

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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Peter Blau notes the death on 12 April of the German-born actress **Christiane Maybach**, who played Polly Nichols in the 1965 film *A Study in Terror*, with John Neville as Sherlock Holmes.

In 1910, as a hasty replacement for his play *The House of Temperley*, Arthur Conan Doyle wrote *The Speckled Band*, which, with HA Saintsbury as Sherlock Holmes and Lyn Harding as Dr Grimesby Rylott (*sic*), was a huge success. Nevertheless, some aspects of the play were recognised even then to be unsatisfactory. Holmes does not explain how he reached his conclusions, for instance, though that's an essential part of the original story; and, as Conan Doyle acknowledged, 'in trying to give Holmes a worthy antagonist I overdid it and produced a more interesting personality in the villain.' Now we have 'The Author's Expanded Edition' edited by Alan Lance Andersen, which very cleverly adjusts the play to provide a *metamenusis*, and to redress the balance between Holmes and Rylott, as well as tidying up one or two other irregularities. The subtitle may seem rather presumptuous, but Mr Andersen has drawn entirely on the original story for this, except, as he admits 'for some of the stage directions and 17 words of my own that were necessary for clarification'. It's a brilliant idea very cleverly executed, and the result is an exciting and intelligent thriller that should be powerful on stage. *The Speckled Band: Author's Expanded Edition* costs \$13.10 from ADTP Publishing, LLC (122 West Ash Lane, Roland, IA 50236, USA).

Ron Nicol has perhaps not felt quite so bound to Conan Doyle's original words in deriving one-act plays from two of the later short stories. Even so, *The Mazarin Stone* and *The Man Who Collected Women* combine the virtues of effective drama and fidelity to their sources. The former is based on a story that itself was based on a play (though *The Crown Diamond* was notably less successful than *The Speckled Band*), so the essentials of a good short play with a single setting — the sitting-room at 221B — were already there. The latter dramatises 'The Illustrious Client', which has a much more complex structure, yet Mr Nicol again sets the action entirely within Sherlock Holmes's sitting-room, and the result is both stylish and natural. I'm impressed, and I'd very much like to see the plays performed. *The Mazarin Stone* and *The Man Who Collected Women* (great title!) are published by New Theatre Publications (2 Hereford Close, Woolston, Warrington, Cheshire WA1 4HR). There's a website at www.plays4theatre.com.

Comes the Dark (Robert Hale Ltd, Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £16.99) is the second Johnny One Eye novel by David Stuart Davies, and it's at least as good as the first, *Forests of the Night*. Johnny was established in short stories in *Sherlock* magazine, and both character and author seem at home in either format. Wartime London is an unusual and exciting setting, offering many possibilities beyond those of peacetime — possibilities that the writer has seized gratefully. He's also done his homework. The language is sometimes stronger than

in books published in the nineteen-forties, but nothing rings false. The descriptions, the characterisations, and the atmosphere are spot-on: you can hear the whine of the buzz-bombs, smell the sweat and the engine oil, and taste the spam and dried egg. A nasty encounter with a crypto-fascist group precedes Johnny Hawke's investigation of the killer dubbed 'the blackout strangler' by the press. In Johnny's world nothing is straightforward, which is bad for him but good for the reader. *Comes the Dark* is a cracking good read, and a book moreover that makes you think.

Catalogue 134 is available from **Nigel Williams Rare Books** (25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE; nwrrarebook@tcp.co.uk).

David Ashton has scripted four splendid series for BBC Radio 4, in which Brian Cox plays the Victorian Edinburgh detective James McLevy (a real person, whose own highly readable, and probably ghosted, memoirs are being reprinted by Edinburgh's Mercat Press). Ashton also plays McLevy's superior Lieutenant Roach. His first novel about McLevy, *Shadow of the Serpent*, was published last month by Polygon (West Newington House, 10 Newington Road, Edinburgh EH9 1QS), and a television series is planned.

Michael Sims has edited and annotated a selection of the best stories from Maurice Leblanc's first four books about Arsène Lupin, in the original English translation by Alexander Teixeira de Mattos. *Arsène Lupin, Gentleman-Thief* will be published in the Penguin Classics series later this year. Mr Sims' 5,000-word introduction promises to be a valuable commentary on the literature of Lupin.

EJ Wagner's book *The Science of Sherlock Holmes* (John Wiley & Sons, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester PO19 8SQ; £13.95) arrived in today's post. I'm looking forward to reading it, and will review it in the next DM.

The Hound of the Baskervilles with 'The Adventure of the Speckled Band' by Arthur Conan Doyle, edited and annotated by Francis O'Gorman, published by Broadview Press (c/o NBN International, Plymbridge House, Estover Road, Plymouth PL6 7PY) at £5.99, has attracted some very appreciative comments from academic readers.

Brian Pugh, Curator of **The Conan Doyle (Crowborough) Establishment**, tells me that he's working on a *Chronology of the Life of Bertram Fletcher Robinson*, in collaboration with Philip Weller and Paul Spiring, which will be available from the Establishment (20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN) around the end of this year. Brian is also working with Paul Spiring on a touring guide to Conan Doyle's Dartmoor. More on these as it reaches me.

Nicholas Utechin's long planned first volume of *The Best of The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, covering the years 1952-1968 and introduced by the late Tony Howlett, will be launched by **The Sherlock Holmes Society of London** at the AGM on the 24th May. This will be a 300-copy hardback, priced at £25.00 (Europe £26.00 or €40.00; rest of world £30.00 or \$60.00). Twenty-five 'special' copies will be numbered and signed by the Editor, the President, and the Chairman, and priced at £40.00 (Europe £41.00/€60.00; elsewhere £45.00/\$90.00). Prices include postage. Send cheques payable to The Sherlock Holmes Society of London (Euros in cash only) to Judi Ellis, 13 Crofton Avenue, Orpington, Kent BR6 8DU.

Also new from our Society is a CD recording of *The Yellow Face* and *The Three Students*, dramatised by MJ Elliott and performed by

the Old Court Radio Theatre Company. These half-hour plays will be performed at the AGM, but are here professionally recorded by an experienced team of radio actors. The CD is available from me, post-paid, at £5.00 (Europe £6.00; elsewhere £9.00 or \$12.00). I think they're great, but as the director I may be biased.

Our Society's archive of Sherlock Holmes films on 35mm and 16mm will be auctioned on 15 May at Christie's South Kensington (85 Old Brompton Road, London SW7). Full details are on Christie's website at www.christies.com under sale no. 4915. On 23 May at the same venue Christie's will auction the pipe presented to HA Saintsbury on his 500th performance as Sherlock Holmes in 1903 (sale no. 5076, lot 800).

Westminster Libraries have an interesting Conan Doyle website at www.westminsteronline.org/conandoyle. Worth a look.

The Royal College of Surgeons of Edinburgh bought quite a lot of important material when the Conan Doyle Collection was auctioned at Christie's in 2004. Some of it will be on display at the College's museum in Nicolson Street, from 1 July to 29 October as part of an exhibition called *Conan Doyle and Joseph Bell — The Real Sherlock Holmes*. You'll also be able to see Conan Doyle's 1892 letter to Bell, acknowledging his debt to his old professor.

Jon Lellenberg, the American agent for the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle, has moved from Washington to Chicago. All correspondence relating to Estate business and related matters should be sent to Hazelbaker & Lellenberg, 1570 Oak Avenue, suite 612, Evanston, IL 60201, USA.

The leading American Sherlockian specialists, **Classic Specialties** (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA; <www.sherlock-holmes.com>) now issue their catalogue-magazine by e-mail only, as *The Sherlockian E-Times*. E-mail the proprietors Carolyn & Joel Senter at Sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com.

Heather Owen has heard from Austin Shaw of Peppermint Pictures Ltd, who have restored and assembled the original 1921 score for Stoll's silent film *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, with Eille Norwood. Peppermint hopes to restore all the surviving Stoll Holmes films and release them on DVD.

At <http://open.bbc.co.uk/catalogue/infax> the BBC has launched its 'experimental prototype' *BBC Programme Catalogue*, a list of nearly a million radio and TV programmes. You can't access the programmes themselves, but you can now track down all the extant Sherlock Holmes plays, documentaries and so forth. On 5 June BBC Worldwide will release a DVD set *The BBC Sherlock Holmes Collection*, comprising the five Peter Cushing films from 1968, Richard Roxburgh in *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and Rupert Everett in *The Case of the Silk Stocking* (all previously released) plus *The Strange Case of Sherlock Holmes & Arthur Conan Doyle* (*sic*, according to the BBC Shop website, from whom the set can be ordered at £31.99 — see www.bbcshop.com).

Just released by Naxos AudioBooks (18 High Street, Welwyn, Herts. AL6 9EQ) is *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* read complete and unabridged by the wonderful David Timson. The ten-CD set is priced at £35.00, and worth every penny.

Cenarth Fox reports that **David Small**, Arthur Conan Doyle in Cen's play *The Real Sherlock Holmes*, will visit his native England in September. 'If there is a Sherlockian Society looking for a good after-dinner speaker, David with his many appearances as Sir Arthur would be well worth considering.' If you're interested, please contact Cenarth Fox at writer@labyrinth.net.au.

Donald Pollock notes that it's not just *Spanking Watson* — all the detective novels of **Kinky Friedman**, currently running for Governor of Texas, 'are saturated with Sherlockian references'.

Aleš Kolodrubec, President of **The Czech Society of Sherlock Holmes**, announces that *Dvořák hra na Baker Street* was launched at the Prague International Book Fair on 6 May. This is the Czech translation of *The Veiled Detective* by our own David Stuart Davies! (To keep up with Sherlockian events in Bohemia, visit www.SherlockHolmes.cz.)

Jeremy Brett was a strong supporter of the Manic-Depressive Fellowship — now **MDF The Bi-Polar Organisation**, which, with

the support of Lambeth Council, will hold two memorial events at the newly refurbished Bandstand on Clapham Common, close to JB's home. On 24 June at 7.00pm, Roger Llewellyn will perform David Stuart Davies's play *Sherlock Holmes — The Last Act!* and on 25 June at 2.30pm there'll be a concert of Victorian and Edwardian songs. Appropriate costume will be welcome. Tickets for both events are £5.00 each, of which £4.00 goes to MDF. Check our Society's website for details at www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk, or contact drkimgilbert2thepractice@yahoo.co.uk.

John Bergquist has a good website, *Sherlockian Resources on the Internet: A Survey* at www.tc.umn.edu/~bergq003/holmes.

As well as its website at www.bakerstreetjournal.com *The Baker Street Journal* now has a 'blog' — a web-log, and if you don't know what that is check it out at <http://bakerstreetjournal.blogspot.com>.

Douglas Johnston also has a good Sherlockian blog, *A Study in Sherlock*, at www.astudyinsherlock.net.

The Mini-Tonga Society, which specialises in miniature recreations of Canonical structures, notes that Nancy Garces has a website with photos of her beautiful mini-221B sitting-room at www.pufichek.com/sherlock/nsgsherlock.htm. Friends will be pleased to know that Trish Pearlman of the Mini-Tonga Society is out of hospital and doing well.

The ninth Annual Outing sailing of **The Crew of the SS May Day**, anchored at Belfast, is entitled *Loose Canon*. This unique walk in Belfast city centre on 17 June will investigate sites relating to 'The Cardboard Box', the Ulster coat, and Conan Doyle's 1925 visit to the city. This is a free event, open to non-members. Contact Oscar Ross for more information at rocross221b@yahoo.co.uk.

The 2006 *Victorian Cricket Match* between the Gentlemen of **The Sherlock Holmes Society of London** and the Gentlemen of **The PG Wodehouse Society** will take place on Sunday 25 June at West Wycombe in leafy Bucks, starting at 11.00. Details of the ground are on the Cricket Club's website at <http://westwycombe.play-cricket.com/home.asp>. [**This is the same day as the Victorian concert at Clapham Common, which the Society is supporting.**]

Periodicals received. *Bohemian Newsletter*, no. 63 (České společenost Sherlocka Holmese, Aleš Kolodrubec, Milešovská 1, 130 00 Praha 3, Czech Republic). *The Camden House Journal*, April 2006 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Canadian Holmes*, Lady Day (Spring) 2005 (**The Bootmakers of Toronto**, Trevor Raymond, 4 Lyons Court, Georgetown, Ontario L7G 1P1, Canada). *Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections*, March 2006 (Suite 111, Elmer L Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, 222 21st Avenue S, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA). *The Illustrious Clients News*, April/May 2006 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, May 2006 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Mayday Mayday*, May 2006 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcarney Way, Belfast BT5 7RP).

The Parallelogram, December 2005, January-April 2006 (**The Parallel Case of St Louis**, Joseph J Eckrich, 914 Oakmoor Drive, Fenton, MO 63026-7008, USA). *The Passengers' Log*, Summer Issue (**The Sydney Passengers**, Rosane McNamara, 4/2a Merlin Street, Neutral Bay, NSW 2089, Australia). *The Scion*, Spring 2006 (**The Musgraves**, Anne Jordan, Hallas Lodge, Greenside Lane, Cullingworth, Bradford BD13 5AP). *The Whaling News*, March and April 2006 (**The Harpooners of the Sea Unicorn**, Michael E Bragg, PO Box 256, St Charles, MO 63302-0256, USA).

And of course *Scuttlebutt from the Spermacti Press*, March and April 2006 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

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