

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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There are two good reasons for buying *Sherlock Holmes and the County Courthouse Caper* by Jeff Falkingham (Beaver's Pond Press, 7104 Ohms Lane, Suite 216, Edina, MN 55439, USA; \$17.00). One, that all proceeds from this limited edition of 1,000 copies go to support the flood relief programme in the town of Brown's Valley, Minnesota. Two, that's it's a cracking good read. In 1886 Sherlock Holmes comes to America, where his friend Dr Watson is studying the latest surgical techniques – and getting married. All right, that's from Baring-Gould, not Conan Doyle, but it gets Holmes to Brown's Valley, to investigate the true source of the Mississippi. He refuses a commission to help settle the town's dispute with neighbouring Wheaton as to which should be the capital of Traverse County – until his native guide is brutally murdered...

The quarrel over the County Courthouse really happened, and the people of Brown's Valley did employ a detective to investigate possible corruption. The larger background to the murders – that of Red Thunder is only one of six – is the Sioux Uprising of 1862, and that too is history, as is the story of Brown's Valley itself. Many of the people we meet did exist, and the others, including the narrator, twelve-year-old Petey Smith, are as real as Sherlock Holmes. Too many writers attempt to copy the Doyle-Watson style, and fail, often because they have no real knowledge of late Victorian London. The bold few, who know their Holmes well enough, put him in a historical setting that they are thoroughly familiar with. And that's what Jeff Falkingham has done. He can bring old Brown's Valley to life for us, because he knows it so well. And, I should add, because he's a damned good storyteller. *Sherlock Holmes and the County Courthouse Caper* is a real page-turner, made the more interesting by the final chapter, which sorts out the fact from the fiction. British readers can send a check for \$27.50 (which includes \$10.50 postage) to BV Flood Relief, PO Box 307, Browns Valley, MN 56219, USA. Two copies would be \$49.00. For larger orders, e-mail Jeff@cccaper.com. And check the website at www.cccaper.com.

Rafe McGregor accurately describes his Amazon Short *A Study in Watson: The Extraordinary Life of the Man Behind Sherlock Holmes* as a 'mini-biography'. It summarises the known facts about Dr Watson, all taken from the sixty accounts in the Canon, and offers soundly-based speculation to create a portrait of the whole man. Amazon Shorts can be downloaded (by American subscribers only, I understand) at www.amazon.com/shorts, for \$0.49. (Rafe's own website at www.rafemcgregor.co.uk is worth a look, by the way.)

Those interested in the London and the England of Sherlock Holmes should check www.OldHouseBooks.co.uk, where they'll find a wealth of facsimile guide books and maps on offer. For instance: *Baedeker's Guide to Great Britain 1890* (£15.99), *Baedeker's London & Its Environs 1900* (£14.99), *Murray's Modern London 1860* (£13.99), *Bacon's up to date Map of London 1902* (£9.99), *London Railways Map 1897* (£9.99), *Dickens's Dictionary of London 1888* (£12.99)... You can get a catalogue from Old House Books, The Old Police Station, Pound Street, Moretonhampstead,

Devon TQ13 8PA (01647 440707; e-mail info@OldHouseBooks.co.uk).

Rohase Piercy's remarkable novel *My Dearest Holmes* caused some raising of eyebrows when it was first published by GMP in 1988. If you've wondered what all the fuss was about, you can buy it from BookSurge, through www.amazon.co.uk where it's available as a print-on-demand book at £6.44 (dealers are asking considerably more for used copies of the original edition). As the title suggests, the story posits a homoerotic element, but, thank heaven, without the sensationalism that such an idea stimulates in some other writers. It's elegantly done, very well written, and rooted in a sound knowledge of the Canon.

I don't think I've mentioned the *Classic Specialties Sherlock Holmes Calendar for 2008*, containing goodness knows how many dates of importance, interest and amusement for the Sherlockian, and great graphics in full colour. It's printed and distributed by CafePress and costs \$19.99. The details are at www.sherlock-holmes.com - or you can write to Classic Specialties, PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; or e-mail sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com. On the website you'll also find essays, puzzles, information about people and societies, and of course a full list of the many Sherlockian and other items for sale – including some attractive new Christmas cards.

Back in October I commented favourably on Cenarth Fox's latest theatrical extravaganza, *Sherlock Stock & Barrel*, though I was only able to read the script. Now I've heard the show on CD and can report that it works beautifully. To recap: five actors set out to tell all sixty stories in eighty minutes. Kirk Alexander, Gareth Wilding-Forbes, Chris Gaffney, Joanne Gabriel and Catherine Munday only manage twenty-five, and the result, necessarily played at a frantic pace, is dramatic, tuneful, ingenious, and above all very funny. You can buy the CD from Fox Plays UK (Ms. Anne Nichols, 4 Drovers Way, Burton, Carnforth LA6 1HU; phone 01524 781868; e-mail inquiries@foxplays-uk.co.uk) or from Fox Plays (Mr Cenarth Fox, PO Box 2078, Richmond South, 3121 Victoria, Australia; phone +61 3 9429 3004; e-mail sales@foxplays.com). You can read the script and find out about performance rights at www.foxplays.com.

BBC Worldwide (Woodlands, 80 Wood Lane, London W12 0TT) has released the full radio series of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, each as a twelve-CD set at £45.00. These are the classic performances with Clive Merrison and Michael Williams. I hope to review the recordings in the next newsletter.

In February, HarperCollins Audio Books (Westerhill Road, Bishopbriggs, Glasgow G64 0QT) will release some classic readings as 3-CD sets: *The Final Problem and other stories* read by Basil Rathbone; *The Adventure of the Lion's Mane and other stories* read by Christopher Lee; *The Hound of the Baskervilles* read by Tony Britton; and *The Adventure of the Sussex Vampire and other stories* read by Christopher Lee. Each set is priced at £13.99.

If you're after a 'Sherlock Holmes' hat, **Stephen Gough** offers tweed deerstalkers at prices starting at £9.99 plus £1.99 first class postage (£2.99 airmail worldwide). E-mail Mr Gough for further details at deerstalkerhats@hotmail.co.uk.

Dana Davies, son of the actor David Ian Davies, designs and makes novelty pens. His latest is a striking Sherlock Holmes pen, reproducing in 3D the caricatures by the *Mad Magazine* cartoonist

Tom Richmond. There are good photos of the unpainted prototype at <http://www.tomrichmond.com/blog/index.php?paged=2>, which is Tom Richmond's website.

Thierry Saint-Joanis passes on news of a musical to be produced in Montréal next February, at the **Segal Centre for Performing Arts**, part of the Saidye Bronfman Centre Yiddish Theatre (5170 Côte-Ste-Catherine, Montréal, Quebec, Canada H3W 1M7; phone 514 739-2301). The book of *Houdini* is by Ben Gonshor, and the music and lyrics by Elan Kunin. Despite being staged at a Yiddish theatre in a French-speaking city, this play about Arthur Conan Doyle's one-time friend is actually in English. It runs from 10 February to 2 March.

Tony Armitage has sent a cutting from a local paper in Tamworth, headed, "'Sleuth' postie solves the case.' The postman in question is Tony's brother **Pete Armitage**, who managed to track down the intended recipient of a letter that arrived from Australia, addressed to "Roy Ashby (violinist – a brilliant one!) living in a village close to Tamworth, Staffs, England". And there's a very nice photo of Mr Ashby with his fiddle and Mr Armitage with deerstalker, pipe and magnifying glass.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle was born on 22 May 1859. From 4 May to 15 August 2009, the **Houghton Library at Harvard University** will mount an exhibition to mark Conan Doyle's sesquicentennial. [**If we used the expression in Britain, I suppose it ought really to be 'sesquicentenary'...**] The exhibition will feature 'rare books, manuscripts, and ephemera from Houghton's collections, the archives of the Baker Street Irregulars, and private collections'. From 7 May to 9 May, the library will also host a symposium to honour Sir Arthur. You can follow developments on the website at http://hcl.harvard.edu/libraries/houghton/doyle_symposium.html.

Billy Fields of **The Nashville Scholars of the Three-Pipe Problem** passes on a report from the Associated Press: 'Researchers in a remote jungle in Indonesia have discovered a giant rat and a tiny possum that are apparently new to science, underscoring the stunning biodiversity of the Southeast Asian nation, scientists said Monday... The animals were found in the Foja mountains rainforest in eastern Papua province in a June expedition, said US-based Conservation International, which organized the trip along with the Indonesian Institute of Science. "The giant rat is about five times the size of a typical city rat," said Kristofer Helgen, a scientist with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. "With no fear of humans, it apparently came into the camp several times during the trip." The possum was described as "one of the world's smallest marsupials."

All right, it's not Sumatra, but both are provinces of Indonesia, and who can say that the giant rat didn't exist in Sumatra a century ago?

Steve Duke of **The Elementary Victorians** sends greetings, and adds, 'Couldn't help noticing your remarks about using the Canon as a springboard to finding out more about the world from that angle. How very true! This is what we in the Antipodes have been forced to concentrate on due to not having many Canonical sites to visit. Just last weekend a small expedition searched Melbourne Town for the sites connected with ACD (visited Oct. 1920 for 5 wks)... We fully intend to slaughter the fatted goose for any visitors from the UK... We have no end of Victoriana here to show members of the SHSL. So where are you all????' Well, if you're heading for the state named after Her Great and Glorious Majesty, you should get in touch with Steve. E-mail stirlingsteve@aim.com, or write to: The Elementary Victorians, Steve Duke (President), P.O. Box 340, Reservoir, VIC 3073, Australia. You can be sure of a friendly welcome.

Not being much of a cyclist, I wasn't really aware till recently of **The Elusive Bicyclists**, an international scion society of the Baker Street Irregulars. It was founded in January 2003 by Holmesians from Denmark, England, France, Italy and the USA – who have since been joined by others from Germany, Lesotho and Switzerland. Membership requirements are "Love of the Master and of bicycling", and the rest you can learn at <http://mysite.verizon.net/vzepmb4x/> - or e-mail Richard Olken at olken@post.harvard.edu.

Peter Haining, who died on 19 November aged sixty-seven, was, said Jack Adrian, probably the only writer ever to make a living out of editing anthologies. He pioneered the republishing of obscure but worthwhile ghost and horror stories from the old magazines, but his interests spread much more widely than that, and his many books include *The Sherlock Holmes Scrapbook*, *The Sherlock Holmes Compendium*, *The Television Sherlock Holmes* and *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. That last gathers together much of Conan Doyle's Holmesian writing that doesn't fall within the Canon. It's been republished two or three times – though the considerably superior collections edited by Jack Tracy (*Sherlock Holmes: The Published Apocrypha*) and Richard Lancelyn Green (*The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes*) haven't...

Anton Rodgers, best known for his performances in television sitcoms like *May to December* and *Fresh Fields*, was actually a remarkably versatile and sincere actor – I was impressed by his Henry V at the Belgrade in Coventry in the late 1960s – and director. In 1965 he was an excellent Neville St Clair to Douglas Wilmer's Holmes in the BBC TV productions of *The Man with the Twisted Lip*. He died on 1 December, aged seventy-four.

Dr Benton Wood, who had been in failing health for some years, died peacefully on 8 December. Headmaster of a church school, he was appointed Chaplain to the Baker Street Irregulars on the death of Leslie Marshall, whose investiture "A Scandal in Bohemia" was also conferred upon him. Ben was for many years head of **The Pleasant Places of Florida** (which is how I came to know him). His principal contribution to the Writings about the Writings is a seminal study, *The Philatelic and Numismatic Holmes*. His wife Joan was honoured as *The Woman* at the 1991 BSI dinner, and Ben himself received the Two Shilling Award 'for extraordinary devotion to the cause beyond the call of duty' in 1997.

Periodicals received. *Bohemian Newsletter*, no. 83 (České společnost Sherlocka Holmese, Aleš Kolodrubec, Milešovská 1, 130 00 Praha 3, Czech Republic). *Cobwebby Bottles* November 2007 and December 2007/January 2008 (The Musgraves, Rafe McGregor, 62 Willow Park Road, Wilberfoss, York YO41 5PS; RafeG@aol.com) [**Rafe notes that 'The name change from Musgraves Matters is due to the increased scope and popularity of what started as a newsletter in June.' Cobwebby Bottles features reviews, fiction, illustrations and a great deal else. It's available only online – go to www.rafecmcgregor.co.uk**]. *The Log of the SS May Day*, 2007 (The Crew of the SS May Day, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardarn Way, Belfast BT5 7RP) [**the Crew's new publication is a real magazine, not just a newsletter; there are contributions by Alex Kane, Victor Hamilton, Tim Healey, Brian Pugh, Ann Bell and Oscar himself in this very welcome first issue**]. *Prescott's Press*, December 2007 (The Three Garridebs, Warren Randall, 15 Fawn Lane West, South Setauket, NY 11720-1346, USA) [**several of the American participants in our Society's recent trip to Prague turn Foreign Correspondent for 'An instructive and even classical series of demonstrations...'**]. *Studies of the Nippon Sherlock Holmes Club*, September 17 2007 (The Sherlock Holmes Research Committee Japan, Saburoh Hiraga, 3-6-24 uneno-higashi, Toyonaka-shi, Osaka 560-0013, Japan) [**I regret that my ignorance of the Japanese language prevents me from appreciating this admirable volume to the full; fortunately for me there are passages in English**]. *The Torr*, Autumn 2007 (The Poor Folk Upon The Moors, Reggie Musgrave, Drummond Cottage, Old Tavern Yard, Westbourne, Chichester, West Sussex PO10 8TA) [**Conan Doyle, Sexton Blake, Cricket, the Hound – The Torr is ever reliably entertaining and interesting**].

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

THE COMPLIMENTS OF THE SEASON

Roger Johnson