

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

Roger Johnson, Mole End, 41 Sandford Road, Chelmsford CM2 6DE

e-mail: roger_johnson@hotmail.com

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From *CADS 40* I learn of the deaths this year of two fine British actors. **Norman Rodway** was Dr Watson to Ronald Pickup's Holmes in Cecil Jenkins' 1990 BBC Radio 3 play *The Singular Case of Sherlock H and Sigmund F. Paul Daneman* played Watson in Gillette's play at the old Birmingham Rep in 1952, to Alfred Burke's Holmes; in 1968 he was the Sholto brothers in BBC TV's production of *The Sign of Four* with Peter Cushing and Nigel Stock. Richard Dalby notes the death on 31 October of **Jenny Laird**, whose long acting career included playing Mrs Hudson in *The Masks of Death* (1984), with Cushing and John Mills.

Barrie Roberts is one of the most reliable writers of new Sherlock Holmes stories, so I'm delighted to see his first novel *Sherlock Holmes and the Railway Maniac* newly reissued in an attractive paperback edition by Allison & Busby (Suite 111, Bon Marche Centre, 241 Ferndale Road, London SW9 BJ; £6.99). He captures the Watson-Doyle style better than most, and he knows his Canon and his history. It's astonishing that no one else seems to have thought of having Holmes investigate the anarchist outrages that culminated in the siege of Sidney Street in 1912. *Sherlock Holmes and the Railway Maniac* is an engrossing and intelligent read. I look forward to seeing the rest of Barrie Roberts' books in paperback.

Also from Allison & Busby, but in hardcover at £17.99, is *The Secret Diary of Dr Watson* by Anita Janda. It's not a new idea to present the uncensored truth behind the published writings, but other writers have used it to parody the Canon; Ms Janda gives us a generally plausible and always entertaining account of what really happened in those cases of the Severed Ears, the Phantom Hound, Black Jack of Ballarat and the rest. In addition she gives us a self-portrait of an intelligent, thoughtful, courageous and very likable man. It's right that Watson's name should be in the title: *The Secret Diary of Dr Watson* is his story, not Holmes's, and the better for it. I wonder if Ms Janda will be tempted to continue the diary . . . I almost hope not.

Just published at £8.99 by the Mercat Press (53 South Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1YS) is *McLevy: The Edinburgh Detective* by James McLevy. The splendid cover photograph of Edinburgh in the 1890s gives a slightly false impression, but it's the only wrong thing about this excellent book. McLevy, an Irishman with no love for the English, entered the city's police force in 1830, became a detective three years later, and wrote these memoirs in the 1850s. Quintin Jardine, who has written a foreword to this new edition, observes: 'McLevy was clearly a one-off, a character who would have trouble fitting into a modern police force, yet whose perception and knowledge of his streets and his subjects would have made him too valuable to be excluded from it.' This welcome new edition of his writings shows us the city into which Arthur Conan Doyle would be born in 1859 — but that's a bonus. *McLevy: The Edinburgh Detective* is a cracking good read.

Volume 11 of *The Shoso-in Bulletin* sums up the international nature of our great game, boasting as it does contributors from Japan, the USA, the UK, the Czech Republic, France, Denmark, Taiwan,

Switzerland, Brazil, Canada, Belgium, Russia, Italy and Spain! The names of John Hall, Hirayama Yuichi, Carolyn & Joel Senter, Stu Shiffman, Sébastien Le Page, Mia Stampe, Jean-Pierre Cagnat and Wladimir Bogomoletz alone should have the Sherlockian grinning happily. This latest addition to a distinguished series can be had for £9.00 post-paid from John Hall (20 Drury Avenue, Horsforth, Leeds LS18 4BR), or for \$12.00 plus postage from Classic Specialties (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA).

Watson's Weapons — For and Against by Dr Tim Healey is the latest publication of the Friends of Dr Watson. If you want to know what life was like for the British army medico in Afghanistan 120 years ago, it's all here. This 44-page A4 booklet costs £7.00 or \$14.00 to non-members (sterling cheques payable to Richard J. Stacpoole-Ryding; US dollars in cash, please), from Richard Stacpoole-Ryding, 14 Western Close, Letchworth, Herts. SG6 4SZ.

Over the years various pranksters have devised comic captions for Victorian illustrations, most of them genuinely funny, thank heaven. Eric Monahan's new 40-page booklet *Sherlock Holmes Illustrated, with Alternative Captions* stands up well, and would make a nice silly Christmas present — for a friend or for yourself. You can buy copies post-paid at £4.70 or \$8.95 from Highcliff, 14 Silver Bridge Close, Broadsands Park, Paignton, Devon TQ4 7NW.

Eric tells me that *Sayers on Holmes: Essays and Fiction on Sherlock Holmes*, published by the Mythopoeic Society (Joan Marie Verba, PO Box 1363, Minnetonka, MN 55346, USA) at \$9.50, is in stock at Crime In Store (14 Bedford Street, London WC2E 9HE) at £8.99.

On Thursday 13 December there'll be a sale of 'valuable printed books and manuscripts' at **Sotheby's** (34-35 New Bond Street, London W1A 2AA; phone 020 7293 5000), which will include various works by Arthur Conan Doyle as well as items from his library (among them Bram Stoker's *The Mystery of the Sea* inscribed to Sir Arthur 'from his old friend' the author), and several watercolours by Richard Doyle. These lots are 'the property of a great nephew of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle'. (*Any prizes for guessing which one?*) Viewing is on Sunday, Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday. Well worth a visit, I'd say.

There are new catalogues available from **Janus Books** (PO Box 40787, Tucson, AZ 85717, USA) and **Classic Specialties** (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA) — both with a good amount of Sherlockiana. Classic Specialties carry a lot besides books, of course.

CADS 40 is, as always with this splendid magazine, full of stimulating and entertaining articles about Crime And Detective Stories. Nothing specifically Sherlockian this time, but *CADS* is a must if you're at all interested in the field. The price is: UK £5.00; Europe £5.50; USA (airmail) \$10.00, (surface) \$9.00. Sterling cheques should be payable to G.H. Bradley; US payments should be in dollar bills. (Geoff Bradley, 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex SS7 1PA.)

Play the Game: Victorian and Edwardian Sporting Songs is a delicious CD of ditties on the subject of, well, just about every sport known to our great-grandparents — cycling, ruggie, boating, golf, billiards, soccer ... and huntin', shootin' and fishin'. Arthur Conan Doyle is represented as the author of 'A Hunting Morning', from his 1898 book *Songs of Action*. Listening to Ian Partridge, Peter Savidge and the Song & Supper Club, with Jennifer Partridge on piano, is like attending a really good smoking concert at an Edwardian country house — gorgeous! The CD is available at major record stores or

direct from the publishers, Just Accord Music (PO Box 224, Tadworth, Surrey KT20 5YJ) at £9.99 post-paid.

The recent, very entertaining BBC TV drama series *Murder Rooms* is just out on video. I need hardly remind you that these fictional mysteries deal with the friendship between the young Arthur Conan Doyle and his mentor Dr Joseph Bell — recreating them, in effect, as Watson and Holmes. Charles Edwards (who was, astonishingly, allowed to play the part clean-shaven) is pleasant enough as Conan Doyle, but it's Ian Richardson who's the real star of these films. He is quite superb as Dr Bell — authoritative, coldly scientific, but humane. The plots, particularly of *The White Knight Stratagem*, are elegant and ingenious (though *The Patient's Eyes* does tend to give the impression that Conan Doyle must have been incapable of inventing a character or a situation, instead drawing everything from his own experience). The supporting casts are impressive — John Sessions, Rik Mayall, Annette Crosbie, Anton Lesser, et al. And by golly, the films look good. The four *Murder Rooms* videos — *The Patient's Eyes* (IMC390), *The Photographer's Chair* (IMC391), *The Kingdom of Bones* (IMC393) and *The White Knight Stratagem* (IMC394) — cost £12.99 each, or £34.99 for the boxed set. Quite a saving!

BBC Learning will shortly release three videos from the Beeb's archives: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* with Jeremy Brett, *Count Dracula* with Louis Jourdan, and — ta-da! — *The Hound of the Baskervilles* with Peter Cushing and Nigel Stock. These are intended for schools rather than home use, and it looks as if they'll be in PAL format only. There'll be quite small quantities, and they won't be as cheap as home videos, but individuals will be able to buy copies. The cost will be £19.99 per video, plus postage (in the UK) of £1.50 for one video and £2.50 for two or three. Or — a special offer — buy two of the three titles for £35.00 all in. You'll have to order direct from Video Offer, BBC Learning, Room A3022, 80 Wood Lane, London W12 0TT, and cheques or postal orders should be payable to BBC Worldwide. Or you can e-mail Gavin Collinson at gavin.collinson@bbc.co.uk with credit card details. If these releases are successful, it's probable that the rest of the 1968 Cushing series will follow, and perhaps more BBC Holmes.

Look out for *The Lost World* on BBC TV and *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* on BBC Radio 4. (*There's a lot of the BBC in this issue, isn't there?*)

Real Victorian pantomime thrives at the famous Players' Theatre, under the Arches at Charing Cross — rhyming couplets, marvellous puns and all. This year's panto, running until 10 February, is *Aladdin, or The Wonderful Scamp*. The Players' is a club, but you don't have to be a member to attend the panto or the regular Late Joys music hall — and it's probably the best value of any West End theatre. Call the box office on 020 7839 1134.

The Players' has a very nice restaurant, but so has the *Sherlock Holmes*, which is just a couple of minutes' walk away in Northumberland Street. The pub does excellent beer as well, and of course it houses the memorabilia originally collected for the Sherlock Holmes Exhibition at Abbey House in 1951. The restaurant offers a grand view of Holmes and Watson's sitting-room, which has been decorated for Christmas (by Mrs Hudson, we presume). You can book lunch or dinner on 020 7930 2644 — or just call in for a drink.

Some more ideas for treating yourself (or a friend) this Christmas. To provide access to the material in the first 40 issues, the publisher has issued *Sherlock Holmes: The Detective Magazine — The Electronic Archive* on CD-ROM in a limited edition of 100 copies at just £39.99. Everything's there, pictures and all, in full colour. It's not perfect (the indexes list me more often than not as 'Robert Johnson'), but it is very easy to use, and very helpful. I think it's well worth the selling price. Order from the Admin. Dept, PO Box 100, Chichester, West Sussex PO18 8HD. **The Baker Street Irregulars** have issued a CD-ROM edition of the complete *Baker Street Journal* at \$100.00 plus \$10.00 postage outside the USA or \$5.00 within the USA (Leslie Klinger at 2029 Century Park East, Suite 3290, Los Angeles, CA 90067, USA; e-mail lsklinger@home.com).

And Phil Attwell points out that Choices Direct (PO Box 190, Peterborough PE2 6UW; phone 01733 232800; e-mail orders@choicesdirect.co.uk) offer the complete BBC Radio *Sherlock*

Holmes, with Clive Merrison & Michael Williams, as a boxed set of 36 cassettes with Bert Coules's book, at £112.50.

It must be the Silly Season. According to the Torquay Herald Express for 2 November, Rodger Garrick-Steele now accuses Arthur Conan Doyle of murdering Charles Dawson — to cover up his (ACD's) perpetration of the Piltown hoax. What next — the invasion of Poland?

The Harpooners of the Sea Unicorn will talk about 'The Blue Carbuncle' after dinner on 15 December (Michael E. Bragg, Box 799, St Charles, MO 63302-0799, USA).

The Annual Dinner of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London will be held at the House of Commons on Saturday 5 January. The Guest of Honour will be the Commissioner of the City of London Police, Perry Nove, QPM. The previous evening there'll be a Club Night at the New Commonwealth Club in Northumberland Avenue, to which members, prospective members and their guests are welcome to turn up any time between 6.00 and 9.00 pm. On the day after the dinner there will be the now-traditional 'hair of the dog' get together at lunchtime, at the Royal Commonwealth Society.

The same day **The Illustrious Clients** will hold their Victorian Dinner in Indianapolis (details from Steven T. Doyle, 540 West Sycamore Street, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA), and there'll be a joint meeting in Winchester of **The Franco-Midland Hardware Company** and **The Glades of the New Forest** to investigate the bibliography of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3RU). On 11 January, the Annual Dinner of **The Baker Street Irregulars** will take place in New York, as will the Baskerville Bash. Information about **The Baker Street Irregulars** can be had from Michael Whelan (7938 Mill Stream Circle, Indianapolis, IN 46278, USA). There's a web page for the Baskerville Bash at www.baskervillebash.org, or write to P.J. Perry (346 East 87th Street, #4-A, New York, NY 10128-4944, USA).

The Poor Folk Upon The Moors will enjoy their AGM and Annual Lunch at the *Globe Hotel*, Topsham on 26 January. David Stuart Davies will be guest speaker (details from Shirley Purves, Lea House, Couches Lane, Woodbury, Exeter EX5 1HL). On 3 February, **The Franco-Midland Hardware Company** and **The Baker Street Branch Lines** will meet in Salisbury to investigate the London & South-Western Railway route from London to Dartmoor (6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3RU). The birthday meeting of **The Northern Musgraves** will be held on 9 February, and among the topics for discussion will be *The Valley of Fear* (Anne Jordan, Fairbank, Beck Lane, Bingley, West Yorkshire BD16 4DN). At their dinner meeting on 16 February **The Illustrious Clients** will discuss 'The Abbey Grange' (Steven T. Doyle, 540 West Sycamore Street, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA).

Periodicals received. *The Formulary*, December 2001 (**The Friends of Dr Watson**, Brian Scrivener, 94 Reigate Avenue, Sutton, Surrey SM1 3JJ). *The Camden House Journal*, November 2001 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *The Illustrious Clients News*, November 2001 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T. Doyle, 540 West Sycamore Street, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Communication*, November/December 2001 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Jeff & Wanda Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA). *The School Report*, Winter Term 2001 (**The Priory Scholars**, Horace L. Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY).

And the invaluable newsletter *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, November 2001 (Peter E. Blau, 3900 Tunlaw Road NW #119, Washington, DC 20007-4830, USA).

I'll be taking a break now until around the end of January, so Jean and I wish everybody

**THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE
SEASON!**

Roger Johnson