

# The DISTRICT MESSENGER



## 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](mailto:rojerjohnson@yahoo.co.uk)

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**Barbara Van Buskirk**, who died on 30 August aged fifty-six, was a long-time member of the Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes and a frequent contributor to *The Serpentine Muse*, whose cover she designed. **Ronald Mansbridge**, the oldest member of the Baker Street Irregulars, died on 1 September in his hundred and first year. English by birth, he was to found the American branch of Cambridge University Press, having been recruited to the company by S C Roberts. He attended his first BSI dinner in 1936 and received his investiture as 'A Case of Identity' in 1998! **Robert S Schultz** ('The Gloria Scott', BSI), who died on 7 September aged eighty-nine, began contributing to *The Baker Street Journal* in the mid-1940s and won the BSI's Morley-Montgomery Award for 2002, in which year he also received his investiture.

Though her career encompassed much else, the actress and singer **Stella Moray**, who died on 6 August, shortly after her eighty-third birthday, will be remembered fondly by habitués (and Sons of Habitués) of the Players' Theatre Music Hall. **David Plowright**, who died on 25 August aged seventy-five, was MD of Granada Television 1975-1987 and chairman from 1987 until his dismissal in 1992 by the new boss of the Granada Group. Plowright's legacy of quality television, including the *Sherlock Holmes* series, now seems a world away. **Frank Middlemass**, who died on 8 September, aged eighty-seven, played Dan in *The Archers*, Algy Herries in *To Serve Them All My Days*, Rocky Hardcastle in *As Time Goes By*, and was extraordinarily moving as the Fool to Michael Hordern's King Lear, on stage and screen. In 1968 he played Peterson in *The Blue Carbuncle* for BBC TV, and in 1984 was outstanding as Henry Baker in Granada's production of the same story.

*Holmes of the Raj* by Vithal Rajan (162/92 Lake Gardens, Kolkata 700 045, India; at 300 Rupees or \$6.50 plus postage) is, I think, the most stimulating new Holmesian fiction I've read in several years. Dr Rajan writes well, and is familiar with the usage of a century ago (though neither Watson nor Doyle would have allowed the word 'farting' into print). There are occasional typographical errors — the image of Watson 'pouring over dispatches' is an odd one — but the book is very handsomely produced: 'gold-embossed, hand-stitched, hand-pasted & hand-bound by Tulamiah Mohiuddin with handloom sari cloth woven & designed in India.' But the essence of it is the content. The Holmes and Watson we meet here are the men we know so well from the writings of Arthur Conan Doyle, and they think and behave just as they should. It's entirely plausible that they should be sent on a confidential mission to India in 1888, and that they should meet the Viceroy and various senior officials and nobility, as well as Madame Blavatsky, Rudyard Kipling, Motilal Nehru, Rabindranath Tagore and others. This was when 'the Great Game' was at its height, and movements for independence were beginning to be taken seriously.

It's even plausible that Holmes and Watson should encounter the people upon whom Mowgli and Kim were based — and that the latter should prove to be something rather different from the

character described by Kipling. Vithal Rajan says that the book 'is deliberately written as an "Orientalist" piece of fiction, tongue in cheek,' and he clearly had fun in writing it, just as I had in reading it. In the story 'Kim and Kim Again' he comes perilously close to parody, but despite introducing a character who calls himself 'Clark Gable' he never quite succumbs. The most impressive feature of the book may be the way in which he treats serious episodes in his country's history — and many of them are deadly serious, with profound effects still felt today. Dr Rajan's touch is light but never frivolous. His Holmes and Watson are humane imperialists, which is just what they would be. *Holmes of the Raj* is an admirable collection and well worthy of your attention. The publisher's website is at [www.writersworkshopkolkata.com](http://www.writersworkshopkolkata.com).

Those who missed the recent expedition to the Peak District should invest in a copy of the handbook, *This Dark Square: A Priory School Examination*, edited by Bob Ellis (£6.00 or \$15.00 postpaid from Judi Ellis, 13 Crofton Avenue, Orpington, Kent BR6 8DU). Nicholas Utechin writes on class, Bob Ellis on the plover and the curlew, and 'Horace' gives his Sidelights on Huxtable, but most of the forty-six pages are given over to admirable work by Jonathan McCafferty and Guy Marriott, who between them consider the location of the school and Holderness Hall, the railway journey from Euston, the running of the Priory School, a parallel to James Wilder, cockfighting in the Ashbourne area, trams, and a curious educational legacy.

The really exciting feature of the book, and of the weekend, is Jonathan's discovery of a new and geographically convincing candidate for Holderness Hall, with associated identifications of Mackleton, the 'Fighting Cock', and the Priory School itself. [*\*Ilam Hall is the house. All it lacks is the ducal connection.\**] *The Dark Square* is a worthy addition to our Society's distinguished catalogue of publications.

On Friday 6 October, Marylebone Library will host the press launch of David Stuart Davies's book *Dancing in the Moonlight: Jeremy Brett — a Celebration*, published by **MDF the Bi-Polar Organisation** (formerly the Manic-Depression Fellowship, of which JB was a strong supporter). The topic is currently in the spotlight, thanks to Stephen Fry's excellent two-part documentary on BBC2. [*\*I wonder if Stephen Fry would have been so open about his manic-depression if it hadn't been for Jeremy Brett.\**]

I've just received a copy of *The Printer's Proof* by Shuggie Ó Scolláin (Cadds Printing Ltd, 59 Lancaster Avenue, West Norwood, London SE27 9EL; no price given). There is some Sherlockian relevance, and I'll review the book in the next DM.

*Rehearsals for Oblivion, Act I: Tales of the King in Yellow* edited by Peter A Worthy (Dimensions Books, PO Box 389, Lake Orion, MI 48361-0389, USA; \$17.95) is a collection inspired by the extraordinary weird tales written in the 1890s by Robert W Chambers. The reason I have a copy is that I contributed one of the stories, but I mention it here because another, 'The Adventure of the Yellow Sign' by G Warlock Vance, is a Sherlock Holmes story — which I haven't yet had the chance to read.

Michael Connolly notes that *Dracula, Bk 1: Asylum* by Paul Witcover (Dark Horse Comics; £4.99 from [www.amazon.co.uk](http://www.amazon.co.uk)) features Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson.

There's lots of interest in *The Sherlockian E-Times*, the latest catalogue-newsletter from Classic Specialties. See it at [www.sherlock-holmes.com/e-times14.htm](http://www.sherlock-holmes.com/e-times14.htm), request an electronic subscription at the website, [www.sherlock-holmes.com](http://www.sherlock-holmes.com) or write to PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA.

It's not certain yet whether L M Goode will admit others to the provocatively named society **The Friendless Drifter**. Meanwhile the Goode Press offers another treat for Sidney Paget's birthday on 4 October. The lovely chapbook edition of *A Scandal in Bohemia* (see DM 256) has been converted by a technological miracle to an even more splendid cyber-chapbook, with additional illustrations, annotations, dialogue, music, a new portrait by Pablo Carreno, and more besides. The website at [www.sidneypaget.com](http://www.sidneypaget.com) deserves the patronage of all who treasure the work of Sidney Paget.

From Russ Mann via Peter Blau: now accessible on the internet is *Crime Scene Sketches: Reproduced in Fac-Simile from the Pen and Ink Drawings in the Note Book of a Private Enquiry Agent*, edited by Thomas F Hanratty and Daniel P King, published in 1976 with an introduction by John Bennett Shaw. 'Hanratty, a forensic investigator, analyzed crime scenes in seventeen Sherlock Holmes stories.' It's at [www.redbirdstudio.com](http://www.redbirdstudio.com). 'CrimeScenes.' [*\*An ingenious and original look at the Canon. I'm very pleased to see it available again.\**]

There's just time to go to [www.quillsvote.com](http://www.quillsvote.com) and register your support for *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes: The Novels*, edited by Leslie Klinger, nominated for a Quill Award in the Mystery/Thriller/Suspense category. The Quills are voted for by the reading public. The closing date is 30 September, and the winners will be announced at a dinner in New York City on 10 October. The book is also in the running for an Anthony at Bouchercon 2006, held in Madison, WI. The winners will be announced on 30 September.

Arthur Conan Doyle, played by Richard Wilson, is due to feature in BBC4's Christmas offering *The Acid Test*, based on Ian Rankin's short story, and with Inspector Rebus replaced by Jim Buchan, played by Alec Newman. Ian Rankin says he's 'delighted' and will make a cameo appearance.

Despite all the evidence, Rodger Garrick-Steele is still trying to have Bertram Fletcher Robinson's body exhumed in hopes of proving that the poor fellow was murdered by Arthur Conan Doyle to cover up the latter's non-existent plagiarism of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and his non-existent affair with Mrs Robinson. Peter Blau reports that Thunderball Films plan to start filming a 'reality documentary' based on this nonsense. Their website is at [www.thunderballfilms.com](http://www.thunderballfilms.com).

After twenty-one years Geoff Bradley's excellent magazine *CADS* (G H Bradley, 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex SS7 1PA; £5.50) has reached its 50th issue. There's nothing specifically Sherlockian this time, but any devotee of Crime And Detective Stories will find lots of interest: Dashiell Hammett, Victor Canning, Michael Gilbert, V C Clinton-Baddeley, Leslie Charteris, and more.

At [www.geocities.com/jim\\_hollingsworth/baker.htm?20066](http://www.geocities.com/jim_hollingsworth/baker.htm?20066) you'll find the first act of *The Baker Street Irregulars*, a new Sherlock Holmes musical, book by J E Hollingsworth, music by S Carlton and D L Graham. Characters include Mrs Hudson, Professor Moriarty, Colonel Moran, Irene Adler, Alexander Holder and his family, and Inspector Lestrade. If you're looking for a musical stage, this could be it.

Matthew Elliott has alerted me to the extensive catalogue of spoken word Sherlockiana available from [www.audible.com](http://www.audible.com). Besides the BBC radio recordings and the readings by David Timson, Edward Hardwicke, David Ian Davies, and Christopher Lee; there are also readings by Walter Covell, Tony Britton, Frederick Davidson, and Richard Green, and writings by Barry Day, Mitch Cullin, Laurie R King, Daniel Stashower, Hesketh Pearson, David Pirie, Michael Chabon, Colin Dexter, and David Stuart Davies.

In January Ascaron Entertainment (UK) will release the new Sherlock Holmes computer game from Frogwares/93 Games. *The Awakened* takes Holmes into the world of H P Lovecraft's weird tales: 'The game, based on an excellent scenario, plunges the player

into the heart of a terrifying investigation. Sherlock Holmes, assisted by the loyal Doctor Watson, investigates strange disappearances, which seem related to the activity of a secret sect. The adventure begins in London, in the renowned Baker Street, taking us then to investigate a disturbing psychiatric hospital near Basle, Switzerland, then on to Louisiana and finally to Scotland.' It looks like fun! [www.sherlockholmes-thegame.com](http://www.sherlockholmes-thegame.com) is the website. Ascaron is at [www.ascaron.com](http://www.ascaron.com).

Peter Blau notes that the **Sherlock Holmes Festival** in Tryon, NC, 3-6 November 'will include theatrical performances, meals, memorabilia, presentations, displays, and a contest.' See the website at [www.sherlockholmesfestival.com](http://www.sherlockholmesfestival.com).

The autumn meeting of **The Musgraves** on 14 October will take the them *Time for Holmes*; it will consider how the media portrayal of Holmes and Watson is influenced both by Conan Doyle's writing and by the writers' and producers' own time. The meeting will be held at Steeton Hall Hotel, Steeton, near Keighley. Get details from Anne Jordan, Hallas Lodge, Greenside Lane, Cullingworth, Bradford BD13 5AP.

*Autumn in New Orleans* on 22 October is organised by **Le Cercle de Sherlock Holmes**. Steven Rothman, editor of *The Baker Street Journal* will be guest speaker. Details are available from Jens Byskov Jensen at [221b@byskovjensen.com](mailto:221b@byskovjensen.com).

The annual meeting of the Geological Society of America will be held in Philadelphia, and **The Practical, But Limited, Geologists** will dine at McGillan's Ale House on 25 October 'in honour of the world's first forensic geologist. There will be no scholarly papers, slide shows or quizzes ... only toasts (and often quite a few of them).' Peter Blau is the organiser: [blau7103@comcast.net](mailto:blau7103@comcast.net). On 27 October **The Sons of the Copper Beeches** will hold their Diogenes Luncheon at the Union League in Philadelphia, followed in the evening by a meeting at the Racquet Club. Next day **Mycroft's League** will tour the Edgar Allan Poe House, then have lunch at Fair Mount, and discover Poe, Dickens and Conan Doyle in Philadelphia. Details from Gideon Hill: [onbridle@verizon.net](mailto:onbridle@verizon.net).

Periodicals received. *Bohemian Newsletter*, no. 68 (České společnost Sherlocka Holmese, Aleš Kolodrubec, Milešovská 1, 130 00 Praha 3, Czech Republic). *The Camden House Journal*, August 2006 and September 2006 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Communication*, September/October 2006 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA).

*The Confederate Chronicles*, August 5, 2006 (**The Confederates of Wisteria Lodge**, Kent Ross, 6875 Fielder, Rex, GA 30273, USA). *Grimpen Mire Gazette*, September 2006 (**Hugo's Companions**, David C Humphrey, 1843 Winnetka Road, Northfield, IL 60093, USA). *The Illustrious Clients News*, August 2006 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Mayday Mayday*, and *Chronicler*, September 2006 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardarn Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). [*\*This is the last issue of Chronicler. From next April it will be replaced by a yet-unnamed bi-annual journal, and each issue of Mayday Mayday will be bigger.\**] **3 Pipe Problem Plugs and Dottles**, September 2006 (**The Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem**, Kay Blocker, 5017 Maywood Drive, Nashville, TN 37211, USA [pkblocker@comcast.net](mailto:pkblocker@comcast.net)).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, August 2006 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; [blau7103@comcast.net](mailto:blau7103@comcast.net)).

Roger Johnson