

# The DISTRICT MESSENGER



## THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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I give such addresses and prices as I have; if I don't provide details of importers or agents, it's because I don't have those details.

Actor and singer **John Gower**, fondly remembered by habitués of the Players' Theatre, died on 1 August, aged seventy-three. In 1990 he played the improbably named Count Giddings in the television movie *Sherlock Holmes and the Leading Lady* with Christopher Lee. **John Barber**, who died 2 December, aged ninety-three, was a distinguished theatre critic, who also worked as a script editor for MGM and for the BBC, including time on the 1968 *Sherlock Holmes* television series with Peter Cushing. At the age of twelve **J N ('Jerry') Williamson** founded the Illustrious Clients of Indianapolis, and in 1950 he was invested into the Baker Street Irregulars as 'The Illustrious Client'. He became a notable author of horror stories, and died earlier this month, aged seventy-three.

Al Gregory points out that **John Fowles** (see the brief obit in DM 257) included at least eight references to Sherlock Holmes in his novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman*.

Our old friend George Welch continues to take an interest in Sherlock Holmes and in the Society, though his health forbids him to travel. He welcomes letters and cards sent c/o his brother, Mr A J Welch, 48 Vaughan Road, Chorlton-cum-Hardy, Manchester M21 0YL. Mail addressed to George at Warwick Court will *not* reach him.

There have been several attempts to write the life of the great detective. The first was W S Baring-Gould's *Sherlock Holmes of Baker Street* — still the most popular despite its romantic flights of fancy (or perhaps because of them). *Sherlock Holmes: The Unauthorized Biography* by Nick Rennison (Atlantic Books, Ormond House, 26-27 Boswell Street, London WC1N 3JZ; £14.99) is less sensational and sentimental, and a good deal cleverer. Mr Rennison clearly knows his Victorian history and his Sherlock Holmes. I've never been wholly convinced that Holmes was a Yorkshireman, but I like this sober account of a lonely childhood at Hutton-le-Moors (no, it's not listed in *Bartholomew's Gazetteer*, but it has a reality that's lacking in Baring-Gould's 'My Croft'). In fact, Mr Rennison's key note throughout is believability. Here we have a realistic explanation of the detective's continuing duel with Professor Moriarty, and of his activities during the Great Hiatus. Naturally he is shown to be involved with historical persons and events, but always in a credible way. Holmesians have often wondered why there is no record of any investigation by Holmes into the Whitechapel murders of 1888; many fanciful theories have been advanced, but Nick Rennison gives us a thoroughly acceptable reason. The conclusion of the biography is bleaker than we might like, but it emphasises how Holmes the legend had already overtaken Holmes the man. *Sherlock Holmes: The Unauthorized Biography* is both well written and well presented. Whether Mr Rennison's book is fact, fiction or speculation, it has inspired me to look freshly at the accounts in the Canon and at their central figure.

*Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Mission* by Eddie Maguire (Breese Books, Baker Street Studios Ltd, Endeavour House, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB2 4DX; £7.50) is an engaging tale of

espionage and skulduggery, the equivalent of a serial at the Saturday Morning Pictures, where you can't wait to find out what happens next. You'll have to wait, though, because having taken Holmes and Watson to Italy on the trail of Russian revolutionaries Mr Maguire will continue the story in a second volume, *Sherlock Holmes and the Bolshevik Plot*. Till 1 January you can buy *The Secret Mission* from the publisher and get Eddie Maguire's *Sherlock Holmes and the Tandridge Hall Mystery* at half price: a total of £11.25, including postage.

*Graphic Classics: Arthur Conan Doyle* (Eureka Productions, 8778 Oak Grove Road, Mount Horeb, WI 53572, USA; \$11.95) is a curious and fascinating collection of comic-strip adaptations, drawn from pretty much the whole range of Conan Doyle's work. There are two Sherlock Holmes stories, one each of Brigadier Gerard and Captain Sharkey, 'The Los Amigos Fiasco', 'The Great Brown-Pericord Motor', 'The Ghosts of Goresthorpe Grange' (otherwise 'Selecting a Ghost'), 'A Parable' and the poem 'Master'. The last two brief pieces are complete, but the others are adapted, using a good amount of the original text. Each is illustrated by a different artist, so the styles are as varied as the stories themselves. There's a confidence and vivacity about the book that's quite a distance from the old 'Classics Illustrated' series. The book can be bought on-line at [www.graphicclassics.com](http://www.graphicclassics.com).

As I mentioned in DM 257, Black Coat Press (Hollywood Comics.com, LLC, PO Box 17270, Encino, CA 91416, USA; [www.blackcoatpress.com](http://www.blackcoatpress.com)) has published an English translation by Manuella Chevalier of *La Ligue des Héros* by Xavier Mauméjean. The French have a remarkable tradition of what I might call literate pulp literature, which joyfully mixes fantasy, science fiction and the *roman policier*. The related tradition in America and Britain matured from the comic book to the graphic novel with the input of writers like Alan Moore and Neil Gaiman, who have drawn some inspiration from Verne, Feval, Leblanc and others. Now it seems that they have inspired Xavier Mauméjean. *The League of Heroes* (\$20.95) clearly owes something to *The League of Extraordinary Gentlemen*, though its premise is, typically, even more fantastic. The inhabitants of Neverland have come to England (now Albion) — except for Peter Pan, who declares himself the enemy of Albion. The League set up by Phileas Fogg to protect the Empire against Pan and other villains includes Sherlock Holmes, Tarzan, Professor Cavor and Captain Hook, all under the command of Lord Kraven. It's all mad, breathless excitement, and great fun.

In 1911 E V Lucas and George Morrow produced a cod-biography called *What a Life!* giving new captions to illustrations from Whiteley's catalogue to tell a deliciously funny, surreal story. Philip Ardagh used the same technique last year, to similar effect, in *The Not-So-Very-Nice Goings-On at Victoria Lodge*, with pictures from *The Girl's Own Paper* (Faber & Faber, 3 Queen Square, London WC1N 3AU; £7.99). This year he's tackled a more difficult task — because it parodies a specific and much-loved original — in *The Silly Side of Sherlock Holmes* (Faber, £7.99), using illustrations from *The Strand Magazine* by Sidney Paget and others. There are some sublimely daft captions in the new book, but I found *Victoria Lodge* funnier over all. Both are eminently entertaining, though.

A plug for the best book of its kind: *Hot on the Scent: A Visitor's Guide to the London of Sherlock Holmes* by Arthur M Alexander (Calabash Press, PO Box 1360, Ashcroft, BC, Canada V0K 1A0; [ashtree@ash-tree.bc.ca](http://ashtree@ash-tree.bc.ca)). Reviewing it six years ago I said, 'Others

have devised admirable walking tours of London - notably Charles Merriman, Antony Richards and Bill Dorn - but Mr Alexander's thirty-five "adventures" are more comprehensive than any. He gives useful information for the American or other non-British visitor, and in a series of appendixes goes into such subjects as the Battle of Maiwand, the Festival of Britain, *The Strand Magazine*, and the Black Museum. As with David Hammer's travel guides, you feel that you're in the hands of a knowledgeable and congenial friend. *Hot on the Scent* is a thoroughly enjoyable book. The price is £17.50, US\$27.50 or Cdn\$37.50. Postage is Cdn\$7.50 to Canada, US\$7.00 to the USA, and £10.00/US\$17.00 (airmail) or £4.80/US\$8.00 (surface) to the rest of the world.

A reminder also of the lovely 'Goode Press Chapbook' *A Scandal in Bohemia*, published as a tribute to Sidney Paget, with Paget's illustrations beautifully coloured, recently discovered biographical information about him, a previously unpublished photograph, and a portrait by Philip Cornell. (Goode Press, PO Box 442, Greendale, WI 53129, USA; \$18.98 post-paid). The next chapbook, *The Boscombe Valley Mystery*, will be published next year, with more art by Phil Cornell, and a tribute to Sidney Paget by expressionist artist Pablo Carreno. The website is at <http://sidneypaget.com>.

Rafe McGregor of Classic Mysteries is looking for contributors for an anthology of Sherlock Holmes pastiches. You can get information from him at [classicmysteries@aol.com](mailto:classicmysteries@aol.com). Classic Mysteries has already published a novel, *Sherlock Holmes: The Way of All Flesh* by Daniel Ward, and a hard-boiled non-Sherlockian thriller by Mr McGregor, *The Secret Policeman*. [*\*More about that in the next DM.\**]

Over twelve weeks from January to April, Stanford University is issuing, free of charge, facsimiles of the *Strand Magazine* publication of 'A Scandal in Bohemia', 'The Speckled Band', *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and 'The Final Problem', on paper or as PDF files. Find out more at <http://sherlockholmes.stanford.edu>.

There's a new catalogue from **Nigel Williams Rare Books** (25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE; [nwrarebook@tcp.co.uk](mailto:nwrarebook@tcp.co.uk)).

Luigi Pachi alerts me to the Italian publication *Sherlock Magazine* issue 5: 210 pages devoted to Sherlock Holmes in the USA, with contributions (all in Italian) from Michael Whelan, Enrico Solito and others. [www.delosstore.it/riviste/scheda.php?id=52](http://www.delosstore.it/riviste/scheda.php?id=52) has the details.

Tony Medawar sends word of a 'burlesque farce' called *Sherlock Holmes' Christmas Turkey, or The Case of the Nebulous Nun* by Vincent McInerney, which is running until 7 January at the **Landor Theatre** (Landor Pub, 70 Landor Road, London SW9 9PH; 020 7737 7276; the nearest Underground station is Clapham North). 'Mrs Hudson, wanting Nigel the turkey killed, needs someone "with a handy chopper". Holmes and Dr Watson are guarding the McNish-McNosh Plans for the Navy's new secret weapon — a recoilless gun. Captain James Riddle ("Call me Jimmy") has lost the cargo of brandy he needs to sell to marry Bessie Backstay, landlady of the Bishop & Bumboatman and a connoisseur of Norwegian whalersmen ("harpoons a-tremblin' in their hands")... It looks like vulgar, crazy fun. [*\*Vincent McInerney was one of Bert Coules's fellow-writers on the monumental BBC Radio 4 series starring Clive Merrison and Michael Williams.\**]

Roger Llewellyn brings *Sherlock Holmes — The Last Act!* to **The Box Office** in South Shields (0191 454 1234) on 24 January, and to **Saville Exchange 1856** in North Shields the next day (0191 293 1956). Then he's off to Scotland: **Greenock Arts Guild Theatre** (01475 723038) on 27 January, **Victoria Halls**, Helensburgh (01700 502252) on 31 January, **The Byre Theatre**, St Andrews (01334 475000) on 1 February, **Carnegie Hall**, Dunfermline (01383 314000) on 3 February, and **Eastgate Theatre**, Peebles (01721 725777) on 4 February.

In its *Arthur Conan Doyle Season* over the Christmas period, the digital channel BBC 4 will screen a selection of Sherlock Holmes films and — more importantly — five new documentaries about Holmes and his creator. At 9.15 pm on 24 December *A Study in Sherlock* compares the various screen incarnations of Holmes. At 9.05 pm on Christmas Day *Conan Doyle for the Defence* covers the cases of George Edalji and Oscar Slater. At 9.00 pm on Boxing Day *The Man Who Loved Sherlock Holmes* examines the life and death of

Richard Lancelyn Green [*\*several of Richard's friends and family contributed to this film, and it promises to be at least tasteful\**]; that's followed at 10.00 by *Baker Street Babylon*, which looks at parody and pastiche. At 10.00 pm on 27 December *This Is Genius: No Place Like Holmes* tours Holmes's London. Check the BBC4 schedules, because most of these programmes are repeated.

Catherine Cooke passes on a bizarre piece of information: 'A woman named Mary Van Deusen creates videos for old pop songs by recutting footage from the old Sherlock Holmes Granada TV series starring Jeremy Brett. This is practically the definition of "magnificent obsession" and some of the cuts are nothing short of genius. [www.iment.com/maida/tv/songvids/hwsong.htm](http://www.iment.com/maida/tv/songvids/hwsong.htm).

Periodicals received. *Antipodean Holmesian Society Newsletter*, August 2005 and September 2005 (**The Antipodean Holmesian Society**, Ted Nye, 51 Irvine Road, The Cove, Dunedin, New Zealand; [ted.nye@stonebow.otago.ac.nz](mailto:ted.nye@stonebow.otago.ac.nz)). *The Camden House Journal*, November 2005 and December 2005 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Communication*, November/ December 2005 and Special Reality Television Double Issue 2005 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA) [*\*the latter is one of the PPOF's grand parody issues\**]. *The Confederate Chronicles*, October 2005 (**The Confederates of Wisteria Lodge**, Kent Ross, 6875 Fielder, Rex, GA 30273, USA). *The Illustrious Clients News*, November 2005 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, December 2005 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Mayday Mayday*, November 2005 and December 2005, *Chronicler and C-Extra*, December 2005 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcarney Way, Belfast BT5 7RP).

*The Passengers' Log*, Spring Issue (**The Sydney Passengers**, Rosane McNamara, 4/2a Merlin Street, Neutral Bay, NSW 2089, Australia). *The Petrel Flyer*, November 2005 (**The Stormy Petrels of British Columbia**, Len Haffenden, 1026 West Keith Road, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7P 3C6). *Practice Notes*, December 2005 (**The Friends of Dr Watson**, Nino Cirone, Flat 2, 31 Muswell Avenue, London N10 2EB). *The School Report*, Winter Term 2005 (**The Priory Scholars**, Horace L Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY). *The Scion*, Autumn 2005 (**The Musgraves**, Anne Jordan, Hallas Lodge, Greenside Lane, Cullingworth, Bradford BD13 5AP). *Sherlockiana*, nr. 2/3/4 2005 (**Sherlock Holmes Klubben i Danmark**, Mia Stampe Lagergaard, Nivågade 3, 2 th., 2200 København N, Denmark). *3 Pipe Problem Plugs and Dottles*, November 2005 (**The Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem**, Kay Blocker, 5017 Maywood Drive, Nashville, TN 37211, USA [pkblocker@comcast.net](mailto:pkblocker@comcast.net)).

And of course *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, November 2005 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; [blau7103@comcast.net](mailto:blau7103@comcast.net)).

The first hundred issues of *The District Messenger* (1 December 1982 - 23 July 1990) are available in (non-searchable) PDF format on CD-ROM, cased and labelled, for £6.00 or \$15.00, including postage and packing. Please make sterling cheques payable to me and US dollar checks to Jean Upton.

Now *The District Messenger* and I shall take a break until around the beginning of February, so I'll wish you all

**The Compliments of the Season**  
*Roger Johnson*