



# *THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY*

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## **NEWSLETTER**

**SPRING 2024**

### **BICENTENARY EVENTS**

Several talks and events for Wilkie's Bicentenary as detailed in the last Newsletter have already taken place. Here in approximately chronological order are those now scheduled to continue into the Summer.

**Mutual Friends, The Adventures of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins** is the title of the Exhibition at the Charles Dickens Museum. This has been running from **15 November** and has been so popular that it has been extended to run **until 21 April 2024**. It is open Wednesdays to Sundays from 10.00am to 5.00pm. Further details can be found on the Museum's website.

**Wilkie in Whitby: a Bicentennial Celebration** will be a joint convention of the WCS, the Dracula Society and A Ghostly Company. It will be held over the weekend of **Saturday and Sunday 8 and 9 June** and consist of a day of talks on the Saturday at the Whitby Museum, followed by a dinner at the Royal Hotel (where Wilkie stayed in 1862). We are also hoping to arrange a guided tour of Whitby on the Sunday morning. On the Friday evening, individual societies may well arrange their own informal get-togethers.

The cost of the Saturday talks, Dinner and Sunday guided tour is £60. Bookings are through Julia Kruk of the Dracula Society and should have been made by 1 April 2024 but try anyway! Remittances to be made to Dracula Society account (J Kruk), sort code 77-91-28, account number 87169668; or by cheque to J. Kruk (the Dracula **Society**, 213 Wulfstan Street, East Acton, London W12 0AB), or PayPal to [juliakruk7@gmail.com](mailto:juliakruk7@gmail.com).

The Dracula Society, who are of course well acquainted with Whitby, stress that June is a busy time and attendees will need to arrange their own accommodation as soon as possible. Those with cars might prefer to book accommodation a little further out and drive in for the convention.

**Rambles Around Marylebone.** The WCS is arranging a walk around central London's Marylebone area in which Wilkie lived for almost all of his life. It will be based on William Clarke's original 'Rambles' with updates from Paul Lewis and Andrew Gasson. It will take place on **Sunday 16 June**. More details will be sent to members by email.

**The University of Buckingham** is hosting a conference on **Thursday 20 to Friday 21 June** with the title **Collins and Dickens – Dickens and Collins**. As part of the events to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Wilkie Collins, the meeting is being supported by both the Wilkie Collins Society and the Dickens Fellowship. The event is being organised by Peter Orford, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English. The Conference programme is about to be publicly announced but it will discuss aspects of Collins and Dickens's works, collaborations, and influences upon one another at <https://www.collins-and-dickens.com>. Paul Lewis will be talking on Thursday afternoon 'Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens – a Financial Relationship'. You can register for the event here <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/collins-and-dickens-tickets-859008767347>.

The 29th **Annual Dickens Society Symposium** will be held from **15-18 July 2024** with the title 'Dickens, Context, and Co-occurrence'. For further details contact the conference organisers **Michaela Mahlberg** and **Caroline Radcliffe** at [dickens2024@contacts.bham.ac.uk](mailto:dickens2024@contacts.bham.ac.uk) or you can view the website at <https://dickenssociety.org/home>. The meeting is expected to include Collins in the session on 'Family and Friends'.

**University of Birmingham** is also staging a small Collins-Dickens Special Collections exhibition from **1 July 2024 - 31 January 2025**.

The Birthplace Branch of the Dickens Fellowship is holding a conference in Portsmouth on **5 to 8 August**, There will be at least two talks on the relationship between Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins. More from the Dickens Fellowship in due course.

**The British Library** we think still intends to hold a small exhibition for Wilkie's bicentenary. However, with the BL's other issues a date is still uncertain.

What the BL website does feature, however, is the painstaking work by our Dutch member Pierre Tissot van Patot on a *Bibliographic overview of the Dutch language translations* and in particular on Collins's play *The Lighthouse*. See <https://blogs.bl.uk/european/2020/09/shining-a-light-on-wilkie-collins-and-the-low-countries.html>.

### **COLLINS IN MARYLEBONE JOURNAL**

Wilkie's biographer and WCS member Andrew Lycett has written a bicentenary piece in the latest issue of *Marylebone Journal*. Entitled 'A Life Less Ordinary', it describes Wilkie Collins and his life which he lived almost entirely in London's Marylebone area. It provides a very readable and clear introduction to Wilkie's life and work. *Marylebone Journal*, Issue 103, pp. 22-26 and can be found online at [marylebonejournal.com](http://marylebonejournal.com).

This is Wilkie's second appearance in *Marylebone Journal* where Andrew Lycett had previously written in the issue for December/January 2013-14 'Wilkie's Worlds'.

### **SOME OTHER RECENT TRIBUTES TO WILKIE**

WCS member Kishor Kale has written in *Studies in Religion and the Enlightenment* about "I say No!" and Charlotte Smith's *Ethelinde*. His article 'The Romance of Mystery and the Mystery of Romance' draws parallels between the two novels and the use by both authors of a McGuffin character. Find out more at [srejournal.org](http://srejournal.org) - search 'Wilkie Collins'.

*Fine Books Magazine* has a number of items on Wilkie including 'A Tale of Two Writers' looking at his collaboration with Dickens on the dramatic version of *The Frozen Deep*. [finebooksmagazine.com](http://finebooksmagazine.com) - search 'wilkie collins'.

Several other newspapers and magazines have written about Wilkie for his 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary. Search his name in the online publications of *The Telegraph*, *The Guardian*, *The Times*, [lithub.com](http://lithub.com) and many more.

### **KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY**

On 20 January 2024 the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery (FOKGC) organised a guided walk conducted by one of the cemetery's experts. Apart from Wilkie Collins, the walk included many other famous Victorian writers, including Thackeray and Trollope along with their friends and colleagues who lived at the time when Kensal Green became Britain's most prestigious cemetery and came to rest there.



Reading from a description of Wilkie's funeral

The expert guided walk was accompanied by several readings including one at the graveside from *The Daily Telegraph* of September 1889 with its description of Wilkie's funeral and the assembled mourners. The twenty-five or so participants in the walk then collectively drank A TOAST TO WILKIE COLLINS.

The walk concluded with a buffet lunch followed by 'Rambles around Wilkie Collins,' a presentation from Jak Stringer. Jak had travelled up from Cornwall to give one of her remarkable and enjoyable one-woman Wilkie shows. She is scheduled to repeat this in June during the forthcoming Collins meeting in Whitby.



Jak Stringer during her afternoon performance

## DICKENS FELLOWSHIP

The Dickens Fellowship, London Branch, hosted its scheduled joint talk by Andrew Gasson and Paul Lewis on 30 January 2024. Their respective titles were 'Mutual Friends - Two Destinies' and 'No Thoroughfare and No Cooling'. The illustrated presentations naturally concentrated on the life of Collins and his many collaborations with Dickens. The meeting took place at the Fellowship's magnificent new venue, The Charterhouse in Charterhouse Square.

## WCS WEBSITE

The Wilkie Collins Society website [wilkiecollinssociety.org](http://wilkiecollinssociety.org) is being revamped for Wilkie's 200<sup>th</sup> birthday year.

Stage 1 has been completed and everything the Society has published since it began in 1981 is now available on the website, free to read or download. That is more than one and a quarter of a million words of news, information, research, and scholarship as well as many of Wilkie's lesser-known works which we published for the first time. No password is needed.

Members will continue to get printed publications posted to them and receive emails with the latest developments. New publications will go on the website after a suitable exclusive period for members. In this way we are making available to researchers and fans 40 years of scholarship by the Society's members and others. Paper copies of some older publications will still be available for sale.

Stage 2 is to update the website for the second quarter of the 21<sup>st</sup> century by replacing the current tired and old-fashioned look with a complete restyle. The new website will also work properly on tablets and mobiles which can encounter problems with the present one. This restyling is currently being worked on and we hope will be released in the very near future. The URL will not change.

Meanwhile, enjoy the 99 newsletters, the 83 pamphlets, leaflets, and books, the 14 updates to the Collected Letters and the 27 issues of the three incarnations of the *Wilkie Collins Journal*. All are free to read and download at [wilkiecollinssociety.org](http://wilkiecollinssociety.org). You can also listen to the eight-minute performance of the Overture to *The Frozen Deep*, found and recorded by the WCS in 2008.

## MUSIC AND WILKIE

Allan Atlas, editor and compiler of *A Wilkie Collins Songbook* (A-R Editions, 2023) will be acting as narrator in a forthcoming concert at the 11<sup>th</sup> Biennial Conference of

the North American British Music Studies Association. The event will take place on Saturday 27 July 2024 at Oberlin College & Conservatory, Oberlin, Ohio and will feature five of the entries from the *Songbook* including *The Woman in White*. The concert is expected to feature Samuel Jungman, tenor; Susanna McCleary; soprano and violin; and Dorothy de Val, piano.

*A Wilkie Collins Songbook* is available from A-R Editions, Middleton, Wisconsin or from Amazon - but at a price not far short of the air fare to the concert in Ohio at the sky-high price of £292.47!

### AN EARLIER APPEARANCE OF *VOLPURNO*

Fourteen years after Wilkie's earliest published piece was identified as *Volpurno* in a July 1843 New York periodical, an earlier appearance published in England has been located.

The *Monmouthshire Beacon* published the short tale on 3 June 1843. It occupies a single column on p. 4 of the broadsheet newspaper and is identical with the piece published in the New York *Albion* a month later. Tantalisingly, the *Beacon* indicates that the story was taken from a London publication called the *Court Journal*. That may be its original publication and its office was not far from where Wilkie worked at the time in Antrobus's tea merchants in the Strand. *The Court Journal* sold only a few hundred copies and the only extant copy for 1843 which has been found is in the British Library. However following the infamous cyber-attack last October, most of the library's books and periodical volumes are unavailable to researchers. The *Court Journal* is not scheduled to be released until the summer, probably in July. So by the next newsletter we may have found *Volpurno*'s original publication.

The discovery of *Volpurno* and the text of the story was published by the Society in 2009 and can be read on the website [wilkiecollinssociety.org](http://wilkiecollinssociety.org) - search 'Volpurno'.

#### VOLPURNO—OR 'THE STUDENT.

BY W. WILKIE COLLINS.

"—Memory, like a drop that, night and day,  
Falls cold and ceaseless, wore her heart away."—Lalla Rookh.

Perfectly overcome by the heat of an Italian evening at Venice, I quitted the bustling gaiety of St. Mark's Place for the quiet of a gondola, and directing the man to shape his course for the island of Lido, (a narrow strip of land dividing the "lagunes," or shallows beyond the city, from the open sea,) I seated myself on the prow of the vessel, with a firm determination to make the most of the sunsey wafts of air that every now and then ruffled the surface of the still, dark waters.

From *The Albion. A Journal of News, Politics and Literature*, 8 July 1843

[*A note from Andrew Gasson. We should all be very grateful to Paul Lewis for the immense amount of time and effort he has spent in putting the website in order; and secondly, he must take the credit for discovering through his research what is likely to prove the first publication of Wilkie's first ever story, Volpurno.*]

## **POLITICIANS**

With so much never-ending politics in the news and a general election imminent, members might like to be reminded of some of Wilkie's cynical views on politicians. "Which of our political parties deserves the confidence of the English people?" In plain terms, on his sides Randal answered: "The party that lowers the taxes." Those words acted on the discussion like water on a fire. As members of Parliament, the two contending politicians were naturally innocent of the slightest interest in the people or the taxes; they received the new idea submitted to them in helpless silence. (From *The Evil Genius*).

Lord B. is the greatest impostor of modern times. In politics a glib tongue and no scruples will do wonders. But literature under false pretences, betrays the pretender. I sincerely believe that man to be the very worst novelist that has ever appeared in print. (Referring to Lord Beaconsfield (Disraeli) in a letter to George Maclean Rose, January 1881).

## **THE WOMAN IN WHITE ANOTHER FILM VERSION**

Recently seen tipped into an online copy of *The Woman in White* was a photograph taken from the filming of the 1929 cinematic version of Collins's sensation novel at the Cricklewood studio in north London.



Our Newsletter for Summer 2019 gave details of various silent film versions of *The Woman in White* including *The Unfortunate Marriage* from 1917 and *The Twin Pawns* from 1919. This 1929 silent version with Collins's original title was directed by the well-known film maker, Herbert Wilcox. The cast consisted of Blanche Sweet as Laura Fairlie, Haddon Mason as Walter Hartwright [sic], Cecil Humphreys as Sir Percival Glyde, and Louise Prussing as Marion Halcombe. There are further details online at IMDB which gives the brief storyline as:

Following a promise she made to her father on his deathbed, Laura Fairlie ([Blanche Sweet](#)) goes to Scotland with Sir Percival Glyde ([Cecil Humphreys](#)) to his mysterious mansion to be married. Once there, many strange and disturbing things happen. She meets a girl who has been a victim of Sir Percival's scheming in order to get her fortune.

The scene depicted in the photograph appears to be towards the end of the story, after Sir Percival has died in the fire at the Old Welmingham Church.

## **MELVYN BRAGG**

Preparing the old Wilkie Collins Society Newsletters for publication on the website has turned up several gems. One is the 2003 edition of *In Our Time*, Melvyn Bragg's intelligent and accessible series on Radio 4. Broadcast on 6 November 2003 'The Novels of Sensation, a Victorian Literary Phenomenon' included *The Woman in White* and *The Moonstone* in the discussion by Bragg's guests Professor Lyn Pykett, Professor Dinah Birch, and John Mullan. It is still available on BBC Sounds at [www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p005492t](http://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p005492t)

## **THE NEW MAGDALEN – A FRENCH VERSION**

We also mentioned in an earlier Newsletter, Winter 2020, a French film adaptation of Collins's 1873 novel and play *The New Magdalen*. At that time it was in production in France under the title *La Place d'une Autre* and now has the English title *Secret Name*. Filming began in October 2020 and the final version was released in 2021. The studio's plot summary will sound familiar to readers of the book.

Despite being inspired by the English tale *The New Magdalen* (1873), penned by the mysterious Victorian author Wilkie Collins (a friend and collaborator of Charles Dickens), Aurélie Georges decided to set her feature film in France at the beginning of the First World War. In this dark and angst-ridden context, we find young Nélie - played by **Lyna Khoudri**, the winner of the Orizzonti's Best Actress award in Venice – a woman in search of some sort of social redemption which will allow her to exist beyond the confines of her social condition. With the help of the Red Cross, our heroine, who becomes a courageous nurse on the front line, can at



last leave behind her life of misery where fighting to get by is an everyday event. During a brutal bombing raid, a mysterious woman loses her life and N elie decides to steal her identity in the hope of improving her lot. But one day, the dead woman resurfaces...

*Secret Name* is produced by 31 Juin films (France) in co-production with ARTE France Cin ma, and released by Pyramide International. Full details can be found at <https://cineuropa.org/film/407504/> where there is an interview with Aur lie Georges and an evocative 1.40 minutes trailer. This is also available on IMDB - search *Secret Name*.

### **NEW VICTIMS OF CIRCUMSTANCES**

There have been discoveries too about Wilkie's three short stories published in 1886 and 1887 in the *Youth's Companion* in New York as a series of 'Victims of Circumstances'. We covered the discovery of the third story in 2002 and in 1992 we published two of them from the London *Boy's Own Paper*.

The three stories were based on real court cases in which an innocent individual was executed for a crime on the basis of circumstantial evidence alone. Earlier this year the probable source of those three stories was identified. Professor Graham Law has incorporated these findings into a new edition of his *Victims of Circumstances* which also updates the background to the tales with twenty years of subsequent scholarship.

### **RICHARD J SMITH**

We are very sorry to inform members that researcher and writer Richard J. Smith died during 2023. Richard was one of our earliest members joining in 1992. His wife Jackie told us he had been ill for some while before his death last June. Richard knew more than most about Wilkie's aunt the artist Margaret Sarah Carpenter (*n e* Geddes, 1793-1872) whose life and works he had researched for many years. Although his planned biography of her remained unpublished he did write her entry for the online *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. Richard also researched in detail the backgrounds of the people mentioned in the autobiography written by Wilkie's mother Harriet. His meticulous work will find a place in that account when it is published, we hope, in the near future. You can read more about Richard in the Winter 1998 Newsletter which is on the society's website.

### **ROYAL ACADEMY 'ENTANGLED PASTS'**

Like many organisations, the Royal Academy is trying to come to terms with the links to the slave trade of people in its past. A new exhibition 'Entangled Pasts, 1768–now' is the first part of that work and runs until 28 April. Wilkie's father William Collins was a student at the RA and became a full Academician in 1820. He exhibited there almost

every year from 1807 to his death forty years later. Although it is possible that some of his patrons who bought his pictures derived money from the slave trade his father, also called William, was passionately against slavery. In 1788 he wrote a polemical poem on the evils of it called *The Slave Trade: a Poem*. Published in 1793 it was ‘dedicated to the Gentlemen, who compose that truly noble, generous, and philanthropic Society for the Abolition of the Slave Trade’. The 24-page pamphlet was priced at one shilling. A reprint can still be tracked down online.

The theme of slavery was also tackled by Wilkie Collins in his 1861 play, *Black and White*. It was written by Collins from an idea by Charles Fechter who suggested the outline of the first two acts. With Fechter's agreement, Collins provided the ending, developed the characters and wrote the dialogue. The story is set in Trinidad in 1830. The English villain, Stephen Westcraft, competes with the Count de Layrac for the hand of an heiress, Miss Milburn. He discovers that the Count is actually of mixed race and legally a slave. He buys him at auction but by another technicality the Count is freed. Fechter played the part of Maurice de Layrac. His leading lady, Carlotta Leclercq, took the part of Miss Milburn.

## **OVERSEAS WILKIE TRIBUTES**

Society member Andrew Mangham took part in a radio seminar about Wilkie Collins on Canada's CBC radio in January. See [www.cbc.ca](http://www.cbc.ca) and search for ‘Wilkie Collins’ for background material and to hear the podcast. He also gave a paper ‘Out of the Blue? Epilepsy, Sensation and Wilkie Collins's Poor Miss Finch’ as the lead article in a special Wilkie Collins issue of the Turkish *Çankaya University Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*. You can read his article and half a dozen others on Wilkie at [dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/cankujhss/issue/82381](http://dergipark.org.tr/en/pub/cankujhss/issue/82381)

## **MUSICAL *THE WOMAN IN WHITE***

First seen in 2004, Andrew Lloyd Webber's musical admitted it was ‘freely adapted’ from *The Woman in White* and attracted an excoriating review in our Winter 2004 newsletter after a short preview in the previous Summer's issue. It was revived in 2017 at the Charing Cross Theatre, again reported in the 2017 Summer and Winter Newsletters. That may not be the end of it as it still features on Lloyd Webber's website with the cast forming the backdrop [www.andrewlloydwebber.com/shows/the-woman-in-white](http://www.andrewlloydwebber.com/shows/the-woman-in-white). Another discovery from putting the newsletters online – [wilkiecollinssociety.org](http://wilkiecollinssociety.org) - see Old Newsletters.

## **REYNOLDS AND COLLINS**

A book on the little-known Victorian writer George W. M. Reynolds (1814-1879) contains an interesting chapter by WCS member Professor Stephen Knight comparing

him to Wilkie Collins. ‘Two Mid-Nineteenth Century Popular Radical Novelists’ compares the two men starting from the premise that they

share a major interest in socio political issues. They explore arrogant aristocrats, dubious clergymen, corrupt professionals in business, law, and medicine, and place substantial emphasis on the maltreatment in various ways of women.

There is no evidence the two authors actually met or directly influenced each other (Reynolds stopped writing just as Wilkie was hitting his peak) but Knight draws interesting parallels about their lives and development as novelists and who at times have been very neglected by academics and historians.

*G.W.M. Reynolds Reimagined – Studies in Authorship, Radicalism, and Genre, 1830-1870*, Ed. Jennifer Conary and Mary L. Shannon (Routledge 2023) is £34.99 in paperback though slightly cheaper on Amazon and Kindle.

## **A ‘NEW’ RADIO PLAY**

More than 1000 radio plays which were long lost from the BBC’s archives have been recovered and restored from home recordings by enthusiasts at the Radio Circle. The only one by Wilkie Collins revealed so far is a 1964 adaptation by Molly Hardwicke of the drama *No Thoroughfare* written by Wilkie Collins in 1867/68 from the story he and Dickens collaborated on for the 1867 Christmas Number of *All the Year Round*. Originally broadcast on 18 July 1964, the 90-minute play was broadcast on Tuesday 26 March on Radio 4 Extra and is on BBC Sounds until 25 April <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/m001xlt2>. The BBC broadcast many items by Wilkie Collins in the 1950s and 1960s but this is the oldest item for which a recording exists. In 2005 we published ‘Wilkie on the Airwaves’ a bibliography of the BBC holdings but it was not included in that – search ‘airwaves’ on [wilkiecollinssociety.org](http://wilkiecollinssociety.org).

There is much more at [bbc.com](http://bbc.com) - search ‘hidden treasures’ and [radiocircle.org.uk](http://radiocircle.org.uk). At the moment the BBC says no other Wilkie Collins plays have been found but it is still going through the 1000 recordings. A long job!

## **MOONSTONE TREASURE**

Booksellers seems to hope that first editions of *The Moonstone* are themselves as valuable as a good diamond. Brought to Book of London NW2 is still trying to sell a fine copy in original cloth with two small pieces of paper signed by Wilkie tipped in, though neither seems to be associated with the copy itself. The price? £60,000 – the

same as a flawless 2ct diamond. We first reported one of these documents in April 2023 in our *Addenda & Corrigenda (14)* as letter number [3396]. For images of the book and the two documents see [broughttobook.com](http://broughttobook.com) - search 'The Moonstone', though the images are better on [abebooks.co.uk](http://abebooks.co.uk) - search 'moonstone signed tinsley'.

## **WHO READ WILKIE COLLINS AND WHERE?**

A first edition of *Armadale* (1866) with an interesting provenance was included in Lot 45 of a recent sale by Bonhams in Knightsbridge. This particular copy had on the front end-paper the stamp of 'Charles A. Rundle, Medical Hall, Wangaratta.' Charles Rundle was the local pharmacist who died in May 1896. Wangaratta is a small Australian town located about 160 miles from the suburban district of Armadale, itself about seven miles from central Melbourne. There is also another Armadale, in Western Australia, and for good measure an Armidale in New South Wales.

## **UNKNOWN MAN**

An Australian auction house, Lawsons of Sydney, caused some excitement by offering a pair of paintings of Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins by an unknown artist in their 21 February sale. One of the images did look like Dickens but the other was certainly not of Collins as a couple of minutes research on Google would have revealed. After that was pointed out to Lawsons the description was changed to Charles Dickens and Unknown Man. Estimated at only A\$150-A\$250 they fetched a modest A\$450 – about £230 before premium and shipping. Quite a lot for an unknown man! See the images at [lawsons.co.au](http://lawsons.co.au) - search 'charles dickens'

## **ANOTHER WILKIE COLLINS**

From time to time the name Wilkie Collins crops up in the most unlikely places. Apparently, this Wilkie namesake was also a team member of the Lima Giants black baseball team around the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In his day job, however, he was a railroad baggage master. More details with a photograph at [www.limaohio.com/top-stories/2024/02/20/reminisce-stories-about-the-lima-giants-outside-baseball](http://www.limaohio.com/top-stories/2024/02/20/reminisce-stories-about-the-lima-giants-outside-baseball).

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