

# THE DISTRICT MESSENGER

The Newsletter of the Sherlock Holmes Society of London

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opinions expressed are the editor's unless noted otherwise

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**Malcolm Payne**, a founder and the main driving force of the Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Establishment, died on the 30th May, after a long illness borne with fortitude and humour. His father, aunt and uncle all worked for Sir Arthur at Windlesham. Thanks to Malcolm's hard work, the name of Conan Doyle is holding its own in East Sussex against that of Sherlock Holmes. He had already passed his responsibilities as Curator to his deputy, Brian Pugh, and correspondence should now be addressed to Brian at 20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN.

Our Society's Functions Secretary, Pam Bruxner, has moved to 2B Hiham Green, Winchelsea, East Sussex TN36 4HB (phone 01797 222132). Paula Brown, of the Noble West Enders, has moved to 132 7th Street, Ashland, OR 97520-2016, USA.

*Sherlock Holmes: Victorian Sleuth to Modern Hero*, edited by Charles R. Putney, Joseph A. Cutshall King and Sally Sugarman, (Scarecrow Press Inc., 4720 Boston Way, Lanham, MD 20706, USA/4 Pleydell Gardens, Folkestone, Kent CT20 2DN.; \$34.50/ £32.50) is a collection of papers from the 1994 Conference of the Baker Street Breakfast Club at Bennington, Vermont. That sounds terribly academic and inaccessible. In fact the contents are wonderfully varied and readable. You'll find familiar Sherlockian names here, like Philip K. Wilson and Patrick Campbell, alongside Nicholas Meyer and Edward B. Hanna, best-selling novelists who have enlarged on the Holmes saga, and a host of specialists in English literature and social history. All write so engagingly that it must be a pleasure to be taught by them. Subjects range from Holmes's work-ethic and Holmes as the archetypal hero to the influence of Sherlock Holmes on *Star Trek: the Next Generation* and the reasons why no movie has yet measured up to the true Sherlock Holmes. It's a delightful, stimulating collection, and I recommend it to all who are interested in the phenomenon that is Sherlock Holmes.

Constable & Co. Ltd (3 The Lanchesters, 162 Fulham Palace Road, London W6 9ER) has just published *The Secret Documents of Sherlock Holmes*, the fourth volume of new adventures by June Thomson (not counting her superb biography, *Holmes and Watson*). Miss Thomson is one of the very few writers who can consistently catch the flavour of the best of the original tales, in both style and substance. Apart from the footnotes (which are certainly interesting but may be getting a little intrusive) you could easily think that you were reading original Conan Doyle. It's that good. And besides the seven stories, all derived from Canonical hints, there's an essay identifying the King of Bohemia with — no, I won't spoil it for you. June Thomson ranks among the major Holmesian scholars, and I'm delighted to recommend this new book. It costs £15.99.

Hugh S. Scullion's latest publication is an intriguing 32-page booklet called *The Sherlock Holmes Reference Manual* (Cadds Printing Ltd, 59 Lancaster Avenue, West Norwood, London SE27 9EL; £6.00 [USA \$14.00 — cheques payable to Hugh

Scullion; elsewhere £8.00 cash] — prices include postage). Mr Scullion has analysed the Canon and provides a handy list of characters and things for each story. These include places, smoking, drinking, murder details — all of which seem well researched — and a sound selection of quotations. He has also devised a new list of abbreviations (more immediately comprehensible than Prof. Christ's code, though I fancy that the latter will outlast it). The book has much interesting data for the scholar and researcher.

Due on the 23rd June from HarperCollins (77/85 Fulham Palace Road, London W6 8JB) is *The Napoleon of Crime*, a biography of Adam Worth (a real-life Moriarty) by Ben MacIntyre.

Calabash Press (PO Box 1360, Ashcroft, B.C. V0K 1A0, Canada) has published the second volume of *The Case Files of Sherlock Holmes: The Speckled Band*. It's a grand collection of essays on various aspects of the story by the likes of Chris Redmond, Dixon Smith, Owen Dudley Edwards, Catherine Cooke, Kathryn White, David Stuart Davies and Kelvin Jones. It's available in Britain from Rupert Books at £20.50 hardback or £14.50 paperback.

**Rupert Books** (58/59 Stonefield, Bar Hill, Cambridge CB3 8TE; phone 01954 781861) have a new catalogue, full of good things. **Nigel Williams** (22 & 25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE) has a new catalogue of first editions.

Issue 19 of *The Sherlock Holmes Gazette* (46 Purfield Drive, Wargrave, Berks. RG10 8AR; US representative Classic Specialties, PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA) continues Michael Cox's fascinating personal account of the Granada TV series. Roger Grimshaw answers readers' questions; Gaynor Coules looks at John Harvey's books; Catherine Cooke examines Sexton Blake; David Stuart Davies meets Clive Merrison & Michael Williams; 'Societies Forum' puts the spotlight on **The Bootmakers of Toronto**; Tim Yarro profiles Val Andrews; Paul Chapman considers Henry Irving; Barbara Roden returns to *The Lost World...* All this and much, much more!

Phil Attwell sends a recent ad for the Folio Society (FREEPOST, 44 Eagle Street, London WC1R 4BR). New members can buy the Society's nice 9-volume edition of the Canon for just £9.95.

Those involved with theatricals should investigate the range of plays in the new catalogue from Jasper Publishing (1 Broad Street, Hemel Hempstead, Herts. HP2 5BW). They include *Holmes*, *Sweet Holmes* and *The Ruanian Succession*.

A reminder that *Good Old Index: the Sherlock Holmes Handbook* by Thomas W. Ross (Camden House Inc., Drawer 2025, Columbia, SC 29202, USA; \$25.95) is distributed in Britain by Boydell & Brewer Ltd (PO Box 9, Woodbridge, Suffolk IP12 3DF) at £14.95. See the review in DM 168.

Penguin Audiobooks (27 Wrights Lane, London W8 5TZ) have sent review copies of *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* volumes I and II. The reader is our Honorary Member Douglas Wilmer, and the producer is our former Chairman Philip Porter, who produced Douglas's earlier recordings. The texts have been sensitively abridged by Neville Teller, who is immensely

experienced in radio production. The promise of quality (need I say?) is fulfilled. These are the first two of three double-cassettes that will include all 12 of *The Adventures* in their published order — part of a larger plan to record the entire Canon. ('The Blue Carbuncle' appears to be the recording previously included in *Black Peter*, but the reading of 'The Speckled Band' is not that featured on *Four Great Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*.) The only adverse comment I can make is that Mr Wilmer's Watson sounds less convincing than his Holmes, but the same could be said of Basil Rathbone's readings. Volume I will be in the shops in July and Volume II in October. Volume III is currently being recorded for release in January. These are excellent performances by a great Sherlock Holmes, and our Society can be proud of its connection with them.

Too late for the last DM was news of another First Day Cover for the *Hound of the Baskervilles* stamp. The Cambridge Stamp Centre Ltd (9 Sussex Street, Cambridge CB1 1PA) reproduces stills from the 1931 Gainsborough movie in a very atmospheric design. Covers can be had autographed by Dame Jean Conan Doyle, Christopher Lee, Edward Hardwicke or Bernard Horsfall (there may be further choices) and costs £11.95. Investigate also the covers from A.G. Bradbury (3 Link Road, Stoneycage, Leicester LE2 3RA). Our own Society has a cover which features a rare *Strand Magazine* advertisement of 1901 and is franked with our logo. It's available from the Society at £5.00 to members.

**The Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Establishment** now has a badge, showing Arthur Conan Doyle head and shoulders, with the initials ACD above and the name CROWBOROUGH below. The price is £4.00 plus postage (£1.00 to Britain and Europe, £1.50 elsewhere). £1.00 from each sale goes to the Conan Doyle Statue Fund. Payment can be made in UK currency, Postal Orders, bank cheques or Giro cheques. Bank cheques should be payable to B.W. Pugh. Dollar payments can be accepted in US cash only. Write to Brian Pugh at 20 Clare Road, Lewes, East Sussex BN7 1PN. (\**Brian reminds me that Groombridge Place near Crowborough is the 'real' Birlstone Manor. You can get a brochure from The Estate Office, Groombridge Place, Groombridge, Royal Tunbridge Wells, Kent TN3 9QG.*\*)

Phil Attwell notes two crime fiction events in Nottingham this month. *Shots on the Page* is this coming weekend (details from Broadwards, c/o JMLS, 24 Gamble Street, Nottingham NG7 4FY). *Shots in the Dark* runs from the 5th to the 15th (Broadway Media Centre, 14-18 Broad Street, Nottingham NG1 3AL).

Charles Hall sends news of a current exhibition at Lady Stair's Close in Edinburgh: *Arthur Conan Doyle — the Edinburgh Connection*. It sounds like a must-see.

There are two versions of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* on stage this month. Swan Ocean Productions have a new adaptation by John Tully at the **LOST Theatre** (450 Fulham Road, London SW6 1LD) 11th-28th June. For information, contact Swan Ocean Productions, 38 Grange Road, Southall, Middlesex UB1 1BY (phone 0181 574 8513). NatWest Theatre Company have Tim Kelly's version at the **Steiner Theatre** near Baker Street Station, 25th-27th June (Janet Hough, H.R. Services, Group Central Services, 3rd Floor, York House, 207 Pentonville Road, London N1 9UZ ;0171 239 8501).

There's a very pleasant public house in Northumberland Street, off Trafalgar Square. Formerly known as *The Northumberland Arms*, it was re-opened on 12th December 1957 as *The Sherlock Holmes* and has for nearly 40 years been a shrine for Sherlockian pilgrims. Visitors can now obtain an anniversary booklet, *Forty Years of The Sherlock Holmes*, illustrated by Jean-Pierre Cagnat.

The pub is just a couple of minutes' walk from the famous **Players' Theatre**, which for over 60 years has presented Victorian Music Hall, such as Watson at least would recognise and enjoy. For information about admission or membership (which provides special privileges) contact The Players' Theatre, The Arches, Villiers Street, Strand, London WC2N 6NG (phone 0171 839 1134; fax 0171 839 8067; e-mail [theplayers@aol.com](mailto:theplayers@aol.com); website [www.jj15.co.uk/players](http://www.jj15.co.uk/players)).

Over the weekend of the 4th-6th July **The Sherlock Holmes Society of London** will be visiting the various Essex and Suffolk sites connected with 'His Last Bow' and 'The Retired Colourman'. Margaret Bird has compiled and published a 'practical handbook', *An East Wind*, which contains stimulating essays by Godfrey Hunt, Derek Hinrich, Catherine Cooke, Tony Bird, Richard Miller, Nicholas Utechin, Wayne & Francine Swift, Ernst-Harald Mock, David Walsh, Geoffrey Stavert, Grant Eustace, David Hammer, Harald Curjel, Roger Johnson and Bernard Davies. Bernard's identification of Von Bork's house is masterly and probably irrefutable. I have no idea how many copies of *An East Wind* will be available to non-participants, but feel that everybody should be aware of the excellence of the book.

**The Franco-Midland Hardware Company** will be at the Red House Carriage Museum in Darley Dale over the 6th-8th June, for their *Annual Dinner Weekend*. (Details from 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3RU.) **The Northern Musgraves** will meet at Bingley Grammar School on the 14th June for *Sherlock in Summer*, their annual film event, featuring a tribute to the late Ronald Howard (Anne Jordan, Fairbank, Beck Lane, Bingley, West Yorks. BD16 4DN). On 21st June **The Poor Folk Upon The Moors** visit Dunkerton (home of ACD's sister Dodo) and Shoscombe in Somerset (Vosper Arthur, Spynishlake, Doddiscombesleigh, Exeter EX6 7PR).

*The Baker Street Journal* for March 1997 (PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331, USA) is mostly a well deserved tribute to Tom Stix, recently retired as 'Wiggins', the head of **The Baker Street Irregulars**. There are affectionate contributions from many Sherlockian luminaries from both sides of the Atlantic (and the Pacific). The BSJ is published by the BSI but is available to all. — one of the half-dozen must-haves for the dedicated Sherlockian.

The **Irregular Special Railway Company** has a new registered address: 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB2 4DX (phone 01223 833418) (\**though I'm sure correspondence sent to the Leigh-on-Sea address will reach Antony Richards, the Station Master*\*). The 4th issue of *The Sherlock Holmes Railway Journal* is full of meaty material from Wayne Swift, Catherine Cooke, David Walsh, Philip Scowcroft, Bernard Prunet and Kevin O'Doherty. It's available to non-members.

Other periodicals received. *The Soft-Nosed Bullet-In* no. 22 (**Von Herder Airguns Ltd**, Michael Ross, Bendheide 65, D-47906 Kempen, Germany) is another admirable collection of essays and artwork. Also *The Striking (Trifles)*, May 1977. *The Ritual*, Spring 1997 (**The Northern Musgraves**, Paul M. Chapman, Langford, Thirsk Road, Easingwold, North Yorks. TO6 3HL). (\**This first issue under the editorship of Paul Chapman and John Hall.*\*) *The Cormorant's Ring*, April 1997 (**The Trained Cormorants of Long Beach**, Jim Coffin, 6570 E. Paseo Alcazaa, Anaheim Hills, CA 92807, USA). (\**Now in handy chapbook format and available at \$3.00 the issue.*\*) *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, April & May 1997 (Peter E. Blau, 3900 Tunlaw Road NW #119, Washington, DC 20007-4830, USA). (\**The invaluable Sherlock Holmes newsletter.*\*)

*Roger Johnson*