

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

Roger Johnson, Mole End, 41 Sandford Road, Chelmsford CM2 6DE

e-mail: rojerjohnson@yahoo.co.uk

no. 291 6th March 2009

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I naïvely expected the flood of new Holmesian books to diminish rather as we got into February, but happily I was wrong. Four more arrived in this morning's post – one being the eagerly awaited *Stage Whispers: The Memoirs* by **Douglas Wilmer**, who to many of us was the definitive Sherlock Holmes of the mid-twentieth century (Porter Press International, PO Box 2, Tenbury Wells, WR5 8XX; standard edition £19.99; special edition £45.00). The publishers appear to have done him proud! There's a website at www.porterpress.co.uk. The US distributor is SNG Barratt USA (92 Londonderry Turnpike, Manchester, NH 03104, USA; www.sngbarratt.com). At our Society's meeting on 24 March, Mr Wilmer will talk about his life and career.

Of the dozen or so guides to Holmesian London, there are two that I recommend to visitors: Arthur Alexander's *Hot on the Scent* and Tom Wheeler's *Finding Sherlock's London*. Nothing stands still for long, though. **Thomas Bruce Wheeler** has revised and expanded his book, and *The New Finding Sherlock's London* (iUniverse, 1663 Liberty Drive, Bloomington, IN 47403, USA: \$22.95) is a guide to more than 300 sites, each of whose significance is clearly and pithily stated. The book can be used in various ways. You can visit the locations of a specific adventure. You can explore the sites near each of ninety-nine railway or Underground stations. Or you can take any of six walking tours in the footsteps of Holmes and Watson. I said of the original edition that it was an excellent traveller's tool. *The New Finding Sherlock's London* is that and much more.

Now there's a third book to recommend. *Close to Holmes: A Look at the Connections between Historical London, Sherlock Holmes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* by **Alistair Duncan** (MX Publishing, 335 Princess Park Manor, Royal Drive, London N11 3GX; £9.99 or \$19.95) is, I think, the first to give equal consideration to the places associated with Conan Doyle. Reading it, we feel that we're in the company of a knowledgeable, enthusiastic and witty friend. I should mention that I contributed the foreword; I did so because the book is both valuable and a pleasure to read. As much a historical and literary exploration as a travel guide, *Close to Holmes* doesn't compete with *The New Finding Sherlock's London*; instead, the two complement each other. On 14 March Alistair Duncan will be signing copies of his book at Waterstone's in the Whitgift Centre, Croydon, from noon to 2.00pm.

Christopher Redmond has published a slightly enlarged edition of his entertaining 52-page booklet *Quotations from Baker Street* (Chris Redmond, 523 Westfield Drive, Waterloo, Ontario N2T 2E1, Canada; cost including postage outside North America £8.00 or €9.00 or \$12.00). Unlike similarly titled collections, this one contains witty, poignant, enlightening and sometimes simply odd quotations about Sherlock Holmes. Many of us will recognise ourselves in Eden Searles' remark: 'My deep love for the dusty stacks of second-hand bookshops is directly attributable to Sherlock Holmes.'

The most easily accessible account of the 'fatal battle' was Leigh Maxwell's excellent *My God – Maiwand*. Now we also have *Maiwand: The Last Stand of the 66th (Berkshire) Regiment in Afghanistan, 1880* by **Richard J Stacpoole-Ryding** (The History Press, The Mill, Brimscombe Port, Stroud, Glos. GL5 2QG; £19.99), which for the first time, I think, looks at the Battle of Maiwand specifically in relation to Dr Watson's regiment. This scrupulously

researched and engagingly written book follows the Berkshires from Ireland to India in 1870, and takes us briefly through the next decade, so that when the cataclysmic battle breaks out we feel we know the men who fought against Ayub Khan's army. Thanks to the remarkable archive of official and personal papers held at The Rifles (Berkshire and Wiltshire) Museum, the author is able to present the officers and men as living human beings, not merely as fighting units, both in the main text and more fully in an appendix of biographical sketches. Other appendices look briefly at connections with Rudyard Kipling and with John H Watson. Mr Stacpoole-Ryding founded the Friends of Dr Watson, and he proves to be a fine storyteller himself, describing the Berkshires' heroic stand vividly and clearly. The link to the Canon is a bonus. Signed copies are, I understand, available direct from The Rifles (Berkshire and Wiltshire) Museum at The Wardrobe, 58 The Close, Salisbury SP1 2EX; www.thewardrobe.org.uk. (Less than two weeks ago three soldiers of the 1st Battalion The Rifles were killed in Helmand province, not very far from Maiwand...)

The Norwegian Explorers' Christmas Annual 2008, subtitled *The Non-English Sherlock Holmes*, includes most interesting articles on the Canon in Yiddish, pastiche in French, the 1954 television series that was filmed in Paris, and more, including an 1894 parody (in English) from Wales! This nice 58-page chapbook costs \$8.00 postpaid from John Bergquist (3665 Ashbury Road, Eagan, MN 55122, USA; checks payable to The Norwegian Explorers).

There are echoes of 'His Last Bow' in *Sherlock Holmes & the Morphine Gambit* by **Jason Cooke** (Breese Books, Baker Street Studios Ltd, Endeavour House, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB22 3DX; 23 March; £7.50 or €12.00 or \$8.50, postpaid). In February 1912 Mycroft Holmes calls on his brother to investigate a burglary at a house on the Norfolk coast, belonging to a German-born businessman and philanthropist, Sir Edward Muster. Relations between Britain and Germany are strained after the previous month's International Opium Convention, at which the Germans urged a ban on the opium trade (which would damage the British economy) and the British demanded a ban on the cocaine trade (which would damage the German economy). The novel is inspired by the story of the Rt Hon Sir Edgar Speyer, who fell victim to anti-German hysteria when war broke out. *The Morphine Gambit* is an exciting story, adequately well-written, though there are a few disconcertingly anachronistic phrases, such as 'safe house' and 'real ale', and Mr Cooke apparently thinks that the First Lord of the Admiralty is the same as the First Sea Lord. Not so. In February 1912 Winston Churchill, MP held the former post, and Admiral Sir Francis Bridgeman the latter.

I've received no fewer than four new Sherlockian titles from Black Coat Press (Hollywood Comics.com LLC, PO Box 17270, Encino, CA 91416, USA; www.blackcoatpress.com). *Sherlock Holmes vs Fantômas* by Pierre de Wattyne & Yorril Walter (\$16.95 or £10.99) has been translated and adapted by **Frank J Morlock** from a 1914 play, *La Mort de Herlock Sholmès, ou Bandits en Habit Noir*. A very different character from, say, Arsène Lupin, Fantomâs, it's said, is a key figure in crime fiction as he represents a transition from Gothic novel villains of the 1800s to modern-day serial killers. The play inevitably takes some liberties with the received image of Sherlock Holmes, but in Frank Morlock's version it's a heart-clutching thriller.

Brian Stableford is both a distinguished writer of science fiction and a notable translator of French SF. His novel *Sherlock Holmes and the Vampires of Eternity* (\$24.95 or £16.99) envisions, through drug-induced 'timeshadowing', the story of the cosmos over the next twelve

million years and the question of its ultimate fate. Sherlock Holmes is only one of the many characters who become observers of, and sometimes participants in, the continuing struggle between Humanity, the Vampires of eternity, and whatever it is that lurks at the end of time. His fellow-shadows include William Hope Hodgson, H G Wells, Oscar Wilde, Camille Flammarion, Alfred Jarry – and Count Dracula. *Sherlock Holmes and the Vampires of Eternity* is a fascinating apocalyptic mixture of wild imagination and serious scientific speculation.

In *Tales of the Shadowmen, Volume 5: The Vampires of Paris* (\$22.95 or £14.99) **Jean-Marc & Randy Lofficier** have gathered more new stories of the heroes and villains of French pulp fiction, from authors including Scott Eckert, John Peel, Rick Lai, Xavier Mauméjean and Brian Stableford. As in the earlier volumes, we find the likes of Fantômas, Arsène Lupin, Joseph Rouletabille and Edmond Dantès sharing adventures with an increasingly wide range of other characters from popular literature – Ernst Stavro Blofeld, Count Zaroff, Frankenstein's monster, Hercule Poirot... even Bertie Wooster and Astérix the Gaul! Sherlock Holmes is there, of course, with Rouletabille and Tevye, in Stuart Schiffman's 'The Milkman Cometh', and with the Time Traveller and Professor Cavor in 'A Matter Without Gravity' by Alain le Bussy. Professor Moriarty, meanwhile, meets Dr Omega and Zepherin Xyrdal in 'The Dynamics of an Asteroid' by John Peel. It's all pretty crazy, and deliriously exciting.

The three novellas in *Sherlock Holmes: The Circle of Blood* by **Steve Leadley** (\$20.95 or £12.99) promise to be rather more down-to-earth, but as the book's only just arrived I can't say much more than that. (Opening at random, however, I find the irritatingly ungrammatical phrase 'different than', and a reference to a building in 'the gothic revival style known as "Queen Anne"...' The British nineteenth century 'Queen Anne' style is very different from the highly decorated American style of that name, though not much closer to the architecture popular in the reign of Queen Anne, 1702-1714.)

The most unexpected new book to reach me is *Blast to Oblivion*, a Black Horse Western by **Chap O'Keefe** (Robert Hale, Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £12.99). In fact the cover painting of a cowboy on a bucking bronco is misleading. The opening quotation, 'The old wheel turns and the same spoke comes up. It's all been done before, and will be again,' as good as tells the reader that Mr O'Keefe has reworked the plot of a Sherlock Holmes story as an exploit of his ex-Pinkerton protagonist Joshua Dillard. The result is clever, atmospheric and exciting. Chap O'Keefe writes about the novel's debt to Conan Doyle at www.blackhorsewesterns.com.

Sherlock Holmes gets five pages in *Great British Fictional Detectives* by **Russell James** (Remember When, Pen & Sword Books Ltd, 47 Church Street, Barnsley, South Yorks. S70 2AS; £19.99). Mr James is a former Chairman of the Crime Writers Association, and knows far more than I do about the subject. He writes entertainingly, and the book is very handsomely presented. But when I read that 'within Doyle's own works we glean that Holmes was born in Yorkshire on 6 January 1854, the third son of a country squire' and was 'educated at Christ Church, Oxford', I wonder whether Russell James has really done his homework. And while I welcome the inclusion of television and radio detectives, I'm surprised that one of the very best, Jonathan Creek, is excluded, though a place is allocated to, er, Dixon of Dock Green. This is by no means a bad book, but I do feel that it could have been much better.

Aside Arthur Conan Doyle: Twenty Original Tales is the curious title of a rather splendid selection of stories by **Bertram Fletcher Robinson**, compiled by Paul R Spiring (MX Publishing, 335 Princess Park Manor, Royal Drive, London N11 3GX; £12.99 or \$22.95). The six Chronicles of Addington Peace, the six episodes of *The Trail of the Dead*, and eight other tales are reproduced in facsimile from the original magazine publication between 1899 and 1907. You can understand why Conan Doyle lamented Robinson's death that year as 'a loss to the world'.

Mémoires et Documents 2008 (Société d'études Holmesiennes de la Suisse Romande) is called *Tout ce que vous avez toujours voulu savoir sur le sitting-room de Baker Street sans jamais l'avoir visité*, by **Jean-Pierre Crauser**. It's in French, but even I found it easy to follow.

Next time I'll review *Stage Whispers: The Memoirs* by **Douglas Wilmer**, *The Architect of Murder* by **Rafe McGregor** (Robert Hale, Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £18.99), *Carter's Occult Casebook* by **Kelvin I Jones** (Oakmagic Publications, 1 Sir Williams Lane, Aylsham, Norwich NR11 6AW; £7.99), and *Sherlock Holmes: Some Unpublished Cases* by **Robert A Kisch** (Institution of Diagnostic Engineers, 7 Weir Road, Kibworth, Leicester LE8 0LQ; £9.99).

Murder One, London's last specialist crime fiction bookshop, closed on 31 January, but the business continues at www.murderone.co.uk. The February issue of *The Sherlockian E-Times* is at http://www.sherlock-holmes.com/e_times09-1.htm. (**Classic Specialties**, PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com.) There's also lots of Holmesian material at George Vanderburgh's Battered Silicon Dispatch Box site at www.batteredbox.com.

There probably isn't much about Sherlock Holmes in *The Wine of Certitude: A Literary Biography of Ronald Knox* by **David Rooney** (Ignatius Press, PO Box 1339, Fort Collins, CO 80522, USA; \$17.95).

On 30 March, Naxos Audiobooks (2nd Floor, 40A High Street, Welwyn, Herts. AL6 9EQ) will launch *The Complete Sherlock Holmes*, a luxury 60-CD set of all sixty stories read unabridged by **David Timson**. It's a magnificent feat by Mr Timson and his producer Nicolas Soames.

At **Greenwich Theatre** on 29 April there'll be a rehearsed reading of *Summerland*, a new play about Houdini and Conan Doyle by Jon Armstrong & Jennifer Porteous. Tickets are £5.00 from 020 8858 7755 or www.greenwichtheatre.org.uk. The full production will be staged at Greenwich in October, followed by a national tour.

A conference entitled *The Cultural Afterlives of Arthur Conan Doyle and Sherlock Holmes* will be held on 4 July in the Derwent Building at the University Hull. Get details from the Department of English, L276/L280, Larkin Building, University of Hull, Cottingham Road, Hull. HU6 7RX; or e-mail g.e.cowper@hull.ac.uk.

The Priory Scholars hold monthly and quarterly meetings, the next being on 14 March, 29 March and 18 April. Contact Horace L Coates for information at 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY (0116 299 3173). A world away, **The Elementary Victorians**, despite the bush fires that have devastated parts of their home state, will meet on 4 April. Steve Duke has the details at PO Box 340, Reservoir 3073, Australia (redman.duke@gmail.com or stirlingsteve@aim.com). As with most such societies, visiting Holmesians are welcome.

The distinguished and prolific Irish playwright **Hugh Leonard** died on 12 February, aged eighty-two. In 1968 he dramatised *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – the latter probably the best screen adaptation of the novel – for the BBC TV series with Peter Cushing and Nigel Stock. His 1985 play *the Mask of Moriarty* has had successful productions on both sides of the ocean.

The science fiction novelist **Philip Jose Farmer**, who died on 25 February, aged ninety-one, was a keen Sherlockian. He loved to use Holmes as a character in stories such as *The Adventure of the Peerless Peer* and *The Other Log of Phileas Fogg*. In 1977 he was one of the founders of The Hansoms of John Clayton.

Periodicals received. *Bohemian Newsletter*, no. 96 (České společnost **Sherlocka Holmese**, Aleš Kolodrubec, Milešovská 1, 130 00 Praha 3, Czech Republic). *The Illustrious Clients News*, December 2008 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, March 2009 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *The Serpentine Muse*, Fall 2008 (**The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes**, Evelyn Herzog, 301 Warren Ave, #203, Baltimore, MD 21203, USA).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, January 2009 and February 2009 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

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