

THE DISTRICT MESSENGER

The Newsletter of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London
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opinions expressed are the editor's unless noted otherwise

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The new phone number given in DM 170 for Pam Bruxner was wrong. The correct address and phone/fax number are: 2B Hiham Green, Winchelsea, East Sussex TN36 4HB (01797 222363). Shirley & John Purves have also moved. Their new address is: Lea House, Couches Lane, Woodbury, Exeter EX5 1HL (phone/fax 01395 232397).

The Poor Folk Upon the Moors have a new Secretary: Richard Streeton (Top Deck, Ridley Hill, Kingswear, Devon TQ6 0BY; phone 01803 752320).

In his engrossing new book *The Napoleon of Crime: The Life and Times of Adam Worth, The Real Moriarty* (HarperCollins, 77-85 Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8JB; £18.00) Ben Macintyre comes to grips with one of the great Victorian criminals. The tag of 'the real Moriarty' is something of an exaggeration, though Worth may have been one inspiration for the character (others may have been Charles S. Peirce, Simon Newcomb and Alfred Drayson). He was certainly a man of great character who led an extraordinary life. The story of his theft of Gainsborough's portrait of Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire is far more interesting than the more recent loss of Goya's Duke of Wellington. The Victorian underworld and *demi-monde* are lightly but authoritatively established for us, and Adam Worth is placed firmly against his proper background. Even without the possible Doylean connection, this book is well worth reading. Worth detested violence, and he seems to have been that rare thing, a major criminal who was not a villain. He did not have Sherlock Holmes as his nemesis, but he did have William Pinkerton.

In *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at the Cinema* (McFarland & Co. Inc., Box 611, Jefferson, NC 28640, USA) Scott Allen Nollen surveys the many movies derived from *all* Conan Doyle's work, as well as the occasions on which he himself has featured as a character, and the famous early sound film in which he explains his spiritualist beliefs and says a word or two about Sherlock Holmes. Mr Nollen's opinions are forthright and well expressed. It would have been nice to have a bit more even about such a stinker as the 1960 version of *The Lost World*, but he is to be thanked for pioneering coverage of the non-Holmes movies. The reader should be aware of some irritating errors, however. The hero of the play *Waterloo* is Gregory Brewster, not Napoleon Bonaparte, who was a different corporal altogether. Tonga and Small, in the Eille Norwood film of *the Sign of Four*, did not differ from their literary originals in dumping the Agra treasure in the Thames. The 1931 Gainsborough version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* actually survives complete, as we who have seen it are aware. The 'little chaps' in *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* are not dwarfs but midgets — there is a difference. Despite such careless mistakes, which should not

exist in a book retailing at £40.50, I do recommend *Sir Arthur Conan Doyle at the Cinema*. The British distributor is Shelwing Ltd, 4 Pleydell Gardens, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN.

Eddie Maguire's 3rd Sherlock Holmes story is *The Croydon Ghost* (Big House Books, 63 Wellington Road, Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 5EZ), an entertaining adventure, reminiscent of 'The Red-Headed League' — perhaps deliberately. Who or what is haunting the cottage newly occupied by the pretty Misses Fuller and their aunt? Dr Watson helps Holmes lay the ghost and capture a wanted man. The attractive cover features a Victorian print of Crown Hill and Church Street, in Croydon, with a couple of well-known figures superimposed. The 36-page booklet, a co-operative venture with Croydon Borough Council, costs £3.50, post-paid. Cheques should be payable to E. Maguire.

Buster Keaton's Sherlock Jr., edited by Andrew Horton, is just out from Cambridge University Press (The Edinburgh Building, Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 2RU). I have long held that Keaton was superior to Chaplin, and not just because his movies are actually funny, so I'm happy to recommend this collection of essays. *Sherlock Jr.* is coming to be recognised as one of the greatest film comedies, and equal to Keaton's own *The General*. The writers here explore his vaudeville background, his technical virtuosity, the way in which he parodies the figure of the Great Detective... The film-within-the-film is more than a burlesque: it tells us how audiences of the mid-1920s saw the cinematic Sherlock Holmes. Incidentally, I hadn't noticed that Sherlock's 'sharp assistant' is called Gillette — a nod to both William and King Gillette. *Buster Keaton's Sherlock Jr.* is in hardback at £30.00 (ISBN 0521481058) and paperback at £10.95 (0521485665).

Rupert Books have gone into publishing, with *A Full Report of a Lecture on Spiritualism Delivered by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* and *The Mystery of the Spot Ball*. The former is a facsimile of ACD's very first spiritualist pamphlet, and the latter an 1893 parody from the *Edinburgh Student*. Both booklets are edited, introduced and signed by our own Chairman, Richard Lancelyn Green, and are issued in a limited edition of 400 copies. The cost of each is £10.00 plus postage (Rupert Books, 58/59 Stonefield, Bar Hill, Cambridge CB3 8TE). Cheques, including US dollar checks, should be payable to R.D. Smith. (**Rupert's homepage is at http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/rupert_books and the e-mail address is rupert_books@compuserve.com.**)

Since the last DM, catalogues have arrived from **Forbes Gibb** (29 Falkland Street, Hyndland, Glasgow G12 9QZ); **The Black Cat Bookshop** (36-39 Silver Arcade, Leicester LE1 5FB); and **Nigel Williams Rare Books** (22 & 25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE). Forbes's *Catalogue Drebber* and the Black Cat listing both concentrate on Holmes and Conan Doyle. Nigel Williams has some ACD first editions, including the 1888 book edition of *A Study in Scarlet*, priced at £24,000...

David L. Hammer has produced a fifth Sherlockian travel book: *A Dangerous Game: Being a Travel Guide to the Europe of Sherlock Holmes* (Gasogene Books, Box 68308, Indianapolis, IN 46256, USA; \$19.95). Peter Blau says: 'The book is written with style and humor, and recommended.'

Peter also notes that the Brazilian pastiche *O Xango de Baker Street* by Jô Soares has already been translated into Spanish, German and Italian, with an English language version due in November from Pantheon, as *A Samba for Sherlock*. (*Cindy Stevens, who's working her way through the Italian translation, tells me that it's **very** odd, and probably not by design.*)

Also from Peter: '*The Strange Case of Mrs Hudson's Cat: And Other Science Mysteries Solved by Sherlock Holmes*, by Colin Bruce (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1997; 254 pp., \$23.00), offers explanations of the more important paradoxes of classical and modern physics (and resolutions for most of them), with a cast of characters that includes Holmes, Watson, Prof. Challenger, Summerlee, Mrs Hudson, and her cat; this is serious science, presented with style and imagination.'

More book news from America. This month Penguin issue a paperback of *Sherlock Holmes and the Red Demon* by Larry Millett. In October Forge will publish *Against the Brotherhood* by Quinn Fawcett, the first in a new series featuring Mycroft Holmes.

Douglas Johnstone reminds me of the audiotape series *More New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, produced by 221A Baker Street Associates from the 1946/47 radio programmes with Nigel Bruce & Tom Conway (PO Box 351453, Los Angeles, CA 90035-998, USA). There are 16 cassettes available, each containing two plays; they're issued by Brilliance Audio and available in Britain through Murder One. The scripts are by Denis Green & Anthony Boucher, responsible for earlier series featuring Basil Rathbone & Nigel Bruce, and the overall quality is very good. Only six of the 32 plays are directly adapted from the Canon, but they're all clever and entertaining. Tom Conway sounds remarkably like Rathbone. Brilliance Audio is at Box 887, Grand Haven, MI 49417, USA.

Brian Pugh writes to correct the prices given in DM 170 for the new lapel badge issued by the Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Establishment. The badge shows Arthur Conan Doyle head and shoulders, with the initials ACD above and the name CROWBOROUGH below. The price is £6.00 in the UK and £7.00 or US\$14.00 elsewhere. Any profits go to the ACD Memorial Fund. Payment can be made in UK currency, Postal Orders, bank cheques or Giro cheques. Bank cheques should be payable to B.W. Pugh. Dollar payments can be accepted in US cash only. Write to Brian Pugh at 20 Clare Road, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1PN.

The second *Sherlock Holmes Festival* at Crowborough was held over the weekend of the 5th & 6th July, while our Society's East Coast Expedition (planned four years ago) was taking place. There was coverage in both The Times and The Guardian. The former quoted the Festival's organiser as complaining that Crowborough gets too little attention compared to Baker Street — whose connection with Sherlock Holmes is merely fictional, whereas Crowborough's is not. Interesting logic! And it raises the question as to why Crowborough is celebrating a fictional character rather than a real author, with real ties to the town.

The **Irregular Special Railway Company** will take a Dunhill Museum and London Walk on Saturday 2nd August

(details from Antony J. Richards, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB2 4DX). On the same day the **Franco-Midland Hardware Company** and **Baker Street Branch Lines** will visit the East Kent Steam Railway (6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3RU). On the 3rd the FMHC and **The Glades of the New Forest** will tour Holmesian and Doylean sites near Crowborough.

Periodicals received. **Irregular Special Railway Company Newsletter** no. 20 (Antony J. Richards, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB2 4DX) (*full of information about Holmes and railways, including the news that the Spa Valley Line from Tunbridge Wells to Groombridge should be fully open later this year*). **Pleasant Places of Florida Communication**, #172 and #173 (Jeff & Wanda Dow, The Papers on the Sundial, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA) (*highly entertaining reports on the first Sunshine State Sherlockian Scion Symposium, plus good brief pieces on 'The Red Circle' and Holmes as a research scientist*).

3 Pipe Problem Plugs and Dottles, May/June 1997 (**Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem**, Gael Stahl, 1763 Needmore Road, Old Hickory, TN 37138, USA) (*an illuminating interview with that formidable Canadian scholar Chris Redmond, a report on the annual Sherlock Holmes/Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium at Dayton, and more besides*). **The Parallelogram**, May 1997 (**The Parallel Case of St Louis**, Joseph J. Eckrich BSI, 914 Oakmoor, Fenton, MO 63126, USA) (*an interesting sidelight on 'The Second Stain' by Gordon Speck, and yet more of PJA's awful verses — not so much Nash as M'Gonagall*).

The FMHC Memo no. 1 (**The Franco-Midland Hardware Company**, 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3RU) (*the Company's new newsletter, covering both its own activities and events in the wider Holmesian world*). Also **The Franco-Midland Hardware Company Annual Report 1997: The Dancing Men Contract** (*a collection of essays on 'The Dancing Men', covering aspects from the elementary to the profound, the best being Alan Saunders on the coded messages and Philip Weller on the topography; the latter convincingly identifies Ridling Thorpe Manor as The Grange at Bacton, but does not mention that Bernard Davies established this identification as long ago as 1984*). **The Torr**, no. 10 (**The Poor Folk Upon the Moors**, Eric Monahan, Highcliff, 14 Silver Bridge Close, Breadsands Park, Paignton, Devon TQ4 7 NW) (*Eric comes up with yet another likely inspiration for Prof. Moriarty — James T. Saward, alias Jim the Penman; Kevin O'Doherty and Vosper Arthur contribute other good essays*).

Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press, June 1997 (Peter E. Blau BSI, 3900 Tunlaw Road NW #119, Washington, DC 20007-4830, USA). (*The father of all Sherlockian newsletters*).

Peter notes *Fairy Tale: A True Story*, starring Peter O'Toole as Conan Doyle and Harvey Keitel as Houdini, is due for release in the autumn from Paramount. 'Viacom hopes it can do for fairies what Universal has done with dinosaurs, and the brand name "Fairies of Cottingley Glen" has been licensed to Playmates Toys, Gibson Greeting Cards and Random House.' (*You have been warned!*)

Roger Johnson