

THE DISTRICT MESSENGER

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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More obituaries, alas. In the past few months we've lost the legendary Howard Haycraft, author of the seminal study of the detective story MURDER FOR PLEASURE and an early and staunch Baker Street Irregular; Donald Houston, who was a cherishable Watson in that splendid film A STUDY IN TERROR; and Donald Churchill, actor and playwright, whose undistinguished Watson in the Ian Richardson HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES was eclipsed by his fine Scott Eccles in Granada's WISTERIA LODGE.

A reminder that Basil Rathbone's enchanting autobiography IN AND OUT OF CHARACTER, long out of print, is now available again from Ianmead Ltd (15 Stoalety Rise, Haslemere, Surrey GU27 1AF) in a strongly-bound and handsome paperback edition at £7.95. Rathbone became so strongly identified with Sherlock Holmes (though many of us delight in his magnificent cinematic villains, such as Guy of Guisborne) that it's easy to neglect his distinguished earlier stage and screen career; it's all here, the dedication and frustration of a great actor's life. Rathbone is revealed as a very likeable man, whose hard exterior hid a truly gentle gentleman. As a bonus, there's his rare Holmesian fantasy, "Daydream". Essential reading for all who've admired Rathbone's performances.

No less important is the third volume in the BSI History Project, IRREGULAR RECORDS OF THE EARLY 'FORTIES, edited by Jon L. Lellenberg (Fordham University Press, Bronx, NY 10458, USA; \$18.95). The Holmesian flame burned low in Britain during the 40s, between the demise of the original Sherlock Holmes Society of London and the founding of its successor, but the fire was bright in America, kept alive by the Baker Street Irregulars and their growing number of scion societies. The bulk of the story is told in the correspondence of the Irregulars themselves, Christopher Morley, the indefatigable Edgar W. Smith, Vincent Starrett, Frederick Dorr Steele and other names that should be familiar to us all (but are not, I suspect); Lellenberg's introduction places the scholarship and the shenanigans neatly in their historical setting, and enlarges on the occasional cryptic references in the letters and reports. (He has a nice way with words, too: "Kansas does boast of towns with the names Altamont and Tonganoxie, but not very much.") For all the public denial of the very existence of Arthur Conan Doyle (an attitude that seems to be in gratifying decline), the BSIs were always happy in private to acknowledge their immense debt to the creator of Holmes and Watson. One small question: among a list of great Holmesian scholars, in a letter on page 229, Smith gives the name of "Machen" - Arthur Machen, presumably, but what was his contribution to the study of Holmes? Clearly there were giants in those days. I'm looking forward keenly to the fourth volume.

(If Machen was a great admirer of Sherlock Holmes, so was that other writer of superb weird tales M.R. James, though none of his canonical criticism has come to light. Fordham has also published a delightful volume of ghost stories written to celebrate MRJ's work in cataloguing the mediaeval manuscripts of the Pierpont Morgan Library in New York. MORGAN LIBRARY GHOST STORIES costs a reasonable \$24.95.)

The Radio 4 series THE MEMOIRS OF SHERLOCK HOLMES, with the admirable Clive Merrison and Michael Williams, is well under way now, and BBC Radio Drama has produced a very nice set of postcards, each featuring a Paget illustration to one of the eleven stories. Each set comes in an attractive card wallet and costs £3.50 (+ 36p postage) from Sherlock Holmes Postcards, 812, Henry Wood House, Langham Place, London W1A 1AA. (Henry Wood?)

Peter Horrocks has a limited number of the splendid Sherlock Holmes Society of London 1991 medals (designed by Deborah Burnett Eadie) available for the cost of postage and packing. UK applicants please send a padded envelope 4"x 6" addressed to yourself and bearing a 24p or

18p stamp; overseas applicants please send a similar envelope and a cheque for \$2.20 (US) made to Peter Horrocks. (22 Old Buildings, Lincoln's Inn, London WC2A 3UJ.)

David Stuart Davies (Overdale, 69 Greenhead Road, Huddersfield HD1 4ER) is offering, as a service to enthusiasts, VHS videos of SHERLOCK HOLMES & THE DEADLY NECKLACE (Christopher Lee & Thorley Walters) and a "colorised" print of TERROR BY NIGHT (Rathbone & Bruce) at £10 each to cover the cost of copying onto PAL. David also offers copies of his new play SHERLOCK THROUGH THE MAGNIFYING GLASS at £4.00; the play was first performed at the Northern Musgraves' 1992 Birthday Party. Catherine Cooke has contributed an enlightening essay on Sherlock Holmes and women. Finally from David, a reminder that 1992 subscriptions for the Musgraves are due by the 1st February; the sub for UK members is £10, payable to The Northern Musgraves and sent to the Membership Secretary, John Addy (23 East Street, Lightcliffe, Halifax HX3 8TU).

Another intensely active society is the Franco-Midland Hardware Company. In addition to providing its various correspondence study programmes, involving two journals, four newsletters and four monographs, the FMHC has expanded its Holmesian social activities for 1992. The Company will be arranging excursions to: ACD's homes at South Norwood, Hindhead and Crowborough; Shrewsbury and North Wales; Croydon; Oxford University; Ruyton XI Towns; Cromer and the Norfolk coast; mid-Hampshire; Dartmoor; Warwick Castle. For details of all correspondence and social activities, send two first class stamps (UK) or one US dollar bill (overseas) to "The Stock-Broker's Clerk", 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hampshire PO14 3RU, England. Jane Sayle (the Clerk in question) tells me that Pam Clarke will be running a one-day convention on Sunday the 9th February in honour of that excellent actor Barrie Ingham, whose distinguished career includes providing the voice of the eponymous murine hero in BASIL, THE GREAT MOUSE DETECTIVE; the convention will be held at the Mountbatten Hotel, Covent Garden, London. For details, send a stamped and addressed envelope to: BI Con, c/o Clarke's, 5 Walker Terrace, Gateshead, Tyne & Wear NE8 1EB.

UK readers whose envelopes are large enough will find enclosed a lovely photograph of the Reichenbach Jug (see DM 115) designed and produced by Studio Gallery (50 Caledonian Road, London N1 9DP). The cards themselves are in a strictly limited edition of 1000, so they too are collectors' items; however, I have more, and they can be had for the cost of postage while stocks last. For details of the Jug itself, please write to Studio Gallery.

Catherine Cooke passes on the news that the Fetcham Players will be mounting a production of THE HOUND OF THE BASKERVILLES, in Tim Kelly's jolly adaptation, at Fetcham Village Hall on the 13th, 14th & 15th February. Tickets are £4 & £3.50 from Sally Percival (tel. 0372 374694) or Symphony World Travel, 220 Cobham Road, Fetcham, Surrey. The village is just outside Leatherhead.

Vincent Mattocks has sent me attractive photos of three nice miniature figures in the "Sherlock Holmes Series", available from Tradition, 2 Shepherd Street, Mayfair, London W1Y 7LN: SH1 (Holmes), SH2 (Watson) & SH3 (Moriarty). For details of price etc., please write to Tradition.

Want ads. William Berner (4712 17th Street, San Francisco, California 94117, USA) wants a copy of The Sherlock Holmes Journal vol. 19 no. 2 (73rd issue). Peter B. Spivak (3753 Penobscot Building, Detroit, Michigan 48226, USA) is after a VHS or Beta format video of SHERLOCK HOLMES IN NEW YORK, starring Roger Moore & John Houston, (if it comes to that, so am I, but playable on a British VCR, please. I'm also lacking THE SEVEN-PER-CENT SOLUTION. Oh, my machine takes VHS only. Can anyone help, please?) William asks me to mention that he'll pay by sterling cheque for the SHJ if necessary.

Finally, Peter Steiler the Younger (Jürg Musfeld), custodian of the Sherlock Holmes Museum in Meiringen, offers an illustrated catalogue of the many canonical souvenirs available from the Museum at SFr2.50. (Park-Hotel Sauvage "Englischer Hof", 3860 Meiringen, Bernese Oberland, Switzerland.) Ask Mr Musfeld about the hotel's special terms for members of Sherlock Holmes societies.

