

# 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)

no. 280 29th February 2008

To renew your subscription, send 12 stamped, self-addressed envelopes or (overseas) send 12 International Reply Coupons or £6.00 or US\$15.00 for 12 issues (dollar checks payable to Jean Upton, sterling cheques to me). Dollar prices quoted without qualification refer to US dollars. You can receive the DM electronically free of charge, as a PDF attachment or as plain text. Please contact me by e-mail.

Alistair Duncan, author of *Eliminate the Impossible: An Examination of the World of Sherlock Holmes on Page and Screen* (MX Publishing, 10 Kingfisher Close, Stanstead Abbots, Herts. SG12 8LQ; £9.99 or \$19.95) knows his Holmes, and he brings a fresh eye to this 240-page survey of the Canon and its film and TV offshoots. His reading list is idiosyncratic, including, for instance, Matthew Bunson's mediocre *The Sherlock Holmes Encyclopedia* (but not Jack Tracy's much superior *Encyclopaedia Sherlockiana*), and W S Baring-Gould's very unreliable *Sherlock Holmes: A Biography of the World's First Consulting Detective*. I can't help thinking that Mr Duncan's book would be richer and fuller were he familiar with more of the 'writings about the writings'. Still, *Eliminate the Impossible* is well written and entertaining. The story summaries are concise and accurate, and the notes are frequently incisive. Most interesting, to my mind, and most controversial, are the comments on film and television portrayals. I'd argue, for instance, that H Marion Crawford was a very acceptable Watson, and that Robert Stephens as Holmes doesn't deserve to be classed as 'bad and forgotten'!

Since 1958, with a fifteen-year hiatus, the best contributions to *The Baker Street Journal* have been recognised with the annual Morley-Montgomery Award, named after Christopher Morley and Bruce Montgomery, and instituted by Lew D Feldman. Now **The Baker Street Irregulars** have published a splendid 360-page hardback, *'A Remarkable Mixture': Award-Winning Articles from The Baker Street Journal*, edited by Steven Rothman, who contributes masterly introduction and notes (The Baker Street Irregulars, 2 Dettling Road, Maynard, MA 01754, USA; [www.bakerstreetjournal.com](http://www.bakerstreetjournal.com); \$35.00 plus postage). It's a real treat, a gallimaufry of, as someone once said, scholarship and absurdity. Some favourites: Andrew Jay Peck on the true Solitary Cyclist; J C Prager & Al Silverstein on 'Lowenstein of Prague'; Peter Blau on what I may call the Muzaffar Ad-Din Stone; Jon Lellenberg on the BSI's 1940 dinner; Donald Pollock & Andrew Solberg's psychoanalytical report on 'J'; Catherine Cooke on Mrs Hudson; S E Dahlinger on William Gillette... All brilliant — *optimi optimorum* — but I'm particularly struck by 1963's 'Study of an Unknown Tale', in which Edward F Clark applied impeccable research and rigorous logic to 'The Matter of the French Republic' (his BSI investiture) and concluded that Moriarty had the Mona Lisa stolen in late 1890, and that Holmes's investigation led to the personal conflict that ended at Reichenbach. Had John Hawkesworth read this essay, or did he come up with the same scenario independently twenty years on, when he wrote the script for Granada TV's *The Final Problem*? It doesn't really matter. I always liked the idea, and now I know that it's perfectly sound, thanks to Mr Clark.

The proprietors of Gasogene Books (Wessex Press, PO Box 68308, Indianapolis, IN 46268, USA; [www.wessexpress.com](http://www.wessexpress.com)) have been very busy. To mark the seventy-fifth anniversary of Vincent Starrett's *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes* they've issued a new edition, edited by Ray Betzner. *The Private Life* is a book that every Holmesian should read. Starrett, like Christopher Morley, was an exceptionally good writer, a stylist so good that you don't stop to think how good he is. Copies aren't too hard to come by, so why should I recommend this one? Well, it's a very nicely produced hardback, priced at a very reasonable \$29.95. There's an affectionate and informative memoir of Starrett by his friend Robert J Mangler. The same adjectives apply to Ray Betzner's

introduction and his account of the various editions of *The Private Life of Sherlock Holmes*. The body of the book is, appropriately, a facsimile of the (American) first edition, which differs substantially from the revised edition of 1960. It predates that marvellous sonnet '221B', but this is the book that tells us that Holmes and Watson 'still live for all that love them well: in a romantic chamber of the heart: in a nostalgic country of the mind: where it is always 1895.'

Also from Gasogene is Leslie S Klinger's *Baker Street Rambles: A Collection of Writings About Sherlock Holmes, John H Watson, MD, Arthur Conan Doyle and Their World* (\$18.95). Les Klinger's reputation rests largely on his annotated editions of the Canon, to which he has most obviously contributed judicious selection and editing of the scholarship of others, so it's good to be reminded that only one who is a considerable scholar himself could achieve such near perfection. In this 210-page paperback we have twenty-four of his own wide-ranging essays, plus three book reviews and two interviews, all with the author's own pithy notes. Les Klinger is as good a scholar and as good a writer as our Game has produced.

And finally we have *From the Archives of The Sherlock Holmes Review: 'A Study in Celluloid'* by Michael Cox (\$12.95). *The Sherlock Holmes Review* ran for ten years, during which time the magazine sponsored a series of symposia, the first being held in Bloomington, Indiana, in 1987. The main speaker was Michael Cox, producer and originator of Granada TV's *Sherlock Holmes* series, and what we have here, twenty-one years on, is a CD recording of the 55-minute talk he gave about the conception and the making of the series. Recording quality is excellent, and the speaker is on sparkling form before an appreciative audience. In 1999 Michael Cox's definitive account of the entire series was published, also under the title *A Study in Celluloid*. By then Jeremy Brett was dead, and the accountants had taken over from the programme-makers at Granada. Michael's recorded talk, as entertaining as it is fascinating, makes an admirable companion to his book.

*The Quintessential Sherlock Holmes* by Richard L Boyer (Alexander Books, 65 Macedonia Road, Alexander, NC 28701, USA; \$75.00 plus postage) is one of the handsomest volumes to come my way in a long time: 496 pages, leather-bound and gold-stamped, in a strong and nicely decorated slipcase. (There are, however, too many missing commas. 'You see Watson?' doesn't mean the same as 'You see, Watson?') Mr Boyer first came to notice with *The Giant Rat of Sumatra* in 1976, a deliriously exciting novel that captured much of the atmosphere of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*. He established himself as a successful author, winning an Edgar in 1982 for his first Doc Adams mystery *Billingsgate Shoal*, but continued to write the occasional Holmes story, of which *The Quintessential Sherlock Holmes* (hence the title) contains five — 'The Wilton Water Horror', 'The Adventure of Zolnay, the Aerialist', *The Giant Rat of Sumatra*, 'The Adventure of Bell Rock Light', and 'The Adventure of the Eyrie Cliff'. They are graced with attractive ink-and-wash illustrations by Phil Hawkins, in a style that would not be out of place in *The Strand Magazine*. Richard Boyer is not one of the very few writers who can adopt the Watson style with consistent fidelity: he overdoes the archaisms a little and his depiction of late-Victorian England is just a touch off-centre. But his heart is in the right place: he gives us the authentic Holmes and Watson, and he knows how to grab his reader's attention. See the website at [www.sherlockholmeslives.com](http://www.sherlockholmeslives.com).

Glen McCready gives a first-rate unabridged reading of *The Lost World* for Naxos AudioBooks (2nd Floor, 40A High Street, Welwyn, Herts. AL6 9EQ; £19.99). I confess that I didn't recognise Mr McCready's name, but it's one that I'll be looking out for. He has the ideal combination of vocal versatility and the ability to engage the listener's attention. I became so gripped, despite the story's familiarity, that I

didn't immediately notice that *The Lost World*, unlike other Naxos audiobooks, doesn't feature any music — but since we have eight and a half hours of narrative on seven discs there really wouldn't have been time for any. What I did notice is the excellence of Conan Doyle's writing, both the drama and the humour. The suburban comedy of Edward Malone's scenes with Gladys is worthy of Jerome K Jerome, and of course both Professor Challenger and Professor Summerlee are profoundly comic characters, funny but heroic, and *believable*. Glen McCready's Challenger, by the way, sounds like a cross between Brian Blessed and Donald Sinden. I like that! Like other Naxos recordings, this can now be downloaded at [www.naxosaudiobooks.com](http://www.naxosaudiobooks.com).

A few years ago Penguin Classics issued most of the Sherlock Holmes stories with perceptive introductions by the likes of Christopher Frayingling and Peter Ackroyd. They've just released the complete Canon, in eight volumes (*His Last Bow* and *The Case-Book* are together), with 'vibrant two-tone covers [using] typefaces that evoke the Victorian era and an early cinema poster aesthetic [that] emphasises the adventure and excitement of the stories'. The covers are certainly different from previous Penguin designs, but they are growing on me. It seems a shame, though, not to include the introductions and annotations. (Penguin Books Ltd, 80 Strand, London WC2R 0RL; £6.99 per volume.)

Two new books from **David Stuart Davies**: *Without Conscience*, the third Johnny One Eye novel (Robert Hale, Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £18.99), and *The Game's Afoot*, an anthology of new Sherlock Holmes stories (Wordsworth Editions (8B East Street, Ware, Herts. SG12 9HJ; £2.99). More in the next DM!

At [www.sherlock-holmes.com/e\\_times08-2.htm](http://www.sherlock-holmes.com/e_times08-2.htm) you'll find the February issue of the *Sherlockian E-Times*, the catalogue-newsletter from **Classic Specialties** (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; e-mail [sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com](mailto:sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com)).

*The Secret Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, Souvenirs of Sherlock Holmes and The Great Detective in Paperback & Pastiche* by **Gary Lovisi** are available from Gryphon Books (PO Box 209, Brooklyn, NY 11228, USA; [gryphonbooks@worldnet.att.net](mailto:gryphonbooks@worldnet.att.net)).

Mr A Hawken (I hope I've read that correctly) notes that the clock & watch auction at **Tamlyn & Son** (Bridgwater, Somerset TA6 3BN; 01278 458241) on 18 March will include his own collection of watches, one of which is a Semloh (spell it backwards) Lever silver pocket watch and chain. There's no real Sherlockian connection, but what the hell.

**Tania Hollies** ([t.hollies@ntlworld.com](mailto:t.hollies@ntlworld.com)) is looking to sell: eight colour stills from the Peter Cook & Dudley Moore *Hound of the Baskervilles*, eleven black & white stills and a full colour programme from *Young Sherlock Holmes* and *The Pyramid of Fear*, and a black & white programme from *Without a Clue*. If you're interested, please e-mail her.

A reminder that *The Death and Life of Sherlock Holmes* by David Stuart Davies opens on 6 March at the **Mill Studio, Yvonne Arnaud Theatre**, Guildford (01483 440000; [www.yvonne-arnaud.co.uk](http://www.yvonne-arnaud.co.uk)), and will be there till 8 March. Roger Llewellyn reprises his role as Holmes. Then he'll take the play on tour: 26 March **Theatr Brycheiniog**, Brecon (01874 611622); 28 **Grand Theatre**, Swansea (01792 475715; [www.swansea.gov.uk/grandtheatre](http://www.swansea.gov.uk/grandtheatre)); 2 April **Armagh Theatre**, (028 3752 1821; [admin@themarketplacearmagh.com](mailto:admin@themarketplacearmagh.com)); 3-5 April **Baby Grand, Grand Opera House**, Belfast (028 9024 1919); 15 April **Greenwich Theatre**, London (020 8858 7755; [boxoffice@greenwichtheatre.org](mailto:boxoffice@greenwichtheatre.org)); 17 April **Maltings Arts Theatre**, St Albans (01727 844222; [maltings.arts@stalbans.gov.uk](mailto:maltings.arts@stalbans.gov.uk)); 19 April **Theatre Royal**, Margate (01227 787787; [admin@theatreroyalargate.co.uk](mailto:admin@theatreroyalargate.co.uk)); 24 April **Arlington Arts Centre**, Newbury (01635 244246; [boxoffice@arlingtonarts.co.uk](mailto:boxoffice@arlingtonarts.co.uk)); 26 April **Forest Arts Centre**, New Milton, Hants (01425 612393; [forest.arts@hants.gov.uk](mailto:forest.arts@hants.gov.uk)); 30 April **Middlesbrough Theatre** (01642 815181; [boxoffice@middlesbrough.gov.uk](mailto:boxoffice@middlesbrough.gov.uk)).

The new film *The Bank Job*, released on 25 February, is inspired by the robbery at Lloyds Bank in Baker Street in 1971. The thieves tunneled into the bank and stole £1.5 million. They in turn may have been inspired by 'The Red-Headed League'.

M J Elliott advises me of the 3rd annual **Imagination Theatre Radio Script Competition**. Scripts can be in any genre. Proper format is very important: please contact [jrfpress@yahoo.com](mailto:jrfpress@yahoo.com) for instructions, application forms and information. First prize, \$150 plus production,

goes to the script that can be produced 'straight out of the envelope'. Second Prize, \$100 plus production, goes to the script that is very good, but still needs a little work. Third prize, \$50, goes to the script that has good writing and inventive ideas, but needs more work. Three honourable mentions receive CDs. Fee is \$15 per script. Scripts must be postmarked no later than 30 April. Winners will be announced 6 June. See [jimfrenchproductions.com](http://jimfrenchproductions.com).

[haha.nu/interesting/sherlock-holmes-the-true-story-of-dr-joseph-bell/](http://haha.nu/interesting/sherlock-holmes-the-true-story-of-dr-joseph-bell/) links to a 45-minute Discovery Channel documentary about Joe Bell. And at [ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/showcase/lcd\\_diary](http://ve.torontopubliclibrary.ca/showcase/lcd_diary) is a digital facsimile of Lady Conan Doyle's diary of the Conan DoYLES' tour of Canada in 1914.

[www.kappachan.com/sherlockholmes](http://www.kappachan.com/sherlockholmes) is the Holmesian website of **Nindya**, a graduate student in Jakarta, Indonesia. Aziz Bin Adam spotted this bright young lady's site. Are there other Sherlockians in South-East Asia?

I somehow missed noting the death on 2 January, aged eighty-two, of **George MacDonald Fraser**, who achieved the rare feat of taking another author's creation and making it his own: the bully Flashman, from Thomas Hughes' *Tom Brown's Schooldays*, whom Fraser took into a career as a coward, womaniser and accidental military hero. The few short stories about the egregious Flashy were collected in *Flashman and the Tiger* (1999), whose title story gives a different view, disconcertingly credible, of the capture of Colonel Sebastian 'Tiger Jack' Moran at the Empty House.

Only three months after the death of his former *Punch* colleague Alan Coren, **Miles Kington** died on 30 January, aged sixty-six. Style and approach were different, but they were the two most consistently, imaginatively witty writers of their generation. Kington is most famous for 'Let's Parler Franglais', in which, as Michael Bywater says, 'he dissected the vagaries of the British from behind the screen of a crazed bilingualism'. *The Franglais Lieutenant's Woman*, a collection of brief parodies, includes 'Sherlock Holmes: The Missing Histoire'. His affection for Holmes also resulted in a Shakespeare spoof, 'The Case of the Danish Prince', and a stage show, *The Death of Tchaikovsky*, written and performed in collaboration with Simon Gilman.

Desmond Tyler reports that **Mimi Langley**, actress and long-time member of our Society, died after a long illness on 24 February. We miss her lively presence at meetings. The funeral will be at Beckenham Crematorium (020 8650 0322) on 3 March at 10.30 am. Mimi was Jewish, so no flowers, please, but donations to Harris HospisCare will be welcome (Caritas House, Tregony Road, Orpington, Kent BR6 9XA).

Periodicals received. *The Camden House Journal*, January 2008 and February 2008 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Cobwebby Bottles*, February 2008 (**The Musgraves**, Rafe McGregor, 62 Willow Park Road, Wilberfoss, York YO41 5PS; [RafeG@aol.com](mailto:RafeG@aol.com)). *Friends of the Sherlock Holmes Collections*, December 2007 (Suite 111, Elmer L Andersen Library, University of Minnesota, 222 21st Avenue S, Minneapolis, MN 55455, USA). *The Illustrious Clients News*, January 2008 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, February 2008 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Irregular Newsletter*, February 2008 (**The Conan Doyle [Crowborough] Establishment**, Brian Pugh, 20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN). *The Magic Door*, Winter 2007 (**The Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection**, Doug Wrigglesworth, 16 Sunset Street, Holland Landing, Ontario, Canada L9N 1H4). *Mayday Mayday*, February 2008 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcarney Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). *QuinCahier* 2, Hiver 1907/1908 (**Société Sherlock Holmes de France**, 36 avenue Jean-Jaurès, 63500 Issoire, France). *The School Report*, Spring 2008 (**The Priory Scholars**, Horace L Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY). *The Whaling News*, November 2007, December 2007, January 2008 and February 2008 (**The Harpooners of the Sea Unicorn**, Michael E Bragg, PO Box 256, St Charles, MO 63302-0256, USA).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, January 2008 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; [blau7103@comcast.net](mailto:blau7103@comcast.net)).

Roger Johnson