



# *THE WILKIE COLLINS SOCIETY*

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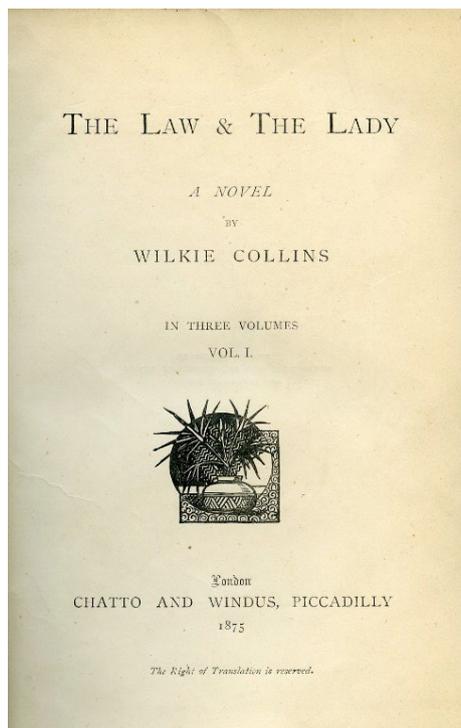
**Membership** Paul Lewis, 4 Ernest Gardens, Chiswick, London W4 3QU

## **NEWSLETTER**

## **SPRING 2025**

### *THE LAW AND THE LADY*

2025 is the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of *The Law and the Lady* one of Collins's better later novels first published in book form by Chatto & Windus during 1875. It had previously been serialised in *The Graphic* 1875 and in the USA in *Harper's Weekly*.



*The Law and the Lady* is essentially a detective story featuring one of Collins's resourceful female characters. It is an early if not the first full-length novel to feature a lady detective. There are also several similarities with the notorious trial of Madeleine Smith in 1857. These include the use of arsenic; its supposed benign use for cosmetic reasons; the use of suicide as a defence to murder; and the ambiguous Scottish Not Proven verdict.

Despite rather indifferent contemporary reviews, Chatto & Windus, who had become Collins's main publishers, issued *The Law and the Lady* in the standard three-volume book form of the time. They continued to publish the novel in all of their cheap one-volume editions in 1875 and well into the twentieth century. *The Law and the Lady* was also translated into several European languages including French, German, Italian and Russian.

### **THE CHARLES DICKENS MUSEUM**

The Charles Dickens Museum at 48 Doughty Street, London also has an anniversary to celebrate. It goes from strength to strength and is currently celebrating its centenary following on from this time last year the highly successful Wilkie Collins and Charles Dickens exhibition to mark Wilkie's bicentenary. The driving force behind this was the Director Dr Cindy Sughrue who has just stepped down after eight highly successful years in the role. The new director is Frankie Kubicki who has herself worked at the museum for several years. There is a full write-up on the museum's website.

### **TAVISTOCK HOUSE THEATRICALS**

A unique collection of watercolours and drawings of Wilkie's plays *The Lighthouse* and *The Frozen Deep* was sold by Bonhams auctioneers. The sketches are by Dickens's neighbour Nathaniel Powell (1813-1873) of the performances by Dickens and his family and friends in what he called 'The Smallest Theatre in the World' at his home Tavistock House in June 1855 and January 1857.

It is not clear whether any of the figures in the drawings depict Wilkie himself. Kathleen Tillotson, one of the editors of the Pilgrim edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens*, wrote in June 1984 to Powell's granddaughter – Miss Baker

who then owned them – that she thought one image (which looked as Wilkie did later in life when he had a beard) was not him but Frank Stone. That sketch depicted *Mr Nightingale's Diary*, the farce written in 1851 by Dickens and Mark Lemon, which was reprised to be staged after *The Lighthouse*. The Wilkie-like figure is shown here on the right. Mark Lemon is labelled on the left and Dickens correctly in the centre. But Wilkie's name above the righthand figure seems to relate to his authorship of *The Lighthouse* not the drawing itself. That sketch is also wrongly labelled 'Private Theatricals at Tavistock House 1857' when in fact the play was performed there in 1855 and not in 1857.

Writing to Wilkie about the plans to perform the plays Dickens wrote

My Dear Collins

I shall expect you tomorrow evening at Household Words.

I have written a little ballad for Mary—The Story of the Ship's Carpenter and the little boy, in the Shipwreck.

Let us close up with Mr. Nightingale's Diary. Will you look whether you have a book of it—or your part.

All other matters and things hereunto belonging, when we meet.

Ever Faithfully

CD

(to Wilkie Collins, 24 May 1855, *Pilgrim Letters*, Vol. VII, p. 628)

Wilkie played Lithers, the Landlord at the Water Lily public house.



The lot sold for £9600, including premium. It comes with a mass of provenance from Powell's descendants and a dozen or more other sketches of his.

### **WILKIE IN 'LONDON PARTICULAR'**

Wilkie featured in the November issue of 'London Particular,' the Newsletter of the Dickens Fellowship. It quoted from a recent article in the *Times* which in turn referred to the *Pall Mall Gazette* of January 1890. This had quoted Wilkie's comments on Dickens written in a copy of John Forster's *The Life of Charles Dickens*.

On the first page, where Forster proclaims "Charles Dickens, the most popular novelist of the nineteenth century", Collins adds: "after Walter Scott". Scott was one of Collins's 'three kings of fiction', along with Balzac and Fennimore Cooper – see Collins's letter [2182] to Miss R, 12 July 1883.

Wilkie ranked Dickens's works from worst to best. Barnaby Rudge was "the weakest book that D ever wrote". "No intelligent person could read Dombey and Son without astonishment at the badness of it". He considered *The Mystery of Edwin Drood* Dickens's "last laboured effort, the melancholy work of a worn-out brain". *David Copperfield*, regarded by many as Dickens's masterpiece, is simply "incomparably superior to Dombey", while *Oliver Twist* is a "wonderful book" held back by one defect: "the helplessly bad construction of the story". "The character of Nancy is the finest he ever did... That the same man who could create Nancy created the second Mrs Dombey is the most incomprehensible anomaly that I know of in literature." But at the top of the list was *Martin Chuzzlewit*, "in some respects the finest novel he ever wrote".

However, the main point of the mention in 'London Particular' was to make an appeal to readers which we are happy to repeat here. Forster's *Life* was sold at auction in 1890 and its whereabouts have been unknown since then. Now the Charles Dickens Museum is urging anyone with knowledge of its whereabouts to get in touch.

'London Particular' like the WCS Newsletter is always happy to receive any comments or contributions. In their case, you should contact Alison Gowans at [aligowans17@outlook.com](mailto:aligowans17@outlook.com).

## ALTERNATIVE DICKENS

A recent book casts a rather different light on Wilkie's great friend, Charles Dickens. Sometimes, biographies of Dickens veer towards hagiography. But *The Life and Lies of Charles Dickens* by Oxford academic Helena Kelly does exactly the opposite. She accuses him – backed up by 575 detailed footnotes – of making up and hiding things about his past, treating his wife abominably, and plagiarising plots and even parts of many of his best-known works. She also suggests that what he died of at the early age of 58 was something very different from the official diagnosis of a stroke – a condition he had kept secret for much of his adult life. And as the icing on the cake, she puts forward what she calls a 'plausible candidate' for the child which Dickens and Ellen Ternan are supposed by some to have had and for whom scholars have long searched.

Wilkie gets scant mentions – sometimes as the 'young buck' who tempts Dickens into 'bachelor wanderings' in the seedier parts of London and Paris, when the evidence from the letters of both of them is rather the other way round. But later she has a more serious accusation. In one of several sections on plagiarism she writes that a play called *Nobody's Child* by Watts Phillips which opened at the Surrey Theatre on 14 September 1867

“Featured a character falling into a ravine, a marvel of scenic art, according to the advertisements, a woman rescuing her lover with some unexpected abseiling skills, a missing will, and an uncle.” (Helena Kelly, *The Life and Lies of Charles Dickens*, London: 2023, p. 207).

She notes the similarities between that and *No Thoroughfare* especially the end of Act III where Marguerite is lowered on knotted ropes down the ravine, finds her lover Vendale on an icy ledge, and ultimately has him rescued.

Kelly did not seem to know when Dickens and Collins actually wrote *No Thoroughfare* which was around the time that *Nobody's Child* was first performed. Crucially, she did not know who had written which parts and said “the borrowing, if there had been any, might easily have been done by Collins rather than Dickens.” But she is wrong. The evidence is clear that the whole of that mountain rescue scene was written by Dickens. So, Collins – at least – is in the

clear. It is worth noting that Watts Phillip borrowed Wilkie's title for one of his own plays in 1864 called *The Woman in Mauve* – a sensation drama.

## **DICKENS AND THE LETTERS BURNING**

It is well known that Dickens burned all the letters he had received on a great bonfire at his home Gad's Hill on 3 September 1860. But the fact he continued to destroy them is perhaps not so well known. In several letters written in the 1860s letters he explained to friends seeking autographs why he had none. Possibly the last example of that before his death is to Dr James Muspratt on 5 June 1867

I have no autograph of Stansfield's left. I destroy all letters as I receive them, as the only safe way of keeping them out of print (*Pilgrim Letters* Vol. XI, p. 375)

Ironically, the work of publishing the letters which Dickens himself wrote to others continues to gather pace. There are now 14,142 known – a figure that corrects various estimates in the 12-volume Pilgrim edition of *The Letters of Charles Dickens* (OUP: 1965-2002). Another cache of perhaps 100 are in the queue to be published at dickensletters.com. Any member who would like a spreadsheet listing all the known letters and where they are published can get one from WCS secretary Paul Lewis – who has recently prepared it. Email paul@paullewis.co.uk.

## **THE LIGHTHOUSE - A NEWLY DISCOVERED EDITION IN FRENCH**

Dutch member, Pierre Tissot van Patot has once again discovered a new addition to Collins's overseas publications, this time for *The Lighthouse* first staged in England on 16, 18 and 19 June 1855 at Tavistock House with Charles Dickens and Wilkie Collins in leading roles.

*The Lighthouse* was never published in England until the edition by the WCS in 2013 with an introduction by Andrew Gasson and Caroline Radcliffe. It was however translated into French by Collins's friend Emil Forgues (1813-1883) who had been given a copy of the manuscript. It was first published as *Le Phare* in July 1856 in the Paris journal *l'Ami de la Maison*. It was subsequently included

with a specially written introduction by Collins in 1864 in *Une Poignée de Romans*, the French version of his collection of short stories *The Queen of Hearts*. This French edition was then used for a Dutch translation of the play as *De Vuutoren* in 1874 in *De Kerels*, a literary magazine published in Brussels.



Issue No 13 for 28 May 1904

Le Phare, No. 12, 21 May 1904

This newly discovered version, using the original translation, is therefore the third publication in French. It was issued in May and June 1904 in Volume 4 of *Les Lectures de la Semaine*, an obscure illustrated Paris periodical issued between 1901 and 1905.

*Le Phare* was announced in issue No. 11 for 14 May 1904 and published in five instalments: No. 12, 21 May 1904 pp. 284-287; No. 13, 28 May 1904 pp. 309-311; No. 14, 4 June 1904 pp.331-333; No.15, 11 June 1904 pp. 353-359; and No. 16, 18 June 1904 (this issue unavailable). The magazine can be seen at the French National Library located in Paris at the Arsenal Library in the Bastille district.

Only issues for 1905 are available online. Collins's introduction is missing from those issues examined but might have been included in Part 5. The interesting

illustrations are by Nelson-Diaz, a contemporary artist who regularly contributed to the magazine. Although the text was published three times in Paris, no performances in France have been found.

### **A FRENCH NEW MAGDALEN**

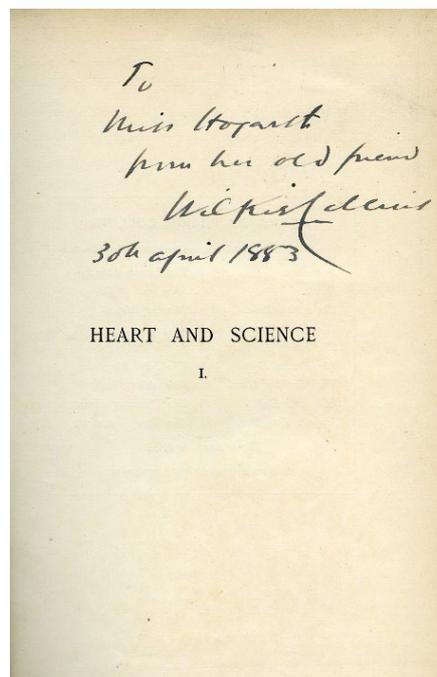
A free streaming service [tubi.com](https://tubi.com) has a French film from 2021 called 'Secret Name' adapted from *The New Magdalen*. The blurb says

A job as a Red Cross nurse in 1914 France becomes Nelie's ticket out of poverty, but her chance at wealth comes by stealing a dead woman's identity.

The credits confirm that the film is "librement adapté de Wilkie Collins The New Magdalen." The film is performed in French with English subtitles. Thanks to Leslie Katz for this information.

### **PRESENTATION OR INSCRIBED COLLINS BOOKS**

Until now the editors of the Wilkie Collins Letters have included as letters the presentation inscriptions on personal copies of his books that he gave to his friends and relatives. A good example is this one to Georgina Hogarth currently listed as letter [3369].



More and more of these have come to light and we now think they should be in a separate Appendix as presentation copies rather than letters. At the moment we

have around 40, a few of which are already in the Collected Letters – but are soon to be reassigned

So, if you have any signed Collins books – or know of any – which he has presented personally to someone please let Andrew Gasson know at his usual email address [apogee@apgee.co.uk](mailto:apogee@apgee.co.uk), preferably with an image of the inscription. We will be publishing them all in due course.

### **WILKIE ONLINE**

The New York Public Library has images of more than a million items in its collection freely available online. They include many images of Wilkie, some manuscripts, agreements with publishers, illustrations from his books, and images of numerous letters written by him to publishers. Find them at [digitalcollections.nypl.org](http://digitalcollections.nypl.org) search ‘wilkie collins’.

### **WILKIE IN HAMPSTEAD**

WCS member, Katherine Haynes, but perhaps better known for her supernatural connection with A Ghostly Company, notes a mention of Wilkie on the Talking Pictures television channel.

On Sunday 26th January, they showed a short film about Hampstead in 1936. When they got to Jack Straw's Castle [a famous local hostelry] there was mention of various famous people who had drunk there, including Wilkie Collins! It would appear that Collins was better known in the 1930s than he came to be later in the 20th century.

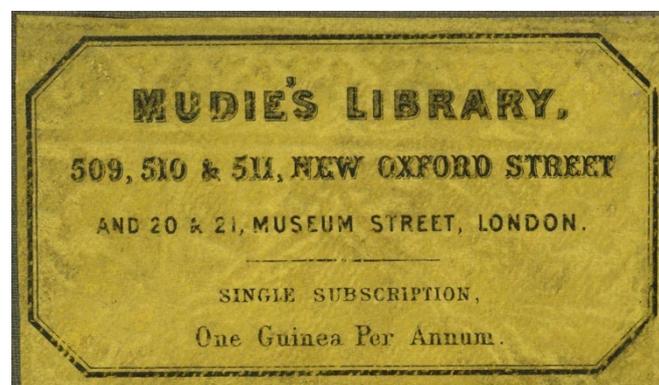
Other famous visitors include William Makepeace Thackeray, Bram Stoker and Charles Dickens who described it in a letter to John Forster

You don't feel disposed, do you, to muffle yourself up, and start off with me for a good brisk walk over Hampstead Heath? I know a good 'ous there where we can have a red hot chop for dinner, and a glass of good wine. (*Pilgrim Letters* Vol. I, p. 353)

Forster, in turn, also quotes it in his biography of Dickens, confirming it “led to our first experience of Jack Straw's-castle.” Forster (II, i, 93).

### MUDIE’S CIRCULATING LIBRARY

The major circulating library issuing Wilkie Collins books in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was Mudie’s Select Library of Oxford Street. A new study of the library’s work by Karen Wade of University College, Dublin has recently been published and updates an earlier book, *Mudie’s Circulating Library and the Victorian Novel* by Guinevere L. Griest published in 1970. This new work is a fascinating account of how Mudie supported and to an extent edited the reading habits of the 19<sup>th</sup> century as middle-class homes awaited the weekly or monthly ‘Mudie Box’. It sent out a thousand of them each week by rail all over the country. The annual subscription of one guinea (£1-1s or £1.05) was less than the price of buying one three-volume novel which cost a standard £1-10s-6d (£1.52). The study *Mudie’s Select Library and the Shelf Life of the Nineteenth Century Novel* can be downloaded free by searching ‘cambridge core mudies’ where you can also buy the paperback for £14.95.



A Mudie’s label affixed to the front cover of *The Queen of Hearts*, 1859

Wilkie gets few mentions in Wade’s book, but further research has found that 26 of his novels and the biography of his father, *The Life of William Collins, R.A.*, were available in Mudie’s January 1888 catalogue. It also offers bound editions of the books at prices ranging from 2s 9d to 4s each – or £3-6s to £4-16s the set – depending on the type of binding. They could also be bound on the premises ‘by careful and experienced workmen’ in ‘Ornamental Bindings’ suitable for ‘Drawing Room Tables...and for Wedding and Birthday Presents and School and

College Prizes'. The whole set of 24 titles could be had fully leatherbound with gilt edges for £10. A very grand prize!



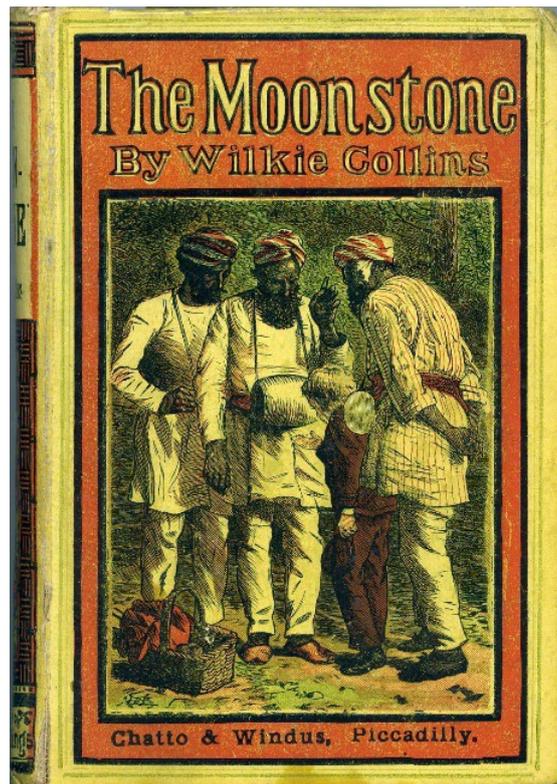
'Bound by Mudie' in a copy of *The Two Destinies* from 1891

Wilkie frequently complained about the stranglehold which Mudie had on the publishing world. It bought hundreds of copies of works as they came out and when the public interest lapsed sold them off at bargain prices. Its power was never diminished in his lifetime.

### **W. H. SMITH AND RAILWAY FICTION**

At the end of January W. H. Smith announced that it was selling its high street branches and all 480 have now been bought by the private equity group Modella Capital. It will rebrand them because W. H. Smith is keeping both the name and all its branches in hospitals and travel hubs such as ports, railway stations and the modern equivalent - airports. This takes W. H. Smith full circle back to its nineteenth century origins and would have been well known to Wilkie.

In the nineteenth century W. H. Smith was best known amongst the public for its railway bookstalls and sales of 'yellowbacks' otherwise known as railway fiction. These were cheap editions, the equivalent of today's paperbacks bound in strawboards with glazed yellow boldly illustrated covers. They were issued by most of the major publishers and usually priced at two shillings compared with five or six shillings for cloth bound copies. In Collins's case, although some were published by Sampson Low and Smith, Elder, twenty-nine titles were issued by Chatto & Windus well into the twentieth century.



Many nineteenth century editions in all formats are found with a W. H. Smith stamp on the front end-paper. The bookseller in combination with Mudie's lending library largely controlled the distribution of first editions. They also ventured into publishing and on 25 September 1867 Collins wrote to his mother:

Smith (the great railway bookseller) is in treaty for my copyrights in combination with Chapman & Hall. If we come to terms, having Smith interested in my books, will insure the pushing of them at every railway station in England.

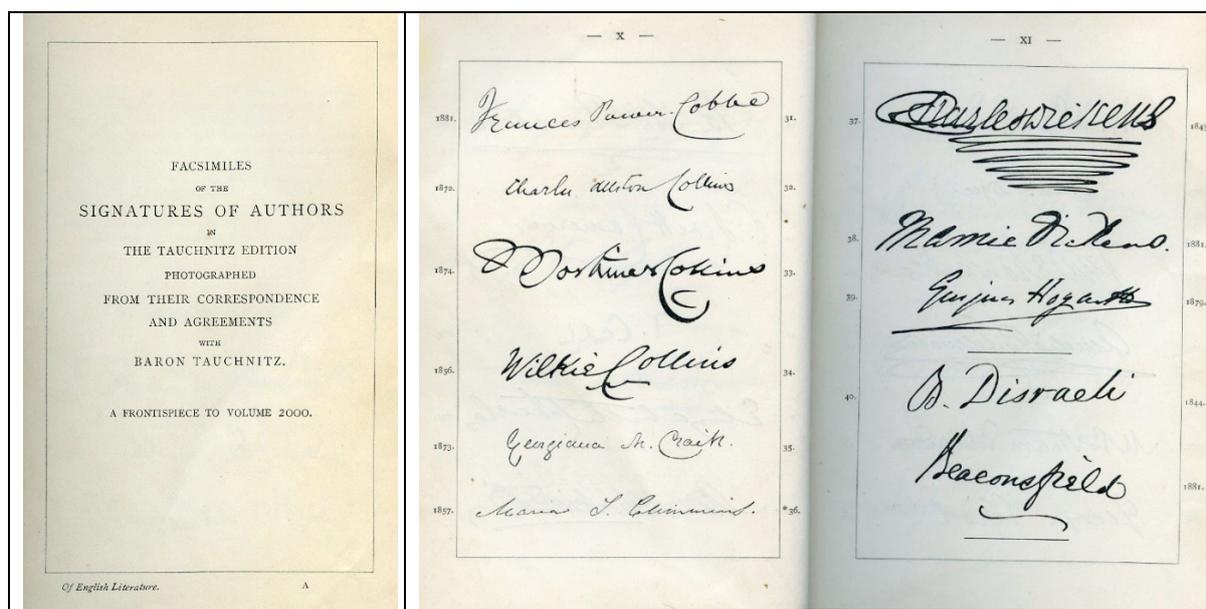
This didn't really come to fruition until 1873 when the collaboration of these two companies issued in hard back remainder copies of *The Dead Secret*, *My Miscellanies*, *The New Magdalen* and *The Frozen Deep*. W. H. Smith was no great friend to Wilkie since, in combination with Mudie's, they had ruined the sales of *Poor Miss Finch* by selling bound-up copies from the magazine serialisation rather than purchasing the Bentley book edition. Because of Smith and Mudie's undue influence Collins called them "these twin tyrants of literature."

## BERNHARD TAUCHNITZ

Travellers to continental Europe often purchased English language editions of their favourite writers published by Christian Bernhard Tauchnitz (1816–95). He founded his Leipzig publishing house in 1837 and quickly began to specialize in editions in English for a Continental audience. From around 1843 Tauchnitz began to ask British writers for permission and paid them long before international copyright conventions required him do so. Wilkie Collins was one of his most popular authors with 28 of his titles plus two of his collaborations with Charles Dickens and several of his short stories in reprints from *Household Words*. Import of these versions to England was not allowed, though of course many did leak back. Wilkie's accounts include numerous payments from Tauchnitz and he appears to have had a very cordial relationship with him.

Sadly, the Tauchnitz records were destroyed in World War II and only one letter from Wilkie to Tauchnitz exists in manuscript. Seven others, and three to his son Christian, are known from extracts published in a 1912 study of the Tauchnitz business by Carl Otto.

In 1881, to celebrate the publication of his 2000<sup>th</sup> volume, Tauchnitz sent a specially bound and personally inscribed copy to "Wilkie Collins Esq, with Baron Tauchnitz's kindest regards" in a volume with "Facsimiles of the signatures of authors in the Tauchnitz edition."



The signatures are set out in alphabetical order so that Wilkie's appears in distinguished company beneath that of Charles Collins and opposite Dickens.

The original MSs of 34 letters from Dickens to Tauchnitz were discovered in 1991 and have now been incorporated in the Dickens Letters Project. Sadly, the small horde of letters included none by Wilkie. One newly published letter from Dickens to Tauchnitz was written on 6 December 1856, just after Tauchnitz published his first book by Wilkie – *After Dark* in 1856. Dickens wrote to Tauchnitz on Wilkie's behalf about a foreign translation of the book. You can read the letter at [dickensletters.com](http://dickensletters.com).

The son of the man who made this discovery is Dr. Dietmar Böhnke of Leipzig University. He has edited a new book about Tauchnitz as a publisher *The Tauchnitz Edition...English Literature in Your Pocket*. There are only a few mentions of Wilkie. Perhaps the most interesting is a table showing he was only 17<sup>th</sup> in the number of volumes published by Tauchnitz. Mary Braddon was top and Dickens second. As a general guide to this German publisher it is very interesting but it costs a massive £140 from Palgrave Macmillan.

## **KENSAL GREEN CEMETERY**

Friends of Kensal Green Cemetery as usual have some interesting events planned for the summer:

On Saturday, 5 April: *I. K. Brunel and the Great Western Railway*. This is a special event, including a talk and book signing by Tim Bryan, author of *Iron Stone & Steam: Brunel's Railway Empire*. This will feature a guided tour and refreshments.

On Saturday, 21 June: *Brown's Hotel and Luxury Living Stories at Kensal Green Cemetery*. Another special event, exploring London's historic Brown's Hotel and notable figures connected to it. It includes a talk by Andy Williamson, the author of the book on this subject and a guided tour, visiting the memorials of the Brown family and other prominent hoteliers and famous personalities.

On Saturday, 9th August: *Joseph Locke and others - a Tour of Kensal Green Cemetery*: A guided walk, telling the stories of railway engineers and promoters buried here on the 220th anniversary of Joseph Locke's birth.

Full details are available on the FOKGC website: <https://www.kensalgreen.co.uk/> and booking can be made through Irina at [tours@kensalgreen.co.uk](mailto:tours@kensalgreen.co.uk). Irina led last year's excellent tour of Kensal Green to celebrate Wilkie's bicentenary.

### **FROM THE HEART OF EUROPE**

A rather unusual website called [fromtheheartofeuropa](http://fromtheheartofeuropa.com) gives one or two Collins mentions. It also looks at anniversaries in 50 year cycles 1825, 1875, 1925 etc. For 1875 it lists 10 books published in that year and rated according to 'Goodreads' and 'LibraryThing' as an estimate of how well known the book is. *The Law and the Lady* is number six in the list in company with titles by Louisa May Alcott, Anthony Trollope and Dostoevsky.

The website, in a different section, also discusses *The Moonstone* and quotes a paragraph from 'The First Period' in the book where Betteredge takes Penelope's advice "to set down what happened, regularly day by day." The website adds

What makes the book so memorable is that the story is told from many different points of view, and the first two are both very vivid – the old family servant, who believes that all wisdom can be found in *Robinson Crusoe*, and the crazy Christian relative, who annoys all the other characters. There is then a fine momentum which carries you through to the end.

### **DESERT ISLAND DISCS**

Mina Smallman is a campaigner for women's safety. Her two daughters Nicola Smallman and Bibaa Henry were murdered in a London park on 7 June 2020. Earlier this year she was Lauren Laverne's guest on *Desert Island Discs* on Radio 4 and her choice of a book to keep with her on the island was *The Woman in White*. She said "When I went back to college it was the English Literature text and it was the first time I had read anything like that. I loved it, so gripping. And it resonated with me on so many levels – dysfunctional relationships and everything." You can hear the episode on BBC Sounds – search desert island discs and look for 16 February 2025.

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

Andrea Mosti sends these publicity photographs from Italy. Her troupe is in the middle of a highly successful tour of *The Woman in White* at three separate venues in Tuscany this week. As she says: “We are very very excited for this play.”



**WALTER HARTRIGHT**  
*La donna in bianco*



**LAURA FAIRLIE**  
*La donna in bianco*



**CONTE FOSCO**  
*La donna in bianco*



**ANNE CATHERICK**  
*La donna in bianco*

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