

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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The last and best of the long stories, *The Valley of Fear*, may yet achieve the recognition due to it. David Timson's unabridged reading for Naxos AudioBooks (2nd Floor, 40A High Street, Welwyn, Herts. AL6 9EQ; £19.99) certainly does it justice — but we expected no less. The novel has the same two-part structure as *A Study in Scarlet*, but improves on it in every way. The main narrative, 'The Tragedy of Birlstone', is one of the finest detective stories ever written, and 'The Scowrers' ranks with the greatest thrillers in the English language. Holmes and Watson are at their best, among a cast of vividly depicted characters — notably the admirable Alec MacDonald and the ferociously hearty Jack McGinty. The mystery of Birlstone is bewildering, and the solution dazzling; the struggle against the reign of terror in Vermissa Valley is almost unbearably tense. I had waited eagerly for David Timson's reading of this outstanding story, and my hopes were justified: every character, from whichever side of the ocean, is individual, every description tells, and every incident is given its due weight. Roy McMillan's production is as precisely nuanced as Nicolas Soames's in the earlier recordings. The incidental music, this time by Bottesini, Delius and Janáček, is perfectly appropriate. Once more Mr Timson himself contributes knowledgeable and informative sleeve-notes. In July Naxos will release *The Casebook of Sherlock Holmes volume I*, so this monumental project is rapidly nearing completion.

Scandinavia and Sherlock Holmes edited by Bjarne Nielsen (The Baker Street Irregulars, 2 Dettling Road, Maynard, MA 01754, USA; www.bakerstreetjournal.com; \$39.95) is a fascinating selection of writings, in English, from Danish and Swedish scholars (and one Norwegian, Nils Nordberg). The history of Holmesian scholarship in Scandinavia, recounted in the twin introductions by Mr Nielsen and Mattias Boström, includes such familiar names as Storm-P, A D Henriksen, Tage La Cour, Henry Lauritzen, and Åke Runnquist from the past, and, among today's luminaries, Mia Stampe Lagergaard, Jens Byskov Jensen, Ted Berman, and Hans-Uno Bengtsson. The subjects range from 'that little thing of Chopin's' to the dynamics of an asteroid, the silent cinema, and the weather in the Canon. Aage Rieck Sørensen's reply when asked about the popularity of Holmes in Denmark was, 'England used to be a Danish country.' Just so.

Mandate for Murder edited by Roy Pilot, Gianluca Salvatori & Enrico Solito is the latest in *The Baker Street Irregulars Manuscript Series* (\$35.00). The MS of 'The Red Circle' is reproduced in facsimile, with a transcription and exhaustive notes by Philip and Jane Weller. Philip Weller also writes about six British residents of Naples, including Conan Doyle, his cousin Nelson Foley and his brother-in-law Willie Hornung. Gianluca Salvatori looks at Italian secret societies. Enrico Solito examines the background of Emilia and Gennaro Lucca. John G Genova considers the two artists who illustrated the story for *The Strand Magazine*, H M Brock and Joseph Simpson. Peter Blau traces the history of the manuscript, now owned by the Lilly Library at Indiana University. It's all exceptionally interesting, but to me the most appealing piece is Steven T Doyle's. He has uncovered what must surely be the definitive answer to that vexed question: just what was 'the Long Island Cave mystery'?

Philip Weller notes that the map of La Gaiola is misprinted in his essay. You can request a free e-mail copy from acds@acd-221b.info.

I don't dislike Holmesian pastiche as such, but increasingly I feel that a successful new Holmes story needs either to bear a marked fidelity to the Canonical originals in style and substance (e.g. June Thomson, Barrie Roberts) or to take a radically different *but justified* approach to the subject (*The Seven-per-cent Solution*, *The Veiled Detective*). Paul D Gilbert's stories in *The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes* (Robert Hale Ltd, Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £18.99) don't do it for me. The plots seem more muddled than complex, but that might not matter if the narration were more convincing. Mr Gilbert's style is stodgier than Conan Doyle's; it seems to strain for an archaic effect, but is in any case let down by such infelicitous phrases as Watson's description of Simpson's-in-the-Strand as 'one of my favourite eateries'. Worse, Holmes is unpleasantly arrogant and ill-mannered: he is simply not the Holmes that we know from the narratives of Dr John H Watson. Perhaps I'm being over-harsh, but it seems to me that Paul Gilbert can — and, I hope, will — do better than this.

For the new Penguin Classics collection *Arsène Lupin, Gentleman-Thief* by Maurice Leblanc (Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL; £9.99 or \$14.00), Michael Sims has chosen thirteen of the best stories (there are many more) about the charming and ingenious Lupin in the original translations by Alexandre Teixeira de Mattos. The brilliant criminal, more stylish and less sanctimonious than his British prototype Raffles, encountered the master detective in four tales, which show Holmes and Watson in a refreshingly different light — though naturally Lupin comes off best. I have to take issue here with Mr Sims, who calls the Lupin-Holmes stories 'feeble parodies', and includes only the first in this book. (Black Coat Press has published all four in new translations: see DM 243 and DM 251). But it's a real treat to have the best of Arsène Lupin available, with Michael Sims' informative introduction and notes.

The Strange Affair of Madeleine Smith: Victorian Scotland's Trial of the Century by Douglas MacGowan (Mercat Press, 10 Coates Crescent, Edinburgh EH3 7AL; 16 April; £9.99) is an authoritative account of one of the most remarkable murder cases of the 19th century. In March 1857, the attractive daughter of a wealthy Glasgow architect was charged with poisoning her lover, Emile L'Angelier, who stood in the way of her proposed marriage. The unique Scottish verdict of 'Not Proven' has encouraged continuing debate. Madeleine Smith's case was not helped by the frank nature of her letters to Emile (seventy-odd years later such explicitness ensured that Edith Thomson was hanged as a participant in the murder of her husband, an act of which she was probably innocent). According to Scottish law the jury was right: the known facts simply don't permit a definite statement as to Madeleine's guilt or innocence. Douglas MacGowan deliberately takes a neutral stance, unlike most previous biographers. He tells an engrossing tale of romance and drama, but it's a tale whose protagonist we can never quite know. In 1861 she married George Wardle, William Morris's business manager, by whom she had a son and a daughter. Naturally the Wardles became involved in the Socialist movement, and Bernard Shaw found Madeleine good-humoured and capable. For nearly eighty years it was believed that she emigrated to America after George's death, dying in New York in 1928, the widow of one William Sheehy, but Mr MacGowan cites compelling reasons for doubting that Lena

Sheehy was actually Madeleine Smith. To the end she remains an enigma.

New from Ramble House Books is *The Secret Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* by Gary Lovisi, with an afterword by Richard A Lupoff (www.ramblehouse.com; \$18.00, hardback \$30.00, plus postage).

The Hilltop Writers: A Victorian Colony Among the Surrey Hills by W R Trotter was published in 2003. It concentrates on the Hindhead-Haslemere area and features Conan Doyle, Bernard Shaw, Flora Thompson and others (John Owen Smith, 19 Kay Crescent, Headley Down, Bordon, Hants. GU35 8AH; £9.95).

There's always something informative, amusing, or both in *The Sherlockian E-Times* (**Classic Specialties**, PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA; www.sherlock-holmes.com/e-times14.htm). **Nigel Williams Rare Books** also has a new catalogue out (25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE; nwrrarebook@tcp.co.uk).

In June the manuscript of 'The Three Gables' will be auctioned at Sotheby's in New York. The estimate is \$350,000-\$500,000.

The asking price for Ted Schulz's collection of *Strand Magazines* is actually \$20,000 and not £20,000 as I reported in DM 270. Interested parties should contact Vincent Brosnan at **Sherlock in L.A.**, 1741, Via Allena, Oceanside, CA 92056 USA; phone 760 630 2013.

L M Goode's research into **Sidney Paget's** life and work continues to produce fascinating material. Take a look at the website at www.artintheblood.com. You'll be hooked!

On 24 March *Det Danske Kriminalakademi* (the Danish crime writers' association) awarded a well-deserved special diploma to **Nis Jessen** for his magnificent illustrated edition of *A Study in Scarlet*.

Geoff Bradley's magazine *CADS* enters its second half-century this month, with the expected wide-ranging coverage of crime and detective stories. It kicks off with a real humdinger: a transcript of a 1930 radio broadcast by Dorothy L Sayers and Anthony Berkeley, during which they devise the plot for a (never written?) story. (G H Bradley, 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex SS7 1PA; \$5.50).

David Ian Davies has completed his recording of the Holmes Canon — see www.audible.com. He adds, 'I would like to dedicate this accomplishment to Charles Prepolec who has always been a guiding force to me throughout this endeavor of love.' One Voice Recordings has also released Matthew Elliott's Holmes story *The Honourable Cracksman* read by Mr Davies — see www.spokennetwork.com.

Peter Egan and **Philip Franks** are Holmes and Watson in Clive Francis' play *The Hound of the Baskervilles* at **Clwyd Theatr Cymru**, Mold (01352 755114) till 14 April, moving to **Greenwich Theatre** (020 8858 7755) 16-21 April, and finally **The Theatre Royal**, Nottingham (0115 989 5555) 23 - 28 April.

The **Peepolykus** comedy version will be at **The Duchess Theatre** in Catherine Street, London for fourteen weeks from 16 April. For the first twenty performances (not Saturdays) all seats are £20.00 — see www.whatsonstage.com/dl/page.php?page=comp&id=4246. The Society has booked fifty seats for the evening of 23 May, the day before the London Mini-Festival begins. Look for the mailing.

Cloak & Dagger Theatre Company will stage *The Mystery of Sherlock Holmes* by Richard James, which looks like an interesting two-hander, at **Wycombe Swan** (Town Hall, High Wycombe; 01494 512000; www.wycombeswan.co.uk) on 25 May. [**If you'd like to review it for The Sherlock Holmes Journal, please let me know.**]

BBC 1's enjoyable two-part drama *Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars*, with Jonathan Pryce and Bill Paterson as Holmes and Watson, will be released on DVD on 14 May by Acorn Media UK.

On 15 March HNR reported that 'the Sci Fi TV movie *Sherlock Holmes and the Curse of the Banshee* starts filming next month in Vilnius, Lithuania, written by Brook Durham and Jacob Eskendar, based on a story by Tim Cox.'

Warner plans to film a yet-to-be-published *Sherlock Holmes* graphic novel by Lionel Wigram — who will produce, with Michael Johnson, and Neil Marshall as writer and director. We shall, apparently, see 'Holmes losing some of his Victorian stuffiness and being more adventuresome, including playing up his skills as a bare-knuckle boxer and expert swordsman as he goes about solving crimes'. Russell Crowe seems to be the bookies' favourite to play Holmes. [**Good grief!**] Rumours that Nicholas Rowe has been offered the part are, alas, mistaken, deriving from Scott Monty's April 1st hoax.

David Stuart Davies needs a copy of *The Sherlock Holmes DVD Collection* — the four TV movies starring Matt Frewer. If you can help, please contact David at overdale@btinternet.com.

Rafe McGregor has an article about Holmes, 'Yorkshire's Greatest Detective', in the April/May issue of *Around the Wolds & North Yorkshire* (www.aroundthewolds.co.uk; £1.15).

The World of Mr Sherlock Holmes is **Alan Stockwell's** website at www.mrsherlockholmes.co.uk. Worth a look.

New from **Baskerville Carriages** (Laughter Hole House, Postbridge, Devon PL20 6TT; info@baskervillecarriages.co.uk; 01822 880386) is 'The Baskerville Dining Experience'. For £80.00 a head you get a carriage ride from Princetown, a five-course Victorian dinner, and the mystery of the phantom hound — plus Sherlock Holmes. The company offers other experiences too. See the website at www.baskervillecarriages.co.uk.

It's not just Fletcher Robinson. Now there are plans to exhume Harry Houdini, following claims that he was murdered by peeved spiritualists, with the support of Arthur Conan Doyle...

The Crew of the SS May Day (anchored at Belfast) will make a day excursion to London on 23 May. They'll be at the Sherlock Holmes pub between 12.30 and 2.00, and will be pleased to meet any fellow-Holmesians there. If you're interested in taking a greater part in this Great Day Out, contact Oscar Ross at rocross@yahoo.co.uk.

Victorian Secrets and Edwardian Enigmas: A Conference on the World of Sherlock Holmes will be held at the Elmer L Andersen Library at the University of Minnesota, Minneapolis, from 6 to 8 July, presented by **The Norwegian Explorers** and the University's Sherlock Holmes Collections. Speakers include Michael Dirda, Cliff Goldfarb, Jon Lellenberg, Elaine Hamill, Jonathan McCafferty and Daniel Stashower. Get details from Julie McKuras, 13512 Granada Ave, Apple Valley, MN 55124, USA; mike9750@aol.com.)

Freddie Francis, who died on 17 March aged eighty-nine, was a brilliant cinematographer, but is more famous as a director, being responsible for 1967's *The Deadly Bees* (based on Gerald Heard's *A Taste for Honey*, but omitting the Sherlock Holmes character, Mr Mycroft), and two episodes of the little-seen 1980 TV series *Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson*, with Geoffrey Whitehead and Donald Pickering. He is also reported to have 'worked on' *The Masks of Death* in 1984. **Michael Dibdin** died on 30 March, aged sixty. His first book, *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story*, involved Holmes with Professor Moriarty and Jack the Ripper, but he made his lasting reputation with his Italian-based novels about Inspector Aurelio Zen. **Ely Liebow** ('Inspector Gregory', BSI) also died on 30 March, just a couple of weeks after Bowling Green University Popular Press reissued his estimable biography *Doctor Joe Bell: Model for Sherlock Holmes*. **Bob Clark**, sixty-seven, whose credits as a director include the outstanding 1980 film *Murder by Decree*, with Christopher Plummer as Holmes was killed, with his son, in a car crash on 4 April.

Periodicals received. **Baker Street Essays: The Canon Examined**, no. 1 (Bob Byrne; www.holmesonscreen.com) [**Bob's new on-line outlet for his own Holmesian musings; attractive, interesting, sometimes contentious**]. **Bohemian Newsletter**, no. 74 (České společenství Sherlocka Holmese, Aleš Kolodrubec, Milešovská 1, 130 00 Praha 3, Czech Republic). **The Camden House Journal**, March 2007 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). **Communication**, no. 270 (**The Pleasant**

Places of Florida, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA). *The Formulary*, March 2007 (**The Friends of Dr Watson**, Nino Cirone, Highcroft Cottage, 14 Totteridge Common, Totteridge, London N20 8NL) [**note the new address**]. *The Illustrious Clients News*, March 2007 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, April 2007 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Irregular Newsletter*, February 2007 (**The Conan Doyle [Crowborough] Establishment**, Brian Pugh, 20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN). *Mayday Mayday*, March 2007 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcarne Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). *Prescott's Press*, March 2007 (**The Three Garridebs**, Warren Randall, 15 Fawn Lane West, South Setauket, NY 11720-1346, USA). *The Serpentine Muse*, Spring 2007 (**The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes**, Evelyn Herzog, 301 Warren Ave, #203, Baltimore, MD 21203, USA). *Sherlockiana*, nr. 1, 2007 (**Sherlock Holmes Klubben i Danmark**, Bjarne Rother Jensen, Højbovøgen 24, 9200 Aalborg SV, Denmark). *3 Pipe Problem Plugs and Dottles*, February 2007 (**The Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem**, Kay Blocker, 5017 Maywood Drive, Nashville, TN 37211, USA pkblocker@comcast.net). *Tonga Times*, Spring 2007 (two issues) (**The Mini-Tonga Society**, Jay Pearlman, 1656 E 19th Street #2-E, Brooklyn, NY 11229, USA).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, February and March 2007 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

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