

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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Sherlock Holmes at the Raffles Hotel is the new short novel by **John Hall** (Breese Books, Baker Street Studios Ltd, Endeavour House, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB22 3DX; £7.50). A year or two after the detective's retirement to Sussex, his old friend, recently widowed and himself at a low ebb, finds the detective a victim of melancholic *ennui*. An unexpected encounter with an old friend provides Watson with the perfect excuse to get both of them away from an English winter to the tropical paradise of Singapore, for the friend in question is Arshak Sarkies, one of the four Armenian brothers who established a chain of luxury hotels in south-east Asia. Their destination is the most famous of them all — possibly the most famous hotel in the world — but what Dr Watson intends as a rest cure quickly becomes a real criminal investigation. They are greeted by Arshak's brother Tigran, manager of the hotel, with the news that a visiting English lady has been murdered. Of course, this, rather than relaxation in the sun, is what Holmes needs. Mr Hall is a good writer and an artful storyteller; moreover he knows his subject — or rather, subjects. His depiction of Singapore in Edwardian days is both enticing and convincing, and of course he is renowned as a Holmesian scholar. *Sherlock Holmes at the Raffles Hotel* is a grand read.

The Chronicles of Sherlock Holmes (Robert Hale Ltd, Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £18.99) is the second collection of new Holmes stories by **Paul D Gilbert**, and, like the first (*The Lost Files of Sherlock Holmes*) it's an attempt to relate some of the tales that are merely referred to in the Canon. Here we have the cases of Baron Maupertuis, Mr James Phillimore, the aluminium crutch, Ricoletti and his abominable wife, the cutter *Alicia*, the red leech, and Isadora Persano. [**The first name of the well-known journalist and duellist was undoubtedly Isadore. 'Isadora' must be a misprint that has been perpetuated over the decades.**] The plotting is clever — neater than in the first volume — and the characterisation is acceptable, though the writing can be a trifle clumsy, and the real Dr Watson would surely not have referred to 'Lord Lynton's veritable tome *The Last Days of Pompeii*'. 'Lynton' for 'Lytton' is a simple and silly typographical error, but it leads one to suspect that 'veritable' ought to be 'venerable', since the novel was written in 1834... But I think Mr Gilbert means only that it's a big book, as most Victorian novels were — though they were often published in three volumes, unlike today's airport blockbusters. As for the notion that the Holborn (where Watson and Stamford lunched, you'll remember, before going on to meet Holmes at Bart's) was a club, a very little research would reveal that the Holborn was a famous restaurant, opened in 1874 and closed in 1955. See, for instance, Lee Jackson's website at www.victorianlondon.org/food/holbornrestaurant.htm. Perhaps I'm being a trifle harsh on Mr Gilbert's book, but it does make rather disappointing reading after *Sherlock Holmes at the Raffles Hotel*.

Sherlock Holmes in Russia, edited and translated by **Alex Auswaks** (Robert Hale Ltd; £18.99) is something altogether different. We've long known that there was once a considerable industry in Germany and elsewhere, dedicated to creating more and increasingly outlandish adventures for Sherlock Holmes, all without the consent, and possibly without the knowledge, of Arthur Conan Doyle. What many of us didn't know is that the same sort of thing was going on in Russia in the early years of the twentieth century, but whereas the tales of the King of Detectives that were so abundantly available in Scandinavia, France, Spain and other countries were mostly translated from the German, the Russian stories were original and relevant to that mighty nation. They were also, to judge by the selection in this book, much better written, and frequently had a political point to them. In his introduction, George Piliev tells us a good deal about the popularity of

Conan Doyle's creation in Russia — as great, apparently, as among English-speaking readers — and how these apocryphal chronicles came to be written and published during the last fifteen years of Tsarist rule, but he can't tell us, for instance, just how many such tales were published and how many writers contributed to the series, because, perhaps unsurprisingly, most of the original records no longer exist. There are two stories here by P Orlovetz and five by P Nikitin, all actually set in Russia, and all narrated by Dr Watson. So we're in a place, or a series of places (St Petersburg, Vladivostok and points between) that the authors knew well, but seen through the eyes of an intelligent and educated foreigner. It's a device that also enables the writers to mention economic and political anomalies without seeming to comment on them directly; it must have been widely used in those pre-revolutionary times. The style of the translated text is not really Watson's, but somehow that doesn't matter. It's clear and crisp, without anachronisms, and it's well suited to these exciting and ingenious accounts of Russian mysteries solved by an English detective.

New from Baskerville Bücher (Michael Ross, Hermeskeiler Platz 14, 50935 Köln, Germany) is the first comprehensive listing of German-language audio productions: *Sherlock Holmes für die Ohren: Hörspiele und Hörbücher im deutschsprachigen Raum* by **Uwe Jacobs** and **Nicole Glücklich**. The nearest English equivalent is the relevant section of Ronald De Waal's *The Universal Sherlock Holmes*, but this sturdy, attractive 260-page paperback is much more portable. Also it has a twelve-page section of full-colour illustrations; I like that! The book is listed on www.amazon.de for €19.95.

Francophones, meanwhile, will benefit from *Dictionnaire Sherlock Holmes* by **Lucien-Jean Bord** (Le Cherche midi, 23 rue du Cherche-Midi, 75006, Paris, France; €21.00). The author is a respected historian and philologist. He is also a Benedictine monk.

Philip J Attwell has kindly provided a copy of *Holmes: Haydn's Head*, a graphic novel by **Omaha Perez** (AIT/Planet Lar, 2034 47th Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94116, USA; \$12.95). It's the first of the series that I'd come across, and although I enjoyed it, I confess that the pleasure was rather mixed. Mr Perez says that he 'is actually a great fan of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle', but his depiction of Holmes and Watson may be the most subversive yet. The detective is incompetent, violent, devious — not to say deviant — and pretty much permanently stoned. The doctor is equally violent, and so blindly loyal that he misreports just about everything, including murder, in his friend's favour. Part of the fun is in the contrast between Watson's narrative and the outrageous activity we see in the panels.

Peter Blau reports: '**Len Deighton's** "Sherlock Holmes and the Titanic Swindle" is the first short story he has written in more than 30 years (and imaginatively Sherlockian rather than a pastiche), and it's one of the 17 stories in *The Verdict of Us All: Stories by the Detection Club for H R F Keating*, edited by Peter Lovesey (Norfolk: Crippen & Landru, 2006; 223pp, \$43.00 cloth or \$20.00 paper); the special cloth edition is signed by the editor and has an additional story in a separate pamphlet. Box 9315, Norfolk, VA 23505 (877-622-6656) www.crippenlandru.com. Douglas G Greene, the proprietor of Crippen & Landru, does an excellent job of finding interesting short stories, old and new, for his anthologies and collections.'

Peter also recommends **Christopher Plummer's** autobiography, *In Spite of Myself: A Memoir* (Knopf Canada, Random House of Canada Ltd, 1 Toronto Street, Unit 300, Toronto, Ontario M5C 2V6, Canada; Cn\$37.00/US\$29.95). 'He explains that he got along like a house afire with Basil Rathbone (they acted together in the play *J.B.*), and he

enjoyed playing Holmes with James Mason ('who turned in the best Watson I've ever seen.')

Due next month from Gasogene Books (Wessex Press, PO Box 68308, Indianapolis, IN 46268, USA) is the tenth volume in the *Sherlock Holmes Reference Library*, edited and annotated by **Leslie S Klinger**. *The Apocrypha of Sherlock Holmes* (\$19.95) will, I expect, overlap considerably with Jack Tracy's *Sherlock Holmes: The Published Apocrypha*, Richard Lancelyn Green's *The Uncollected Sherlock Holmes* and Peter Haining's *The Final Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, but Les Klinger's annotations will make the new book essential.

Richard James's play *Sherlock Holmes and the Mystery of Mallen Hall* has been well received in Berkshire and Lancashire. You can read the script, and buy it for production, at http://www.lazybeescripts.co.uk/cgi-bin/Search_Results.asp?sPa=mallen. Or write to Lazy Bee Scripts, 2 Wood Road, Ashurst, Southampton SO40 7BD.

There are lots of potential seasonal purchases in the December *Sherlockian E-Times* at http://sherlock-holmes.com/e_times08-12.htm. (**Classic Specialties**, PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com.)

In February the cities of Edinburgh, Glasgow, Bristol, Portsmouth, and Westminster will join other authorities in **The Lost World Read 2009**, a campaign to promote a) reading, b) Charles Darwin's 200th birthday, and c) Arthur Conan Doyle's 150th birthday. Events will include free copies of (what else?) *The Lost World*, with an exclusive cover designed by Aardman Animations and featuring Wallace and Gromit. The books will be distributed through libraries, schools and other partner organisations. Enter "Lost World Read 2009" into Google for leads.

Next month the BBC will begin filming the updated Sherlock Holmes script by **Steven Moffat** and **Mark Gatiss**. If the one-off production, apparently entitled *Sherlock*, is successful there will be a series. Benedict Cumberbatch and Martin Freeman will play Holmes and Watson, with Rupert Graves as Lestrade. The setting is London, but filming will be done in Wales, where *Doctor Who* and *Torchwood* are made. Yesterday's Daily Telegraph quotes Steven Moffat: 'Everything that matters about Holmes and Watson is the same. Conan Doyle's original stories were never about frock coats and gaslight. They're about brilliant detection, dreadful villains and blood-curdling crimes — and, frankly, the hell with the crinoline.'

CSA WORD (www.csaword.co.uk; 6A Archway Mews, London SW15 2PE) has released on CD *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes: v. 1* read by **Edward Hardwicke**: six fine readings ('The Empty House', 'The Devil's Foot', 'The Abbey Grange', 'The Cardboard Box', 'The Man with the Twisted Lip' and 'The Bruce-Partington Plans') first released on cassette. Volume 2 follows on 12 January.

On 21 January BBC Audiobooks (St James House, The Square, Lower Bristol Road, Bath BA2 3BH) will release *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes vol. 3* — four plays by **Bert Coules**, starring Clive Merrison and Andrew Sachs: 'The Peculiar Persecution of Mr John Vincent Harden' from the first series, 'The Striking Success of Miss Franny Blossom' from the second, and 'The Thirteen Watches' and 'The Ferrers Documents' from the third, which begins transmission on Boxing Day.

As noted in DM 274, the famous **Café Royal** in Regent Street is to close — on Monday, in fact. On 28 November, *West End Extra* reported: 'To the bohemians of Victorian England, the Café Royal was an oasis of French charm — the reason why it became so beloved by Oscar Wilde and his friends. It was the backdrop to so many dramatic events in his life including his decision to sue the Marquess of Queensbury.' And of course there are Holmesian connections, including a dinner or two of our Society. The entire contents are to be sold at Bonhams in Knightsbridge on 20 January: 'Up for grabs are everything from humidors to brandy caskets, Venetian chandeliers to a whole boxing ring — the scene of many a bruising black-tie bout.' www.bonhams.com/cgi-bin/public.sh/pubweb/publicSite.r?sContinent=EUR&screen=furnitureSELL.

A few websites worth looking at. Our own Society's is at www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk. Chris Redmond's Sherlockian.net is,

naturally, at www.sherlockian.net. Willis Frick's Sherlocktron is at <http://members.cox.net/sherlock1/Sherlocktron.html>. Randall Stock's Best of Sherlock Holmes is at www.bestofsherlock.com. Then there are *The Baker Street Journal* at www.bakerstreetjournal.com, the Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes at www.ash-nyc.com, and the Sydney Passengers at www.sherlock-on.net. The University of Minnesota Sherlock Holmes Collections is (are?) at <http://special.lib.umn.edu/rare/holmes.phtml>, Portsmouth's Arthur Conan Doyle Collection is at www.conandoylecollection.co.uk, and Marylebone Library's Sherlock Holmes Collection at www.westminster.gov.uk/libraries/special/sherlock.cfm. David Stuart Davies, crimewriter and Holmesian scholar, is at www.davidstuardavies.com/, his partner in The Mystery Men, Matthew Booth, at www.matthew-booth.com, and the Mystery Men's site at www.mysterymen.info/.

The Park Plaza Sherlock Holmes at 108 Baker Street (to you and me, the **Sherlock Holmes Hotel**) has been in discussions with *Guinness World Records* regarding an attempt to break the world record for the most people dressed as Sherlock Holmes in one place and at one time. The last we heard the hotel management were awaiting word from Guinness as to whether it would be recognised as an official records category. If you'd like to know more, contact Megan McIntyre (Account Manager) at megan.mcintyre@rooster.co.uk.

Michael Harper has sent information about a course to be held on 21 March, from 10.30 to 4.30, at City Lit, Keeley Street, Covent Garden (London WC2B 4BA). The tutor is Geoff Doel, and the course is **Sherlock Holmes and his Creator**. The standard cost is £31.00 (senior fee £19.00, concessionary fee £10.00). You can enrol by post, in person, online at www.citylit.ac.uk, or by phone on 020 7831 7831.

John Ringham, who died on 20 October aged eighty, was a prolific and versatile actor. His last performances were in the detective series *Wallander*, with Kenneth Branagh, and the daytime soap *Doctors*. In 1985 he memorably played Inspector Lanner in Granada TV's production of *The Resident Patient*, with Jeremy Brett and David Burke.

Periodicals received. *The Camden House Journal*, October 2008, November 2008 and December 2008 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *The Illustrious Clients News*, November 2008 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Mayday Mayday*, December 2008, and *C-Extra*, December 2008 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcairn Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). *The Passengers' Log*, 8 October 2008 (**The Sydney Passengers**, Rosane McNamara, 4/2a Merlin Street, Neutral Bay, NSW 2089, Australia).

The Pipe Smoker's Thing, Autumn 2008 (Albert Mendez, 142-35 38th Avenue, Flushing, NY 11354, USA) [**much Sherlockian interest in this issue, though John Hall's new story is actually about the aristocratic 1920s sleuth Freddie Darnborough; Mr Mendez corrects an error in DM 284: The Holmesian Society has a dozen or so active members, though he is the only survivor of the founder-members**]. *The Rats' Annual Telegraph*, December 5 1898 [**sic**] (**The Giant Rats of Sumatra**, Joe Highfill, 480 Northwood Street, Parsons, TN 38363-2211, USA). *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, Winter 2008 [**I trust you won't actually need to be reminded of our own Society's journal...**]. *Sherlockiana*, nr. 4, 2008 (**Sherlock Holmes Klubben i Danmark**, Bjarne Rother Jensen, Højbovängen 24, 9200 Aalborg SV, Denmark). *The Torr*, Autumn 2008 (**The Poor Folk Upon The Moors**, Reggie Musgrave, Drummond Cottage, Old Tavern Yard, Westbourne, Chichester, West Sussex PO10 8TA).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermacti Press*, November 2008 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

Postal subscribers may not receive this till after Christmas, but in any case I'll wish everybody

The Compliments of the Season.

Roger Johnson