

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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Alexis Barquin passes on the news that on 11 December Christopher Lee will be invested as a Chevalier of the French Academie des Arts et des Lettres. Lee, as you won't need reminding, is the only actor to have played both Holmes brothers and Sir Henry Baskerville. (*Richard E Grant has played *Sherlock* and *Mycroft Holmes* and *Jack Stapleton**)

I'm reminded that though **Richard Harris**, who died on 25 October, never appeared in a Sherlock Holmes movie or play, he did play James McParlan, the 'real' Jack McMurdo, in the 1970 film *The Molly Maguires*. Laura Kuhn notes the death of **Lewis Feuer** on 24 November; the New York Times said: 'His interest in matters philosophical was matched by a fascination with Sherlock Holmes. He condensed it in a historical whimsy of a novel, *The Case of the Revolutionist's Daughter: Sherlock Holmes Meets Karl Marx* [in which] Holmes is hired by Marx to investigate the disappearance of his daughter Eleanor.' **Stanley Black** died on 26 November, aged 89. There was nothing directly Sherlockian in his long career as musician, conductor and composer, but he did write the score for the atmospheric 1959 thriller *Jack the Ripper*.

The Ripper's in the news again with the publication of Patricia Cornwell's *Portrait of a Killer*, which claims that Jack was the painter Walter Sickert. As someone said, Ms Cornwell may know a lot about criminals but she doesn't seem to know much about artists.

You'll have checked the Christmas radio and TV scheduling by the time this reaches you, but I'll mention that the new *Hound of the Baskervilles* will be shown on BBC1 on Christmas Eve (Barbara Roden's sent a very encouraging review from Canada). Oscar Ross suggests we look at BBC2's comedy on 23 December: *Cruise of the Gods*, in which Steve Coogan plays a former children's TV entertainer who has gone on to a US mini-series, *Sherlock Holmes in Miami*. He also notes that from Christmas Day Granada Plus will show a selection of Granada TV's classic Holmes series.

Mercat Press (53 South Bridge, Edinburgh EH1 1YS) has published a second selection from the memoirs of James McLevy, and *McLevy Returns* (£9.99) is just as good as its predecessor, *McLevy: The Edinburgh Detective*. Once again, curiously, the cover photograph is of Edinburgh in the 1880s, even though McLevy's detective career stretched from the 1830s to the 1860s. No matter; it's an attractive picture, and the book itself is splendid. The style of these tales, taken from two volumes published in 1861, is chatty, in the way that Dickens's essays are. Dr Watson would have recognised a fellow-spirit, and could have cited McLevy's accounts in justification of his own narrative style. Even Holmes might have approved of the Edinburgh detective, as the stories show him to have been intelligent and resourceful as well as hard-headed and courageous. McLevy is also a gripping storyteller. Here are the first lines of 'The Jewel-Box': *Sometimes we detectives have moments of despondency. As the world is made, robbers and murderers will persevere, — it is their nature; and the more they achieve, the more they would. They are artists inspired by their art.* Could you resist reading on?

David Ian Davies has followed his recording of *Silver Blaze* with the other Dartmoor adventure, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (One Voice Recordings, 16835 Halper Street, Encino, CA 91436, USA; e-mail ddavies@aol.com). Mr Davies reads, as always, with a relish that he communicates to the listener. His remarkable vocal versatility is again

evident in this unabridged reading, which occupies four CDs, and the characters are all carefully distinguished. Actually 'reading' is too limited a word. Mr Davies *acts* the narrative. There are some occasional mispronunciations, though — 'dyspnoea', meaning a breathing difficulty, is not pronounced *dispan-yay* but *diss-nee-a*, as any good pronouncing dictionary will tell you. And it's a curious choice to play Sir Henry with a dubious Scottish accent, and justify it by changing the text to give him a background in Canada and Scotland instead of 'the States and Canada'. Those quibbles aside, this is a fast-moving and engaging performance of Holmes's greatest case, nicely packaged with a very atmospheric picture of Dartmoor.

No quibbles at all about the latest related release from Naxos AudioBooks (18 High Street, Welwyn, Herts. AL6 9EQ). Kerry Shale makes a lovely job of reading Poe's three tales of the Chevalier C Auguste Dupin. In 'The Murders in the Rue Morgue', 'The Mystery of Marie Rogêt' and 'The Purloined Letter' Poe created the detective story — or tale of ratiocination, as he called it. Sherlock Holmes was very dismissive of Dupin and Poe, but Arthur Conan Doyle freely acknowledged his debt to character and author, a fact missed by David Timson in his otherwise admirable notes. Whether or not you've read Dupin lately, I urge you to listen to these grand readings. You'll discover again the remarkable achievement of Poe, and realise perhaps for the first time how much Conan Doyle improved on his model. *The Dupin Stories*, available on four CDs (NA427612) or four cassettes (NA427614), is a near-essential companion to David Timson's continuing series of superb readings of the Sherlock Holmes stories for Naxos AudioBooks.

Philip Atwell reminds me that the BBC's Cover to Cover cassettes have released an unabridged reading of *the Hound of the Baskervilles* by Sir Derek Jacobi. Should be good!

Steven Rothman, editor of *The Baker Street Journal*, sends notice that this year's BSJ Christmas Annual will be *Tilting at Windmills: Denis Conan Doyle and the Baker Street Irregulars* by Richard Lancelyn Green. It is, says Steve, 'a 64-page illustrated account of the wranglings of the Conan Doyle Estate in America with liberal quotations from the correspondence between Denis, Adrian and their lawyers and those being threatened by those two keepers of the flame, such as Edgar Smith, Christopher Morley and Ellery Queen.' *Tilting at Windmills* is available from *The Baker Street Journal*, PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331, USA, or from the BSJ website at www.bakerstreetjournal.com. The price outside the continental United States is \$12.00, payable by check, Visa or Mastercard.

Due on 6 January at £3.99 from Pocket Books (no address to hand) is *Hounded by the Baskervilles* by Mercer Warriner, in which Sabrina the teenage witch summons Sherlock Holmes to help her.

What looks like an extraordinarily interesting book is Will Bagley's *Blood of the Prophets: Brigham Young and the Massacre at Mountain Meadows* (University of Oklahoma Press; \$39.95). It's an account of one of the worst mass murders of civilians in American history, when 120 men, women and children, travelling on a wagon train west from Arkansas, were slaughtered in a valley in south-western Utah, on 11 September 1857. It seems that the responsibility of the Latter day Saints is pretty clear, although Mormon authorities have done their best to conceal evidence. At any rate, this single dreadful event goes a long way to explain the fear in which many 'gentiles' held the Mormons, and why Conan Doyle chose them as the villains of *A Study in Scarlet*. (My apologies: I've forgotten who put me on to this.)

There are new catalogues available from **Black Cat Bookshop** (90 Charles Street, Leicester LE1 1GE; e-mail blackcatuk@aol.com, website

www.blackcatbookshop.com) and **G H Bradley** (9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex SS7 1PA; e-mail Geoffcads@aol.com). Lots of Sherlockiana in the former, and recent crime fiction in the latter.

St Bartholomew's Hospital is again under threat, from the scheme first proposed in the mid-1990s: 'to combine Bart's, the London Chest Hospital, the Royal London Hospital and the Queen Elizabeth Children's Hospital upon a single site in Whitechapel' (see *Private Eye* 1067 & 1068). Today's 'Labour' government is as committed to private finance initiative deals as the Tories ever were, and the future of the best loved hospital in London seems uncertain.

Holmes and Watson's sitting-room at the *Sherlock Holmes* pub in Northumberland Street, off Trafalgar Square (020 7930 2644) has been decorated for Christmas by Mrs Hudson. You get a grand view of the room from the restaurant, and the food and drink are excellent.

If you need a Sherlockian Christmas present, don't forget the wide range available from **The Sherlock Holmes Memorabilia Company** (230 Baker Street, London NW1 5RT) and **Classic Specialties** (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA; e-mail sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com). And check www.221bbakerstla.com for Chuck Kovacic's Sherlockian artwork.

Wonderful neo-Victorian (and other) Christmas presents can be had from **Past Times**, who have 60-odd shops and a mail order service. Call 01993 770440 for a catalogue. **Hawkin & Co.** (St Margaret, Harleston, Norfolk IP20 0PJ; phone 01986 782536 for a catalogue) sell all sorts of toys and things you didn't know were still made. Hawkin's has a growing number of very popular shops, the latest here in Chelmsford.

For something more expensive, check www.spycruise.com for details of the 2003 SpyCruises from San Diego to Hawaii (embarking 27 March) or from New York to London (1 September). Learn about espionage in luxurious surroundings from top intelligence experts.

The Times for 7 November had a half-page article, 'Sherlock Holmes and the curious case of a scholar who detects the Bible in Conan Doyle's tales'. Mario Palmaro, who teaches philosophy at Regina Apostolorum Pontifical University in Rome, claims that New Testament echoes appear throughout the Holmes Canon.

A reminder that Billy Wilder's idiosyncratic gem *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* is being shown at the National Film Theatre until 20 December. Booking and other information is on the NFT website at www.bfi.org.uk/nft, or phone 020 7928 3232.

In issue no. 42 of *CADS* John Hall has contributed a very good piece on E W Hornung and A J Raffles, and David Ellis an equally interesting one on the fictional exploits of Edgar Allan Poe. *CADS* is grand reading for the crime fiction fan (G H Bradley, 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex SS7 1PA; e-mail Geoffcads@aol.com).

Shirley Purves has resigned as secretary to **The Poor Folk Upon The Moors**; enquiries should be addressed to Vosper Arthur at Spynishlake, Doddiscombsleigh, Exeter EX6 7PR. And Eric Monahan has handed over editorship of the Poor Folk's journal *The Torr* to Reggie Musgrave.

Patricia Guy tells me that Verona's first Sherlockian group is up and running. The choice of name when I last heard was between **The Assorted and Stradivarius of Verona** and **I Figli di Tonga**. For details, contact Patricia at benguy@libero.it. (*I think Patricia's entertaining and informative book *Bacchus at Baker Street: Observations on the Bibulous Preferences of Mr Sherlock Holmes and his Contemporaries* is still available at £9.95 from Ian Henry Publications, 20 Park Drive, Romford RM1 4LH.*)

At 6 pm on 10 December, Philadelphia's newest Sherlock Holmes Society, **Mycroft's League**, hosts a cocktail party to celebrate 55 years of the great Sherlockian game in the city. The venue is the Old Café at the Union League of Philadelphia, 140 S. Broad Street. Get more information from Gideon Hill, 644 Bridle Road, Glenside, PA 19038-2004, USA (gideonhill@earthlink.net).

The annual dinner of **The Sherlock Holmes Society of London** is on 18 January in the Members' Dining Room at the House of Commons, where the guest of honour will be Professor Sir Roy Meadow, one of our most distinguished paediatricians. Ian Richardson has also accepted an invitation, commitments permitting. As usual there's an informal lunch the next day at the New Commonwealth Club in Northumberland Avenue. For details of the society, contact Bob Ellis, 13 Crofton Avenue, Orpington, Kent BR6 8DU.

The annual dinner of **The Crew of the SS Mayday** is on 12 December, and on 6 January they celebrate Sherlock Holmes's birthday (Oscar Ross, 19 Ardarn Way, Belfast BT5 7RP, Northern Ireland). On 21 December **The Harpooners of the Sea Unicorn** meet to discuss 'The Blue Carbuncle' and to party (Michael E Bragg, PO Box 256, St Charles, MO 63302-0256, USA). **The Three Garridebs** hold their Blue Carbuncle Lunch on 29 December (Sue Vizoskie, 90 Ralph Avenue, White Plains, NY 10606, USA). **The Sound of the Baskervilles** meet on 14 December and 13 January; their Master's Dinner is on 4 January (David Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8981, USA). The Birthday Meeting of **221B** also takes place on 4 January (Philip Weller, 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3 RU). **The Sydney Passengers** celebrate Holmes's birthday on 5 January (Bill Barnes, 19 Malvern Avenue, Manly, NSW 2095, Australia).

Festivities in New York begin with *The Christopher Morley Walk* on Thursday 9 January, followed later in the day by a staged reading of *The Blue Carbuncle*, adapted by Andrew Joffe and featuring Paul Singleton and Mary Ellen Rich (2 pm at the West Bank Café, 407 West 42nd Street; admission free), and by *The BSI Distinguished Speaker Lecture* (Douglas G Greene, biographer of John Dickson Carr, editor and publisher). Next day begins with *The Martha Hudson Breakfast*, continues with *The William Gillette Memorial Luncheon*, and open house at Otto Penzler's Mysterious Bookshop, and concludes with the annual dinner of **The Baker Street Irregulars** (invitation only) and *The Baskerville Bash*. On Saturday morning the dealers' room is open at the Algonquin Hotel, and **The Clients of Adrian Mulliner** hold their Junior Bloodstain in the lobby. The afternoon sees the BSI's annual reception, for all Sherlockians and their friends. Sunday winds up the weekend with **The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes'** informal brunch at the Baker Street restaurant at 1152 First Avenue. (*For details about the BSI, contact Michael Whelan, 7938 Mill Stream Circle, Indianapolis, IN 46278, USA. For the ASH, Evelyn Herzog, 360 West 21st Street, New York, NY 10011, USA. For The Clients of Adrian Mulliner, Anne Cotton, 12 Hollywood Street, South Hadley, MA 01075, USA. For The Baskerville Bash, P J Perry, 346 East 87th Street, #4-A, New York, NY 10128-4844, USA.*)

Periodicals received: **Communication**, November/December 2002 and Special Hollywood Issue 2002 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Jeff & Wanda Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 33544, USA). **The School Report**, Winter Term 2002 (**The Priory Scholars**, Horace Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY). **The Passengers' Log**, Spring issue 2002 (**The Sydney Passengers**, Rosane McNamara, 4/2a Merlin Street, Neutral Bay, NSW 2089, Australia). *Mayday Mayday*, November and December 2002 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardarn Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). **The Baker Street Journal**, Autumn 2002 (**The Baker Street Irregulars**, Steven Rothman, 220 West Rittenhouse Square, #15-D, Philadelphia, PA 19103, USA) (*subscriptions for the BSI should go to PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331, USA; correspondence for the BSI should be sent to Michael Whelan, 7938 Mill Stream Circle, Indianapolis, IN 46278, USA*).

The Whaling News, October and November 2002 (**The Harpooners of the Sea Unicorn**, Michael E Bragg, PO Box 256, St Charles, MO 63302-0256, USA). **Quivers on the Web**, November 2002 (**221B**, Philip Weller, 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 3 RU; e-mail 221b@acd-221b.info) (*the first electronic newsletter of the Franco-Midland Hardware Company's International Sherlock Holmes Study Group*). **Ineffable Twaddle**, December 2002 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 98332-8981, USA). And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, November 2002 (Peter E Blau, 3900 Tunlaw Road NE #119, Washington, DC 20007-4830, USA; e-mail pblau@dgsys.com).

The District Messenger will take its customary break until late January or early February, so, from Jean and me,

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Roger Johnson