its mighty summit.” This is taken from Chapter II, 1842-1844, and recalls the time when Wilkie visited the Northern Isles with his father in early 1842. William Collins had embarked on the trip with a commission to illustrate Sir Walter Scott’s *The Pirate* (1822), first published with his

engravings in 1844 by Robert Cadell of Edinburgh. The full quote from *The Memoirs* is:

The immense precipice of Sumburgh Head, hanging over as if it would fall into the sea, with the waves writhing about its jagged base, and hundreds on hundreds of sea-birds whirling above its mighty summit, was, he declared, one of the sublimest natural objects he had ever beheld. He made a careful sketch of it from the beach; from which he produced a striking and original illustration of the scene in "The Pirate," where Cleveland is saved from the wreck of his vessel, by Mordaunt Mertoun.

The Memoirs also narrate the difficult circumstances under which the illustrations were made.

Most of the painter's studies in his northern sojourn were produced under unpropitious skies; and he and his party would frequently have formed no bad subject for a picture in themselves, when they halted on a bleak hill-side: Mr. Collins, with one knee on the ground, steadying himself against the wind; his companion [Wilkie Collins] holding a tattered umbrella over him, to keep the rain off his sketch-book; the guide standing by, staring at his occupation in astonishment; and the ponies browsing near their riders, on the faded grass, with mane and tail ever and anon floating out like streamers on the gusty breezes that swept past them. Obstacles of weather, however, wrought no bad influence on my father's studies; he preserved his patience and composure through them all, and finished his sketches determinately, in spite of Shetland showers and northern gales.

A detailed plot summary of *The Pirate* can now be found <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/works/novels/pirate.html>.

THE FROZEN DEEP AT THE DICKENS FELLOWSHIP

The Dickens Fellowship in London has arranged an additional meeting to its previously advertised programme. On Tuesday 14 November, Dr Joanna Robinson, Lecturer in Victorian Literature at University College, Cork, will speak on 'Staging Dickensian Drama: *The Frozen Deep*'. The talk will be based on Joanna's experience of producing and directing 'Is She His Wife?' in 2015 and *The Frozen Deep* in 2016.

The Fellowship meeting will take place at Lumen URC, 88 Tavistock Place, WC1H 9RS.

The website at www.dickensfellowship.org/central-fellowship gives a reminder that the annual Dickens Day at the University of London will take place on Saturday 14 October. The theme this year will be 'Dickens and Fantasy'. Further details will follow on the Fellowship website.

WILKIE COLLINS'S JEWISH CONNECTIONS

Andrew Gasson and Professor William Baker have recently published an essay entitled 'Forgotten Terrain: Wilkie Collins's Jewish Explorations' in *Jewish Historical Studies*, Volume 48, December 2016, pp. 177-199. The essay explores Wilkie's numerous connections with the nineteenth century Anglo-Jewish community and discusses the appearance of Jewish characters in his works. It covers most of his life from about 1836 and records friendships with, for example, his close friends Frederic and Nina Lehmann, dedicatees of *Man and Wife*; Solomon Hart, R.A., the portrait painter; Sir David Salomons, MP and first Jewish Lord Mayor of London; and Sir Francis Goldsmid, philanthropist and first Jewish QC and his wife Lady Louisa to whom Collins presented a copy of *Armada*. In his later days, he was in close touch with industrialist Sebastian Schlesinger who became the final executor after Collins's death in 1889.

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***THE WOMAN IN WHITE* – A REVISED MUSICAL VERSION**

Andrew Lloyd Webber's 2004 musical version of *The Woman in White*, which starred Maria Friedman and Michael Crawford, is due to be revived at the Charing Cross Theatre for twelve weeks from Monday 20 November to Saturday 10 February 2018. It will be directed by Thom Southerland with lead possibly taken by Laura Pitt-Pulford. Andrew Lloyd Webber and lyricist David Zippel have apparently revisited their original work to refresh the storytelling for a new generation of theatregoers.

Southerland, Artistic Director of Charing Cross Theatre, is quoted as saying "I am so excited about this new production. *The Woman in White* is a wildly exciting romantic thriller which is frequently tender and personal. The music is grand, sweeping and instantly captivating. Having long been an admirer of *The Woman in White*, I know that Charing Cross Theatre is the ideal intimate space for audiences to experience it for the first time or rediscover this lush Victorian Gothic thriller."

The Woman in White will be produced by Patrick Gracey, Steven M Levy and Vaughan Williams, by arrangement with the Really Useful Group.

THE WOMAN IN WHITE ON TV

Filming for the new BBC production of *The Woman in White* around Belfast was completed in the first half of the year. But there is still no transmission date announced. Charles Dance plays Mr Fairlie with Ben Hardy as Walter Hartright and Olivia Vinall as Laura Fairlie. Jessie Buckley is Marian Halcombe, with Dougray Scott as Sir Percival Glyde. The five 60-minute episodes have been written by Fiona Seres who says it “is a powerful, poignant story and I have absolutely loved adapting this epic for the screen. I’m thrilled it’s attracted such an exciting, high-calibre cast who I know will bring it to life in a unique and intimate way.”

The BBC blurb promises “*The Woman in White* will take viewers on a chilling ride down the shadowy paths and corridors of English country houses and ultimately into the depths of the Victorian madhouse.”

It is the fourth BBC TV adaptation of the story. Others were broadcast in 1966, 1982, and 1997.

NEWSPAPER ARCHIVES

The British Newspaper Archive is the growing online record of the British Library’s astonishing collection of newspapers published in England, Scotland, Wales, and Ireland.

Out of around 21 million pages – the number grows daily – a search for Wilkie Collins produces more than 30,000 hits. Several hundred of those are new to the archive in the last month as the ten-year project with the genealogy firm Find My Past reaches its half way point in digitising the 40 million pages of newspapers in the British Library’s vast collection. The search produces images and transcripts – though it has to be said some of those are very poor and as a consequence searches may miss items if they were wrongly transcribed. The archive costs £72 a year for unlimited access. www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk.

Newspapers.com is a digital archive of American newspapers. Wilkie Collins produces more than 25,000 hits in its 300 million digitised pages. It is part of the online genealogical firm ancestry.com and users get a reduced subscription. Prices vary and there are many special offers but reckon on around \$100 a year.

Newspaperarchive.com is also American and claims more than 42,000 hits for a simple Wilkie Collins search. Much of the material will overlap with

newspapers.com. It also costs around \$100 a year but beware auto-renewals that might come in at a higher price. Look for special offers.

Spectator sport

The *Spectator* archive is also worth a look. It gives full access to all issues from 1828 to 2008, with excellent transcripts and images of the original. A search on Wilkie Collins will find dozens of articles from his own time right up to the present century. Contemporary pieces range from this appreciation on 10 January 1857:

The "Tavistock House Theatricals," which commenced on Tuesday at the residence of Mr. Charles Dickens, have been the talk of the week in literary, artistic, and professional circles. Mr. Wilkie Collins, who on a former occasion supplied the same body of amateurs with a drama entitled *The Lighthouse*, is likewise the author of the present season. *The Frozen Deep*, as the new piece is called, is of larger dimensions than its predecessor...

to this obituary on 28 September 1889:

WILKIE COLLINS. THE position of Mr. Wilkie Collins in literature was a very unusual one. He was an extremely popular writer—deservedly popular, as we think—who was not very highly esteemed. Of all the Englishmen who read novels, few have failed to read some of his best stories; fewer, having begun them, ever laid them down unfinished....

Those pieces and more than a dozen others about Wilkie can be read in full, free at www.archive.spectator.co.uk which is a model of archive access.

SALE OF WILKIE'S FURNITURE

On 24 October 1889, just a month after his death, Wilkie's furniture and household goods were auctioned at his home 82 Wimpole Street. We published an account of the sale in our Winter 2010 newsletter which you can find online, along with all the previous Newsletters back to 1994, at our website wilkiecollinssociety.org. The pamphlet enclosed with this mailing, *A Visit to Wilkie Collins*, includes a contemporary illustration of the sale which has never been republished before.

But more details of the items and the prices paid have emerged from the archive of the London evening newspaper *Pall Mall Gazette*. In the days before and after the sale it published the following paragraphs in its 'Today's Tittle Tattle' section. They have not been republished before.

Pall Mall Gazette 22 October 1889, p. 6.

All sorts of rickety articles, from boots that clothe the feet to hats that cover the head, have been brought together by the assiduous collector. Hitherto a collection of the ink-pots of famous novelists have escaped the vigilant hunter after articles of *vertu*. An opportunity occurs on Thursday to form a nucleus for such a collection. The furniture and effects of Mr. Wilkie Collins are to be sold under the hammer at 82, Wimpole-street on that day. There are some odd fragments. To wit his triple alliance of ink pots, stationery case, and writing table, all of which have done duty for his most ingenious romances.

Besides these items there are others which might serve to give stimulus to a yet unwritten tale—such as Wilkie Collins's arm-chair, of oak, quaintly carved, with its seat of crimson plush; or the very fine cabinets that held his household goods. There are also the desk over which his hand played as he jotted down 'his ideas to startle the world', and the mirrors in which he sometimes conjured up a new world, and the handsome buhl clock that marked time in the dining-room, or the striking marble timepiece that bade welcome to the coming guest and chimed a requiem to the departing caller.

The Pall Mall Gazette 23 October 1889, p. 6

I mentioned a few interesting items which will be offered to the public at Mr. Wilkie Collins's sale. In addition to those, I noticed yesterday a pair of bronze figures of boys and some sets of Indian vases. The other 180 lots put down for sale are the ordinary everyday household effects and furniture, without a shred of romance in them. It is said that an American has made up his mind to secure the best pieces for his fatherland. Perhaps Barnum may desire the most curious for his Dime Museum.

The Pall Mall Gazette 25 October 1889, p. 6

Most of the really interesting things had been removed from Mr. Wilkie Collins's house before the sale began yesterday. There were no books, no pictures, and only a scratch lot of odds and ends. It is understood that the pictures of the dead novelist, some of which were valuable and curious, will be sold at Christie's later on.

I was much amused to hear the badinage of the brokers, whose profession is an arduous one. One always admires a little genuine enthusiasm in this "vale of tears," and some of these husky gentlemen really get excited when a good "lot" is up, although they have been living on "lots" all their lives. Only the auctioneer remains unemotional, like the croupier who rakes in the Napoleons at Monte Carlo. "No wonder he wrote gloomy books if he wrote on a table like that," remarked one of them, with literary leanings; "they say he saw ghostesses, too. I don't wonder, do you marm," to a lady. "Why, look at them porteries. You can just pictur 'em swingin' about of a dark night, with the draught from the winder. You'd like to buy 'em; what'll they fetch? Five bob. Why, they ain't only fit to lay down on macadamized roads."

Mr. Collins was evidently fond of red as a colour. His dining-room walls were covered with a deep red paper, which gave the sombre chamber a warm and cheerful look even yesterday.

The Pall Mall Gazette 26 October 1889, p. 6.

A correspondent sends me some further details of the sale at Wimpole-street which may be useful to the biographer of the dead novelist. A japanned champagne cooler that had seen service, two fire- guards, hanging glass, and a drum clock brought 3s., the novelist's bedstead fetched 10s.; the mattress 28s., and its companion another 28s.; the bolster, pillow, and coverlet, 14s. His bedside table fetched £2-4s. A hungry amateur, after a little discussion, secured the two bedroom chairs that had seen the late novelist to bed many a night, and up in the morning many a day, with his bed rest, which he had used times out of number whilst jotting down his midnight or early morning thoughts for 9s. Certainly this was one of the most interesting lots in the sale.

The plaster bust of W. Collins, R.A., fetched 10s. The drawing-room chairs, six in number, 30s.; his couch £2-6s., easy chair £3-15s.

Two mantel-boards were sold for 20s. In the dining-room the walnut-frame armchair bought 4-4s. The mahogany-frame indulging chair £3-15s.; the dining table, £6; the beautiful oak sideboard, £23-2s.; the antique carved armchair that Collins used brought £6 12s.; the Buhl clock £5-10s.; and the plaster busts that stood over the library shelves brought 7s. the pair.

[**Note:** There were twenty shillings to the pound so a shilling was worth 5p. Multiply by 100 to get an idea of the current price equivalent. The 'indulging chair' thus fetched about £375 in today's terms].

A WILKIE COLLINS THESIS ON *THE WOMAN IN WHITE*

As mentioned in the last Newsletter, WCS member Dr Kirsten Hüttner very kindly donated for WCS members copies of the published book of her PhD thesis, *Wilkie Collins's "The Woman in White": Analysis, Reception and Literary Criticism of a Victorian Bestseller*.

We still have one copy left so any member who would like it should contact Andrew Gasson at apogee@apgee.co.uk. The thesis runs to some 300 pages so although there will be no charge for the book, the cost to cover second class p. & p. will be £3.

WCS PUBLICATIONS

All of the Wilkie Collins Society's publications are listed on the website at wilkiecollinssociety.org/publications/ from where they can be ordered. The previous 25% off sale continues with all receipts going to help the Society continue its work.

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www.wilkiecollins.com
www.wilkie-collins.info