



## *THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY*

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### **NEWSLETTER**

**SUMMER 2024**

#### **DICKENS SYMPOSIUM**

Just too late for this Newsletter, the 29th **Annual Dickens Society Symposium** was this year held from **15-18 July** with the title 'Dickens, Context, and Co-occurrence'. It is organised by Caroline Radcliffe and Michaela Mahlberg at the University of Birmingham. Still current, however, the university is also staging a small Collins-Dickens Special Collections exhibition which runs from 1 July to 31 January 2025.

#### **DICKENS FELLOWSHIP CONFERENCE**

The one remaining event that is at least partly associated with Wilkie's bicentennial is the Annual Dickens Fellowship conference 5-8 August in Portsmouth. Among other attractions there will be at least two talks on the longstanding friendship between Collins and Dickens. More here [https://www.dickensfellowship.org/images/sati/pdf2024/conf2024\\_form-info.pdf](https://www.dickensfellowship.org/images/sati/pdf2024/conf2024_form-info.pdf).

#### **WILKIE IN WHITBY: A BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION**

This proved a most successful and enjoyable meeting on the weekend of 8 and 9 June. Held at the impressive Whitby Museum, this was a joint convention of the WCS, the Dracula Society and A Ghostly Company.

We began with ‘Do you Believe? – an Introduction to the Supernatural World of Wilkie Collins’ by Katherine Haynes, founder member of A Ghostly Company and outstanding winner of the previous evening’s supper quiz. Katherine brilliantly covered the supernatural in Wilkie’s entire oeuvre, including both the short stories and his full-length novels. Barry McCann then talked on ‘Wilkie Collins on Film and TV’. Barry is a writer, editor and broadcaster on matters supernatural and his presentation took us through Wilkie’s works from the earliest silent films, starting with *The Moonstone* in 1909 to modern 20<sup>th</sup> century television productions.

The afternoon began with Andrew Gasson talking on ‘Wilkie Collins and Detective Fiction’ which discussed both Collins’s ‘firsts’ in detective contributions to his early short stories and those in his major novels, as well as *The Moonstone* and *The Woman in White*. The day concluded with ‘A Ramble around Wilkie Collins,’ one of Jak Stringer’s brilliant solo performances taking us this time through Wilkie’s early life and works.

We are working on publishing all three of the papers presented at the Whitby meeting.

Another high point of the day was the showing of the 1917 silent film version of *The Woman in White*, re-released in 1920 as ‘The Unfortunate Marriage.’ Apart from the anachronistic appearance of the occasional motor car, the film follows quite closely the original plot and caused our Whitby audience to burst into spontaneous applause.

This version is 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](http://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 <http://vimeo.com/20908725> or purchased from Thanouser.

## **BUCKINGHAM UNIVERSITY CONFERENCE**

**The University of Buckingham** duly held its more major conference on **20-21 June** with the title **Collins and Dickens – Dickens and Collins**. As part of the events to commemorate Collins's bicentenary, the meeting was being supported by both the Wilkie Collins Society and the Dickens Fellowship. The event was organised by Peter Orford, Senior Lecturer in the Department of English. Details of the several speakers and panels spanning the two days can still be found at <https://www.collins-and-dickens.com/>.

As part of the conference, Buckingham staged a reading of the Collins and Dickens jointly written but rarely performed play *No Thoroughfare*. Written in 1867 as an adaptation of their Christmas Number of the same name, *No Thoroughfare* tells the sensational tale of Walter Wilding, a foundling child searching for the truth about his past, and his friend George Vendale's pursuit of the beautiful Marguerite overshadowed by her villainous guardian Herr Obenreizer.

Of particular note were first Paul Lewis's 'Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens – A Financial Relationship' and secondly the idea which emerged from Esther Reilly's paper 'What becomes of Old Giants' that the simple Mrs Wragge in *No Name* (1862) was intended as a parody of Mrs Beeton and her recently published *Book of Household Management* (1861).

Peter Orford intends publishing in due course most if not all of the papers presented at Buckingham in book form.

## **KENSAL GREEN WALK**

In January, to mark the anniversary of Wilkie's birth, the Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery (FOKGC) organised the very successful guided walk to cover Wilkie's resting place as well as numerous other Victorian writers. The cemetery's experts who conducted the walk have possibly agreed to run it a second time – but only if they feel there is enough support. Anyone who missed the first walk and is interested should email Andrew Gasson who will co-ordinate the responses.

## **COLLINS AT THE BBC**

One disappointment of this bicentenary year is the paucity of broadcasts by the BBC – and for that matter independent television. The BBC did air Matthew Sweet’s ‘The Wilkie Collins Guide to Modern Life’ in December 2023, *The Woman in White* and a feature in ‘Bookclub’ in January this year and an adaptation of *No Thoroughfare* in March - but nothing since despite the huge range of material which they have in their archives. There’s still time for them to get their proverbial act together but the entire range of material both held in the archives and that lost to posterity is carefully itemised in the accompanying compilation by Paul Lewis.

## **A WILKIE COLLINS STAMP**

Perhaps it was unrealistic to hope that during Wilkie’s bicentenary year he might appear on Royal Mail postage stamps. After all, the philatelic powers that be have decided that rather less worthy but fictional subjects are Robin Hood, Blackadder, Paddington Bear and Harry Potter: or if you want real people, Shirley Bassey, Paul McCartney or even Queen Victoria for her bicentenary.

So, courtesy of London’s very interesting Postal Museum, we decided to create our own!



## **MURDER BY BOOK**

Apparently unaware of the Collins Bicentenary but giving him a brief mention, Cambridge University Library are holding an exhibition 'Murder by Book; a Celebration of 20<sup>th</sup> Century British Crime Fiction. This has been running from 23 March and continues until 24 August. One of the highlights is Collins's own writing desk which he took with him when he went abroad and on his trip to America in 1873. At his death it passed into the keeping of Harriet Bartley, Collins's amanuensis and daughter of Caroline Graves. The contents of the box include Wilkie's last diary with some of the final entries in the hand of Harriet Graves.

Entry is free but booking is essential. Quoting from the library's blurb:

Crime fiction is the UK's most read, bought and borrowed genre. Cambridge University Library draws on its world-leading collections of British crime fiction to stage a murderously good exhibition! Bringing together literature, culture and heritage, Murder by the Book illuminates and celebrates the stories of the UK's most popular fiction writing. Curated by award-winning crime novelist Nicola Upson, the Library's exhibition challenges traditional distinctions between literary fiction and genre fiction. Murder by the Book examines crime's place in our literary history and the library's own Special Collections.

Agatha Christie's typewriter, Dictaphone and the typescript of her final Poirot novel – so top secret it was kept in a bank vault for three decades are star exhibits. The exhibition also showcases rare books and audio-visual recordings looking at the genre from its origins in the works of Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens to contemporary best-sellers Val McDermid and Ian Rankin.

With first editions of *The Moonstone* and *Bleak House*, as well as Sherlock Holmes' debut appearance, the exhibition explores the library's remarkable collections and stylish dust jackets that represent more than a century of British book design.

More at [bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68639001](http://bbc.co.uk/news/uk-england-cambridgeshire-68639001) and book at [www.lib.cam.ac.uk/murderbythebook](http://www.lib.cam.ac.uk/murderbythebook).

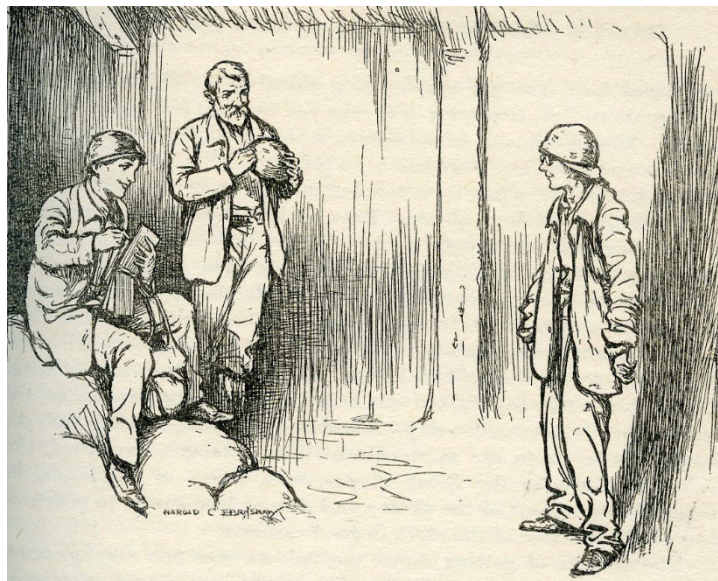
## **RAMBLES AROUND MARYLEBONE**

As mentioned in the Spring Newsletter, on the afternoon of 16 June the WCS ran its walk around the Marylebone area of central London in which Wilkie lived for most of his life. This was based on William Clarke's original 'Rambles around

Marylebone' from 1994, updated by Paul Lewis and Andrew Gasson. About a dozen or so members attended the walk which covered about four and a half miles and took in virtually all of the Wilkie connected places in Marylebone; with stops for explanations it lasted approximately three hours.

The walk is being repeated for the Dracula Society on 18 August, this time in the morning. It will be shortened to last about two hours and cover about three and a half miles. WCS members who were unable to attend the June walk are invited to come along in August. The joining instructions are similar, to meet at the Windsor Castle Pub, 98 Park Road, NW1 4SH at 10.45 for an 11 o'clock start. The nearest underground is Baker Street. The pub is currently closed for refurbishment but has a convenient forecourt. No need for a formal booking, but please let Andrew Gasson know by email if you intend to turn up.

## **BOTALLACK MINE**



Staying with Rambles, BBC2 on 9 May 2024 broadcast a documentary on Botallack Mine. This featured as Chapter IX in Wilkie's own 1851 *Rambles Beyond Railways*. The documentary showed the area in detail with the old mining houses and stacks and went as far underground as is currently safe. It also mentioned the production of arsenic which was a favourite of poisoners at the time and, of course, featured in the later novel *The Law and the Lady*. Wilkie, and his artist companion Henry Brandling, were determined to experience the whole adventure including the tunnels under the sea which were then in constant use. They were equipped with miners' over-suits to keep them dry. Wilkie being

five feet six had clothes which belonged to a six feet two miner with a shirt which fell down to his toes and required the cuffs of his jacket to be turned up to his elbows. He described how a round hat was jammed over his eyes and added that he was “so near-sighted as to be obliged to wear spectacles...nobody, I think, will be astonished to hear that my companion seized his sketch-book, and caricatured me on the spot.” The attached illustration by cartoonist Harold Earnshaw (1886-1937) is taken from an abridged excerpt entitled ‘Down a Cornish Copper Mine’ published in *The Green Book for Boys* [1910] and in *By Land and Sea* [1916], both edited by Herbert Strang.

### **DIONYSUS THEATRE’S *THE WOMAN IN WHITE***

A dramatic production of *The Woman in White* will tour southern England in July and August. WCS members can get a 15% discount on the evening ticket prices by using the code ‘WILKIE24’. The play will run for two or three nights at four venues – Salisbury, Wembley, and Hurstpierpoint and Southwick in Sussex. A special October performance has also been arranged for Broadstairs – where of course Wilkie wrote the opening chapter of the story in August 1859.

The adaptation by the Dionysus Theatre’s Artistic Director, Robert Tremayne – who plays Fosco – is directed by Vicki Newman and described as ‘a tempestuous tale of love, betrayal and greed’. Details at [www.dionysus-theatre.co.uk](http://www.dionysus-theatre.co.uk).

### **WCS WEBSITE**

A reminder that The Wilkie Collins Society website [wilkiecollinssociety.org](http://wilkiecollinssociety.org) has now been revamped for Wilkie’s 200<sup>th</sup> birthday year. Everything the Society has published since it began in 1981 is now available on the website, free to read or download. There is news, information, research, and scholarship as well as many of Wilkie’s lesser-known works which were republished for the first time. You will also find all issues of the *Wilkie Collins Journal*, the annual updates to the Collected Letters and a performance of the overture to *The Frozen Deep*. No password is needed.

New printed publications will continue to be posted to members together with electronic news updates to those on our email list. New publications will be placed on the website after an exclusivity period for members. In this way we are making available to researchers and fans some 40 years of scholarship by the



Society's members and other contributors. Paper copies of some older publications are still available to purchase.

### ***THE WOMAN IN WHITE ON NETFLIX***

The BBC's 2018 production of *The Woman in White* has become a surprise Netflix hit since appearing in its lists in July. Its popularity is helped by Ben Hardy, a former star of the BBC soap *Eastenders* (he played Peter Beale) in the lead role of Walter Hartright. Oscar nominee Jessie Buckley is Marian Halcombe (it is thought Wilkie named his first daughter after her with the unusual spelling Marian) and Olivia Vinall plays Laura. Charles Dance makes a creepy Frederick Fairlie (a character Wilkie Collins is said to have based on either (or both) the writer Leigh Hunt or Dickens's eccentric friend Chauncy Hare Townshend) and Dougray Scott (*Mission Impossible 2*) is the evil Sir Percival Glyde. If you subscribe to Netflix, you can watch it free. It is also available on DVD.

With this newsletter is Paul Lewis's guide to every appearance of Wilkie Collins on BBC radio and television since 1926.

### **WILKIE CARTOON**

A cartoon of Wilkie Collins – looking more like Gandalf than anyone – has emerged from an 1885 publication. Drawn by the Victorian illustrator Phil May for the Winter issue of the periodical *Society*, Wilkie is in the centre of some fifty line drawings of Victorian writers, politicians, and other well-known figures.





Phil May (1864-1903) was a prolific illustrator and caricaturist though he struggled to make a living. This cartoon was published in November 1885 just before he left for a better paid job in Australia. But after three years he returned to London and continued to draw for numerous periodicals including *Punch*, *The Graphic*, and the *Illustrated London News*.

He struggled with alcoholism and “lived a raffish bohemian life, squandered his money, and died of cirrhosis of the liver and tuberculosis at the age of thirty-nine.” (Simon Houfe, *Dictionary of British Book Illustrators*, Antique Collectors Club 1978, p. 386).

### **MOONSTONE ANNOTATED**

In 2022 we reported the sale of an annotated copy of the 1877 privately printed edition of Wilkie’s dramatisation of *The Moonstone* by Sotheby’s in New York – <https://wilkiecollinssociety.org/wp/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/2022-Winter-Newsletter.pdf>. The extensive changes and rewrites amended 60 of the 88 printed leaves and turned the three-act play into four. The hammer went down at \$40,000 and with buyer’s premium it would have cost the UK buyer around £42,000. The book is now on sale by the London book and manuscript dealer Peter Harrington for – wait for it – £100,000 <https://www.peterharrington.co.uk/the-moonstone-a-dramatic-story-in-three-acts-161307.html>. If any WCS member buys it, please let me know!

A plain unannotated copy of the same 1877 edition in a fine red clamshell case is on sale for £18,500 at Rooke Books [www.rookebooks.com/1877-the-moonstone-a-dramatic-story-in-three-acts](http://www.rookebooks.com/1877-the-moonstone-a-dramatic-story-in-three-acts). This is still a very rare item but the price is much higher than for other copies sold in the last few years.

### **MALAYSIAN *MOONSTONE***

A Malaysian edition of *The Moonstone* has been tracked down by the ever-vigilant WCS member Pierre Tissot van Patot in the Singapore National Library. It was published by Macmillan in Kuala Lumpur and is based on an easy-to-read edition of the book published in London which was adapted and abridged by E. F. Dodd for people whose first language was not English. The editions share the same simple illustrations.

## **THE LOCKED ROOM *MOONSTONE***

The reviewgeek.com website featured ten classic locked-room mysteries in January with *The Moonstone* at no.4, after a Conan Doyle story and before one by John Dickson Carr. Both authors were known fans of Wilkie and Carr even featured him in his novel *The Hungry Goblin* (1972).

## **A THESIS ON WILLIAM COLLINS**

WCS member Alan Bean is a specialist in the art of Wilkie's father, William Collins RA. Alan has been awarded a PhD by the University of Birmingham for his thesis '*Natural piety' and sentiment: children, landscape and religion in the paintings of William Collins, R.A. (1787-1847)*'. It can be downloaded here [etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/14655/](http://etheses.bham.ac.uk/id/eprint/14655/)

Members with information about William Collins or the location of missing paintings can contact Alan at [sandjfineart@gmail.com](mailto:sandjfineart@gmail.com).

## **A THESIS ON *BASIL***

WCS member Guy Philipps has been awarded a DPhil by Oxford University for a detailed study of *Basil* placing the story in its contemporary aesthetic context of pre-Raphaelite art and portraiture and of prose fiction. Guy says he also examines "the manuscript of the novel in detail for the first time" and discusses "what underlies Wilkie's...statement in the preface that he had 'founded the main event out of which this story springs, on a fact in real life' – a statement that is startling when one considers what that 'main event' actually is." The illustrated 272 page thesis *The deeper reach of pen: portraiture and fiction in Wilkie Collins's Basil* is available at [www.ora.ox.ac.uk](http://www.ora.ox.ac.uk) search 'wilkie collins Basil'.

## **DINNER WITH LEAR**

More moments of Wilkie's life have emerged from a diary kept by his friend, the artist and nonsense verse writer Edward Lear (1812-1888). They probably met in Italy when Wilkie was 14 and Lear twelve years his senior. And we know they corresponded as late as 25 May 1887 when Lear sent Wilkie a photograph. Lear

died in January 1888. He kept a diary for his last thirty years and it records being at dinner parties with Wilkie on two occasions.

(1) Thursday 23 August 1860.

At 5.30 to Egg's – 6.30 dinner

Mrs Egg, Holman Hunt – Wilkie Collins & Pigott

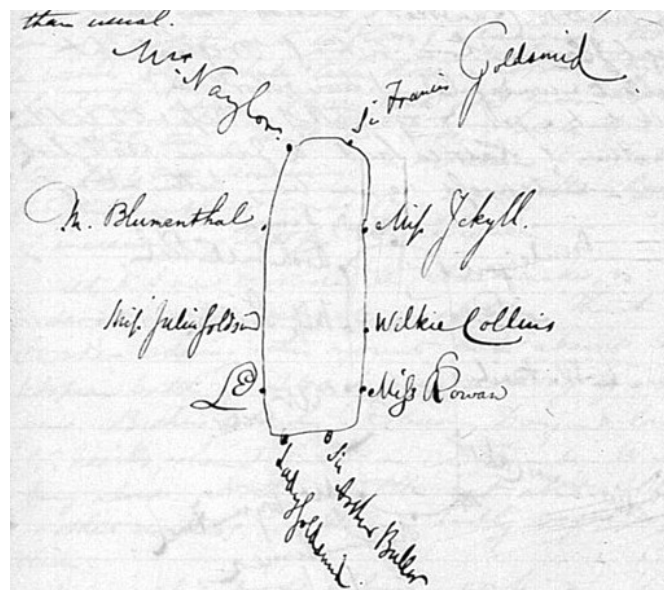
Dinner & wines very good

We staid till 11.15 Then WC and I set off to walk but Daddy [Holman Hunt] did so too & talked & on – & was "wilful = obstinate". So I got in a cab, & came home

On the Tuesday Wilkie had returned from Yorkshire, on Wednesday he collected his first payment of £500 for *The Woman in White* and opened his own bank account with it at Coutts. The day after this dinner party he went to Shanklin to visit his friends the Lehmanns but when he wrote to his mother with all this information he did not mention the dinner party on the Thursday (letter to Harriet Collins 22 August 1860).

(2) Wednesday 13 July 1864.

7.15 Then to St John's Wood Lodge where was a larger party than usual Mrs Naylor, Sir Francis Goldsmid, Miss Jekyll, Wilkie Collins, Miss Rowan, Sir Arthur Bullen, Lady Goldsmid, LE [him], Miss Julia Goldsmid, Mr Blumenthal....Wilkie Collins is very greatly aged. Cab home - near 12.



The diagram shows where Wilkie sat – always arranged male female at such events – but the dinner at the Goldsmid house is not recorded in Wilkie’s letters. Nor is this meeting with Lear in the street on Sunday 15 August 1869.

I walked home, meeting with Wilkie Collins by the way & having a rather long talk. That boy is quite unspoiled.

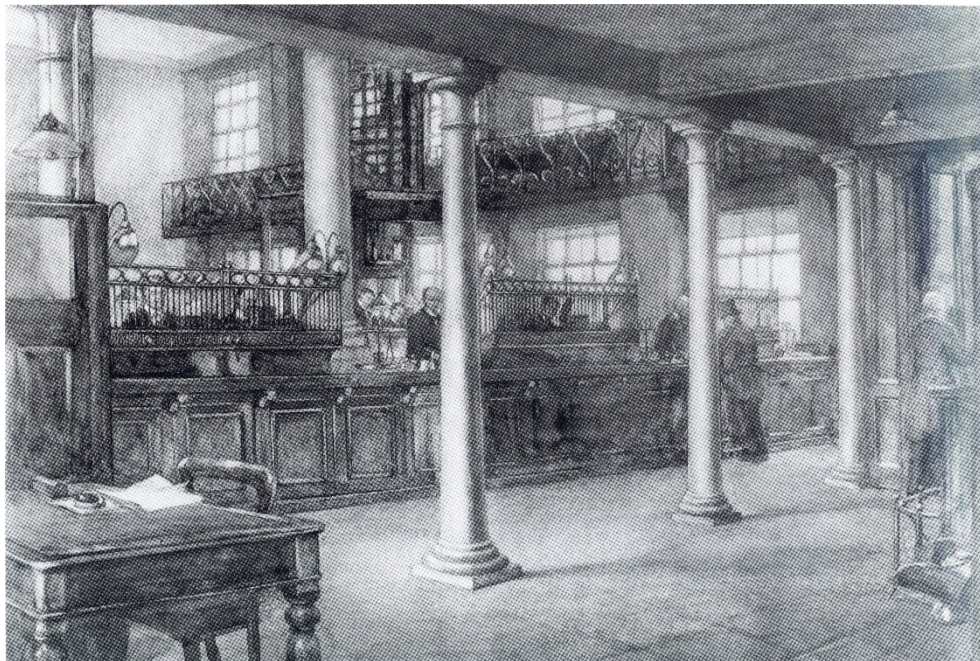
Lear’s diaries also record many letters from Wilkie to him none of which has survived and from Lear to Wilkie of which perhaps only three survive. The editors of Wilkie’s *Collected Letters* are currently considering how to present them. The diaries can be read online at [https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/search ‘Edward Lear’](https://hollisarchives.lib.harvard.edu/search/Edward%20Lear).

These dates from Lear’s diaries join the two letters recently discovered from the correspondence of Thomas Carlyle who records Wilkie’s being present at the birthday parties of Dickens’s friend and biographer John Forster on 2 April 1861 and 1866. See <https://carlyleletters.dukeupress.edu>. Again, neither event is mentioned in Wilkie’s known letters.

## **COUTTS BANK**

Wilkie opened his bank account at Coutts on 23 August 1860 with £300 of his first payment for the three-volume edition of *The Woman in White*. Coutts was in The Strand then as now but at a different location. Its address was 59 Strand where it stayed until 1904 after which it moved to its present site at 440 Strand, just a few doors from the office of Edmond Antrobus, the tea merchant at no. 446, where Wilkie worked for four hard years from 1841 to 1845. The illustrations show the building and the banking hall which would have been very familiar to Collins: he called there often as did Caroline Graves to cash cheques for housekeeping expenses.



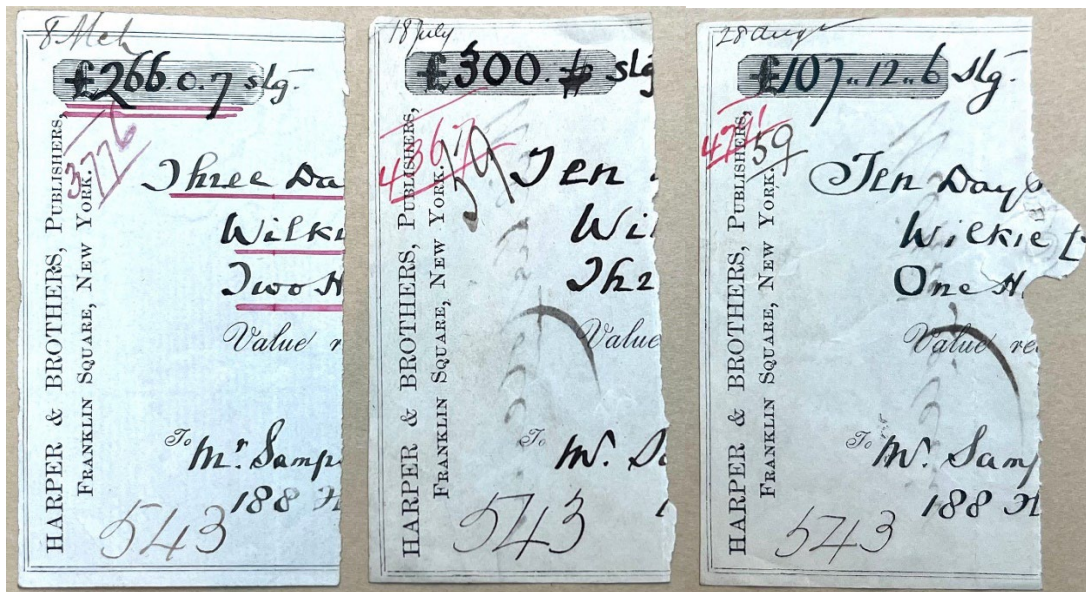


Coutts Bank at 59 The Strand, London in 1885 and the banking hall, c. 1900  
Both from Edna Healey, *Coutts & Co 1692-1992 – The Portrait of a Private Bank*, p. 296d

### **CHECK (CHEQUE) STUBS OR PAYMENT ORDERS**

A brief and hitherto unresearched entry in the massive Parrish Collection at Princeton University refers to three ‘check stubs’. Princeton librarian Brianna Cregle kindly found these items and sent us images of them.





Payable orders – Harper & Brothers to Wilkie Collins.  
 Parrish Collection, Princeton Library (AM18939 Box 15, folder 11)

In fact, they are not check (or cheque) stubs but torn payment orders – or Bills – from Harper & Brothers for Wilkie, paid via its agent the publisher Sampson Low, 188 Fleet Street, for stories which Harper published. Collins’s bank account at Coutts shows all three paid in on the dates indicated. They can be identified as

- 8 March 1875 – £266-0s-7d comprising a second payment for *The Law and the Lady* probably of £200, and royalties for earlier publications. Payable at three days.
- 18 July 1876 – a first payment of £300 for *The Two Destinies*, payable at ten days.
- 28 August 1877 – £107-12s-6d comprising a payment for the story *Percy and the Prophet* probably of £50, and royalties on earlier publications, payable at ten days.

To get a rough idea of current values multiply by 100. All three are countersigned on the reverse by Wilkie.

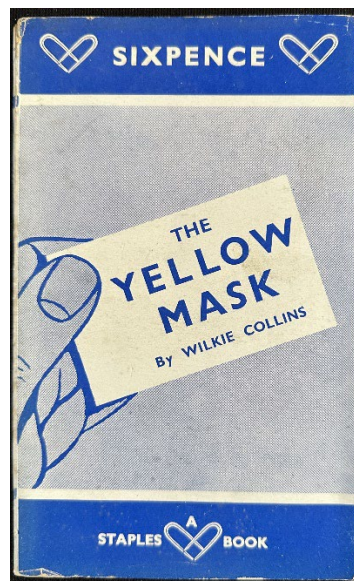
Why these three orders survived from the dozens that Wilkie must have received is a mystery and the curators of the Parrish Collection do not know where they came from. But they are fascinating examples of Victorian financial ephemera.

## RAMSGATE

The illustrated talk to the Ramsgate Society ‘A Tale of Two Towns: The Seaside Life of Wilkie Collins’ by Paul Lewis can still be downloaded from the Ramsgate Society website <https://bit.ly/Paul-Lewis-Two-Towns>.

## THE YELLOW MASK

The first English stand-alone edition of Wilkie’s short story has come to light. *The Yellow Mask* was first published in Dickens’s periodical *Household Words* in four parts in July 1855. A year later Wilkie republished it as one of the stories in *After Dark*. The story was immensely popular in the US where pirate editions proliferated. But it never appeared in Wilkie’s lifetime in a standalone edition in the UK. That had to wait until World War II when a medical publisher called John Bales & Staples branched out into paperback stories, presumably to capture the wartime market for reading material. The sixpenny edition in a blue banded cover ran to three printings between January and March 1941.



## MORE LETTERS

New examples of letters written by Wilkie Collins generally appear at auction or with dealers. But recently a few have been identified which had remained undiscovered in libraries and collections. The latest two are in the archives at Chatsworth, the seat of the Duke of Devonshire. Both relate to the gift to Wilkie in 1852 of a large, newly published lithograph portrait of the sixth Duke, William



Cavendish. Wilkie wrote to the Duke thanking him although only a summary of this letter survives. However, the full manuscript of a chatty letter thanking the Duke's musical director Charles Coote, who actually sent it and whom Wilkie knew well, is in the Chatsworth archive which kindly supplied copies. They will be published with more than 25 new discoveries around the turn of the year.

## **LARGE PRINT EDITIONS**

Recently available on ebay were large print editions of several Collins titles including *The Evil Genius*, 'My Lady's Money', *I Say No* and *Little Novels*. These are issued in English by the German publishing house Megali Verlag which specialises in reproducing historical works in large print to make reading easier for people with impaired vision. Several other titles are also available and much more cheaply from Amazon in either hard or soft covers.

## ***THE WOMAN IN WHITE IN ITALY***

Andrea Mosti writes from Italy that her small troupe of players has decided to stage the 1871 dramatic adaptation of *The Woman in White* at some time next year. More details as and when we have them.

## ***DROOD REVIVED?***

The distastefully weird pastiche *Drood* by Dan Simmons (see reviews 'speculative, unpleasant, overlong...rather horrid novel' mentioned in the Summer 2009 Newsletter on the Society's website) might be made into a TV series. The story has Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins as characters hunting for a mysterious ghostly figure through Victorian London's criminal hinterland. The website [deadline.com](http://deadline.com) revealed in March that Euro Gang Entertainment had done a deal with German writer-director Marco Kreuzpainter to produce and direct the series. Nothing has been heard of the idea since that original revelation. With a bit of luck, perhaps it will go the way of the proposed film in 2008 directed by Guillermo Del Toro which never saw a frame recorded.

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