

# The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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Within the last few weeks we have suffered several losses.

**Stratford Johns** will be remembered as Charlie Barlow in *Z Cars*, *Softly Softly*, *Barlow at Large* and the *Jack the Ripper* special that inspired the Sherlock Holmes movie *Murder by Decree*. He also played the Chief Commissioner in John Cleese's spoof *The Strange Case of the End of Civilisation as We Know It*. **Eve Titus** wrote the delightful *Basil of Baker Street* stories, which inspired one of the best Disney cartoons of the past twenty years; in 1993 she was invested into the Baker Street Irregulars as 'Young Master Rucastle'.

**Barry Foster** was another great detective for British TV, Nicholas Freeling's Van der Valk, and he played Sherlock Holmes in a good BBC radio series in 1978, with David Buck as Watson. Foster wryly attributed much of his success to being frequently mistaken for Jon Pertwee, Keith Barron and **John Thaw** — and with a precious irony Thaw died just ten days later, aged only 60. He also achieved fame as a TV detective, or rather two: Jack Regan of *The Sweeney*, and Detective Chief Inspector Endeavour Morse. And of course he was a superb Jonathan Small in Granada's production of *The Sign of Four*.

**Chuck Jones** was one of the great masters of movie animation, directing classic exploits of Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck, Porky Pig, the Road Runner, Wile E. Coyote, and Tom & Jerry. Peter Blau notes that the Academy Award tribute at the presentation of his fourth Oscar in 1996 included a clip from his Sherlockian parody *Deduce You Say!* Finally, **Spike Milligan** was a man who truly deserved the title of Comic Genius. A regular character in his long-running and hugely influential radio series *The Goon Show* was a seedy incompetent villain named Moriarty, and his 'Q' series for BBC TV included a typically loony Holmes parody. Four years ago he sent up Holmes's greatest case something rotten in *The Hound of the Baskervilles According to Spike Milligan*, which made up for his part in Peter Cook & Dudley Moore's movie travesty of the story.

In reporting the awards made at the BSI dinner in January I neglected to mention the unique Silver Penguin Award (a 1930s cocktail shaker) presented to **Jon L Lellenberg** for his superb *Baker Street Irregulars History Series*. (\*I confess with shame to not recognising Jon at the dinner, though we've been friends for over 30 years — he's shaved off his moustache and looks quite different!\*)

**The Northern Musgraves** honoured me with the Northern Musgrave Crown at last month's birthday lunch in Huddersfield — the sixth Crown, I think, to be awarded.

The March issue of *Book and Magazine Collector* (43-45 St Mary's Road, Ealing, London W5 5RQ; £3.00) features a very good 17-page article by Norman Wright & David Ashford about *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. The writers had help from Phil Woolley of the **Black Cat Bookshop** (90 Charles Street, Leicester LE1 1GE).

Nick Utechin has seen Alan Barnes's excellent *Sherlock Holmes on Screen* (see DM 218) priced at £9.95 in a chain called British Bookshops & Sussex Stationers. That's a saving of £8.00!

There are recent catalogues from **Nigel Williams Rare Books** (22 & 25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE; [nwrrarebook@tcp.co.uk](mailto:nwrrarebook@tcp.co.uk)), and **Rupert Books** (58/59 Stonefield, Bar Hill, Cambridge CB3 8TE; [sales@rupert-books.co.uk](mailto:sales@rupert-books.co.uk)). Rupert's catalogue is also online at [www.rupert-books.co.uk](http://www.rupert-books.co.uk).

Those who have ordered the BBC video of the Peter Cushing *Hound of the Baskervilles* will have realised that there's some delay in sending copies out. Unfortunately I've been unable to get any response from Gavin Collinson to find out what's happening! My apologies for that — I'll keep trying, as I think the video and DVD will be worth the wait.

Meanwhile you should check [www.the-mausoleum-club.org.uk](http://www.the-mausoleum-club.org.uk), a website devoted to British archive TV — shows that deserve to be repeated or released on video. Both the Peter Cushing series and the preceding series with Douglas Wilmer receive a gratifying amount of coverage, in the form of perceptive reviews, transmission details and scans from contemporary issues of the *Radio Times*. It's quite fascinating.

John Hine Studios (2 Hillside Road, Eggars Hill, Aldershot, Hants. GU11 3NB) make a series of attractive miniature buildings of Victorian London, and as accessories they've issued various tiny figures designed by Bob Russell & Andrew C. Stadden. One set of these *London by Gaslight* figures consists of Jack the Ripper, Holmes & Watson and Woman with Bottle. Very good they are too.

*The Hound of the Baskervilles* (Verglas Music, PO Box 19, Virginia Water, Surrey GU25 4YE) is a new CD in the tradition of Jeff Wayne's *War of the Worlds*, a second collaboration by Clive Nolan & Oliver Wakeman, following their successful 1999 *Jabberwocky*. The spoken narration by the excellent Robert Powell paraphrases and condenses sections of Conan Doyle's text, and the atmospheric songs are well performed by the likes of Ashley Holt, Bob Catley, Paul Allison and Tracy Hitchings. The backing band, led by Nolan & Wakeman, is equally distinguished. I've sometimes wondered what a rock music take on Sherlock Holmes would sound like, and I'm glad to say that it's pretty damn' good!

Look out for a recently completed CD recording of *Silver Blaze* from One Voice productions, which should soon be available from Amazon.com and other sources. The one voice is that of David Ian Davies, an English actor long resident in the United States, whose vocal versatility is very evident in his exciting reading of one of Sherlock Holmes's greatest cases. (\*David Ian Davies is, as far as I know, no relation to David Stuart Davies, though he was born in Huddersfield.\*)

Four of the five *Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* recently broadcast on BBC Radio 4, are available on a double cassette, but as I haven't yet seen a copy I can't tell you which four. What I can say is that they're all powerful tales whose characters reveal the depths and the heights of humanity. Non-Canonical Holmes stories are something fairly new to British radio, though they're long established in America. Bert Coules's writing and the acting of Clive Merrison, his new Watson Andrew Sachs, and the distinguished supporting casts raise these dramas to a higher level than the enjoyable puzzles that Basil Rathbone & Nigel Bruce encountered.

Listen2books (Jersey JE1 1LB; [www.listen2books.co.uk](http://www.listen2books.co.uk)) offers a mail order service to those who can't by audiobooks locally. The current catalogue includes *The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes* read

by Christopher Lee, and the four-volume *Best of Sherlock Holmes* — the radio series with John Gielgud & Ralph Richardson.

Nick Utechin reports finding at Murder One a video from Orbit Media (no address to hand) featuring two episodes from the 1954-5 TV series with Ronald Howard & Howard Marion-Crawford as Holmes & Watson: *The Case of the Violent Suitor* and *The Case of the Impromptu Performance*. The 60-minute video costs £10.99.

New at **The Sherlock Memorabilia Company** (230 Baker Street, London NW1 5RT; phone 020 7486 1426; e-mail [sales@shmc.demon.co.uk](mailto:sales@shmc.demon.co.uk)) is the first in a superb set of hand-made and hand-painted statuettes by Jonathan Dewar, limited to 250 copies. 'Awaiting the Hound' is a 12½" figure of Sherlock Holmes on Dartmoor. By the time this reaches you the second figure, the Hound itself, will probably be ready. Eventually there'll be half a dozen figures whose bases fit together, making a dramatic whole. They'll be available either in bronze effect or fully coloured — my preference is for the latter. They don't come cheap, but they are rather beautiful.

**The Sherlock Memorabilia Company** also stocks Clive Nolan & Oliver Wakeman's *Hound of the Baskervilles* CD.

Ian R Thomson has painted a striking picture called 'Teller of Tales', which, rather than being a straightforward portrait of Arthur Conan Doyle, features his photograph, on a desk with various of his books, pictures of his family, and the tools of his trade. 'Teller of Tales' is available as a numbered limited-edition print at £45.00 each (\$64.00 or 73 euros) from Great Scot, 278 Holburn Street, Aberdeen AB10 6DD. Cheques should be payable to Great Scot.

At the Helmsley Arts Centre (phone 01439 771700), about 20 miles north of York, on Saturday 20 April, you can see Roger Llewellyn as Holmes in David Stuart Davies's play *Sherlock Holmes — The Last Act!* Critics have said: 'This is the finest, most fully realised one man show I've ever seen,' 'Davies' script is barbed and witty, flecked like marble with poignant insight,' and 'The finest interpretation of Doyle's hero.' I'm in full agreement: both play and actor are superb. If you can't get to Helmsley, do look out for *Sherlock Holmes — The Last Act!* near you.

Our Swiss friend Marcus Geisser is still working for the International Red Cross, and has recently relocated from Burma to Siam — sorry, from Myanmar to Thailand. He is interested in contacting Sherlockians in that country who would like to help found a Sherlock Holmes Society of Thailand. He adds: 'Moreover, material about Thai translation is also most welcome.' Sherlockian residents of Thailand should contact Marcus Geisser at ICRC, 36 Sirimangkalajarn Road, Soi 11, Tambon Suthep, Muang District, Chiang Mai 50200, Thailand — [marcus\\_geisser@hotmail.com](mailto:marcus_geisser@hotmail.com).

Two of France's, and the world's, leading Sherlockians, Alexis Barquin and Thierry Saint-Joanis, have launched an independent website, *The Who's Who of the Sherlock Holmes Societies*. 'So far more than 550 photos are available from more than 344 active societies from 23 different countries. There are the society contacts, a short history, address, the contact e-mail and the website URL. It is hoped this site will help Sherlockians and Holmesians put faces to names.' You'll find the *Who's Who* site at [www.sh-whoswho.com](http://www.sh-whoswho.com).

Following the successful game against the Wodehousians in June, **The Sherlock Holmes Society of London** has plans for a number of weekend cricket matches next summer, to be played to 1895 rules. (\**Challenges have been made by the Gentlemen of Essex CID and by the Old Dagonians, alumni of the school where Martin Dakin taught.*\*) Prospective players should please contact Peter Horrocks at [minuetter@aol.com](mailto:minuetter@aol.com).

Sir Richard Parsons will talk about 'Sherlock Holmes On Her Majesty's Service' at our own society's next meeting on 20 March.

It's not strictly Sherlockian, but we have it on George MacDonald Fraser's authority that Holmes and Flashman's paths crossed — the AGM of **The Flashman Society** will be held at the Falstaff Hotel, Leamington Spa on 16 March. The days events will commence at 11.00 am and continue till late! (Get details from Max Wormald at [m.wormald@ntlworld.com](mailto:m.wormald@ntlworld.com).)

**The Sound of the Baskervilles** will meet on 11 March to discuss 'The Three Garridebs' (contact the group via David Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8981, USA; website [www.geocities.com/soundofthebaskervilles](http://www.geocities.com/soundofthebaskervilles)). The topic at the 16 March meeting of **The Sydney Passengers** will be 'Wisteria Lodge' (Bill Barnes, 19 Malvern Avenue, Manly, NSW 2095, Australia). On 30 March **The Three Garridebs** will discuss *The Valley of Fear* (Dante M. Torrese, 11 Chestnut Street, Ardsley, NY 10502-1001, USA).

Our society's next informal club night will be on 5 April at the Royal Commonwealth Society, 18 Northumberland Avenue — very near the Sherlock Holmes pub. All members, prospective members and guests are welcome (the next will be on 3 May). **The Poor Folk Upon the Moors** plan a formal dinner that same day to celebrate Holmes's return after the hiatus (Vosper Arthur, Spynishlake, Doddiscombsleigh, Exeter EX6 7PR). Roger Llewellyn has accepted the post of president of **The Deerstalkers of Welshpool**, the first Sherlockian society in Wales; the meeting on 6 April will precede a talk by Brian Pugh, Curator of the Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Establishment (Roy Upton-Holder, Baskerville, 146 Little Henfaes Drive, Welshpool SY21 7BA). Happy birthday to **The Occupants of the Empty House**, who'll celebrate their Silver Jubilee on 12-13 April in Carbondale, Illinois, with a host of events including the John Bennett Shaw Memorial Library Raffle (Debbie Tinsley, P.O. Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA).

Looking ahead a bit, the annual Birthday Lunch of **The Margery Allingham Society** will be held on 18 May at the University Women's Club in Mayfair; the guest speaker this year will be the distinguished novelist Andrew Taylor (Pamela Bruxner, 2B Hiham Green, Winchelsea, East Sussex. TN36 4HB). The Annual General Meeting of **The Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Establishment** on 22 May — Sir Arthur's birthday — will follow the laying of a wreath at Montargis Terrace in Crowborough (Brian Pugh, 20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN).

Periodicals received. *The Serpentine Muse*, Spring 2002 (**The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes**, Susan Z Diamond, 16W603 Third Avenue, Bensenville, IL 60106-2327, USA). *Communication*, January/February 2002 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Jeff & Wanda Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA). *The Camden House Journal*, February 2002 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *3 Pipe Problem Plugs and Dottles*, November 2001/January 2002 (**The Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem**, Gael Stahl, 1763 Needmore Road, Old Hickory, TN 37138, USA).

*The School Report*, Spring Term 2002 (**The Priory Scholars**, Horace L Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY). *Ineffable Twaddle*, March 2002 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8981, USA). *Sherlockiana*, no. 1, 2002 (**Sherlock Holmes Klubben i Danmark**, Mia Stampe, Hellebækgade 19, 3.tv. 2200 Kobenhaven N, Denmark) (\**Mia Stampe will bring a group of Danish Sherlockians to London from 23 to 26 May, and they will attend our society's meeting on 23 May. If you would like to join them on their activities, please contact Mia at [stampe@dsri.dk](mailto:stampe@dsri.dk) or Peter Horrocks at [minuetter@aol.com](mailto:minuetter@aol.com).*\*) *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, Winter 2001 — worth waiting for.

And of course the invaluable newsletter *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, December 2001, January 2002, and February 2002 (Peter E. Blau, 3900 Tunlaw Road NW #119, Washington, DC 20007-4830, USA).

*Roger Johnson*