

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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In 1992 my 48-page chapbook, *'Ready When You Are, Mr Rathbone': A Review of the Universal Holmes Films*, was published by the Northern Musgraves. Brief as it is, for years it was the only substantial study of the twelve Sherlock Holmes pictures that Basil Rathbone and Nigel Bruce made for Universal. Now Middlesex University Press (The Burroughs, Hendon, London NW4 4BT) is preparing to publish something very much more substantial, *England's Secret Weapon: The Wartime Films of Sherlock Holmes* by our member **Amanda J Field** (30 June, £11.99). By examining them in the context of the time in which they were made, Ms Field is able to show us that Universal's Baker Street Dozen were considerably more than the poor relations of the two cinematic aristocrats that Fox had made in 1939. She works as a volunteer with the Lancelyn Green Bequest at Portsmouth, which gave her access to an extraordinary amount of primary material — scripts, contracts, correspondence with the Conan Doyle brothers — but she has also dug far deeper than any previous Holmes scholar among various archives in Los Angeles. Thanks to Ms Field, we can appreciate how cunningly Rathbone and Bruce are linked to their origin in Victorian England, which American audiences in 1942 saw as a bastion of democracy. She charts the less than straightforward development of the series, from blatant propaganda through gothic murder mystery to the introduction of the *femme fatale*. Despite the book's title, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* and *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* are dealt with in some detail, though *The House of Fear*, *Pursuit to Algiers* and *Terror by Night* receive little attention. I do have some minor quibbles. The Swiss musician at the beginning of *Sherlock Holmes and the Secret Weapon* is playing a hammered dulcimer, or *hackbrett*, not a xylophone. Irene Adler's disguise was as 'a slim youth', not an ostler. The 1959 Hammer film *The Hound of the Baskervilles* does not feature a *séance*. And I fancy that William Gillette would have been disappointed to be told that he played Sherlock Holmes with an American accent. But, as I said, these are minor matters. *England's Secret Weapon* is a splendid achievement, one of those books that force you to look anew at a subject that had, perhaps, become too familiar.

**Gyles Brandreth** began his Oscar Wilde Murder Mysteries in grand style. The second book was actually better than the first, and the third, *Oscar Wilde and the Dead Man's Smile* (John Murray, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH; £16.99), consolidates and improves on that achievement. From a prologue in the Chamber of Horrors at Madame Tussaud's we are taken back eight years, to Wilde's tour of the United States in 1882, where he acquires a valet and is saved from robbery or worse by a sharp-shooting gambler. On the voyage back to Europe he falls in with the great actor-manager Edmond La Grange and agrees to assist him in translating *Hamlet* for production at the Théâtre La Grange in Paris. At Liverpool the customs officials find that, instead of books, one of Wilde's cases contains a dead dog. The greater part of the story takes place in Paris, where Oscar Wilde meets his Boswell for the first time, in the person of Robert Sherard, the narrator of these histories. (Sherard, who knew Mr Brandreth's father, actually was a friend of Wilde's, and his first biographer.) When Wilde's valet, now La Grange's dresser, is killed, Sherard takes over his rôle, and witnesses both the triumphant production of Shakespeare's tragedy and the disintegration of the company. La Grange's children, his Hamlet and Ophelia, die suddenly and spectacularly. Finally La Grange himself is killed in his dressing room. In an epilogue, again at Madame Tussaud's, Wilde and Sherard discuss the case with Arthur Conan Doyle, and the truth emerges at last — as does the macabre significance of the book's title. *Oscar Wilde and the Dead Man's Smile* is an exceptionally good detective story (at one stage, I think, Gyles Brandreth borrows inspiration from John Dickson Carr, the greatest writer in the genre). It's

also a fascinating historical novel. Paris in 1883, little more than a decade since the Prussian siege, is a mixture of beauty, decadence, high civilisation and deep cruelty — a Jekyll-and-Hyde city that becomes a major character, as alive as Sarah Bernhardt, James Russell Lowell, John Tussaud and the other *dramatis personae*.

Thirty-five years ago **Tim Pigott-Smith** played Dr Watson to John Wood's Holmes in the Royal Shakespeare Company's outstanding production of William Gillette's play *Sherlock Holmes*. Since then he has presented a television documentary about the great detective, recorded Hesketh Pearson's biography of Arthur Conan Doyle, and played Holmes himself, in Roy App's fine radio dramatisation of *The Valley of Fear*. In August last year his book *The Dragon Tattoo* (Hodder Children's Books, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH; £5.99) was published — and as it's the first in a series called *The Baker Street Mysteries*, I'm at a loss as to why I hadn't heard of it before! The basic premise isn't new: at present there are three other series of children's books about the Baker Street irregulars, and they all contradict each other to a degree, which is to be expected as the information in the Canon is minimal. The important thing is that Mr Pigott-Smith handles that premise with great skill. You have to accept that Holmes was still in London in 1893, and still endeavouring to bring Professor Moriarty to justice; also that his band of 'irregulars' didn't come into being until then. Just don't worry about it. Immerse yourself in the breathlessly exciting adventures of young Sam Wiggins in his bid to rescue his friend Ann-Li Chang from Moriarty's henchman Colonel Maltravers (a worthy addition to the gallery of villainous colonels), and of the Baker Street page boy Billy Chizzell in his search for the missing detective. The story is written with an actor's sensibility, in short dramatic scenes, cutting from one situation to another. Philip Pullman, no less, says, 'Anyone writing a new Sherlock Holmes tale needs sharp wits and a keen sense of drama, and Tim Pigott-Smith has those in abundance.' True! I'm looking forward to *The Rose of Africa*, due in August, and *Shadow of Evil* in October.

The latest product of Paul Spiring's researches among the works of **Bertram Fletcher Robinson** is *The World of Vanity Fair* (MX Publishing Ltd, 335 Princess Park Manor, Royal Drive, London N11 3GX; £75.00 or \$145.00). In his short life, Robinson was a remarkably prolific journalist, editing *The Daily Express*, *Vanity Fair* and *The World* in addition to his other literary pursuits. *Vanity Fair*, which nothing in common but the name with today's magazine, began in 1868 as a satirical journal — though we would consider the satire very polite. Its most famous feature, from January 1869 until the magazine folded in 1914, was the series of full-colour caricatures of celebrated persons, with humorous text attributed to 'Jehu Junior'. The most prolific artists were Carlo Pellegrini, who signed his work 'Ape', and Leslie Ward, otherwise 'Spy', but there were at least twenty-four others, including James Jacques Tissot and Max Beerbohm. Between 1905 and his death in 1907 Fletcher Robinson contributed fifteen articles to *The Windsor Magazine*, under the title 'Chronicles in Cartoon', in which he reprinted nearly four hundred — about a fifth — of the *Vanity Fair* caricatures published so far, but grouped under headings that began with 'Royalty' and proceeded through 'Politics', 'Music', 'Empire Builders', 'Leaders of Religion' and the like. *The World of Vanity Fair* reprints those fifteen articles, nearly 280 pages of them, in full-colour facsimile. You'll be keen to know, I'm sure, whether Spy's famous portrait of William Gillette is here. Sadly, it isn't, because Robinson died before his project got as far as 'The Stage', but what we do have, thanks to Mr Spiring, is an extraordinarily rich gallery of late Victorian notables — which unfortunately comes at an extraordinarily high price, especially for a paperback.

Just arrived in the post is *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, a Sherlock Holmes Graphic Novel, adapted by **Ian Edginton** and illustrated by **INJ Culbard** (SelfMadeHero, 5 Upper Wimpole Street, London W1G 6BP; £14.99). The address, so close to Conan Doyle's consulting room, inspires confidence, as does the foreword by Daniel Stashower. It's very stylish, and obviously done with affection and intelligence, as the careful floor plan of 221B indicates. Besides, how could anyone resist the advertisements on an omnibus: 'R Stephens & Co', 'Lee Bros', 'Hoffmanstal', 'The Blakely Ballet'...?

Last month's symposium at Harvard University, 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: A Sesquicentennial Assessment', coincided with the publication of the latest volume in the BSI Manuscript Series, *So Painful a Scandal* edited by **John Bergquist** (\$35.00 plus postage), which reproduces the MS of 'The Three Students' (held at Harvard) together with scholarly essays by, among others, Guy Marriott and Nicholas Utechin. *Papers at an Exhibition* edited by **Peter Accardo** and **Daniel Posnansky** (\$35.00 plus postage), will be published in October, as will a signed and limited boxed set of both books, together with the catalogue of the continuing exhibition in the Houghton Library, *Ever Westward: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle in American Culture*, edited by **Peter Accardo**. The catalogue is not, apparently, available separately. The limited edition — 75 copies — will cost \$195.00 plus postage. See [www.bakerstreetjournal.com](http://www.bakerstreetjournal.com) for full details. Orders should be sent to The Baker Street Irregulars, Michael H Kean, 3040 Sloat Road, Pebble Beach, CA 93953-2837, USA. [*\*Naturally I hope to review these books in due course.\**]

Alistair Duncan reports that the **Sherlock Holmes Museum** at 239 Baker Street plans to publish a book of letters to Sherlock Holmes. Such letters have been delivered to the museum since Abbey National left Abbey House, which occupies the address 221 Baker Street.

Alistair also notes that the brass plaque that was installed by the door (unveiled by Jeremy Brett, I think) was removed before the complete rebuilding of Abbey House and has not yet been reinstated. Does anyone know what's become of it?

**David Stuart Davies** offers a CD recording of his one-woman play *Sherlock Through the Magnifying Glass*, as performed by Mary Wooldridge for the Northern Musgraves in 1992. The performance is excellent, and the 28-minute recording is crisp and clear. (David Stuart Davies, Heaton House, 14 Heaton Road, Gledholt, Huddersfield HD1 4HX; [overdale@btinternet.com](mailto:overdale@btinternet.com); £10.00 or \$35.00, post-paid.)

**Roger Llewellyn** has signed with Big Finish (PO Box 3787, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 3TF; [www.bigfinish.com](http://www.bigfinish.com)), the spoken word company who have the franchises for *Doctor Who*, *Robin Hood*, *Highlander* and other high profile series, to record both of David Stuart Davies's plays. *Sherlock Holmes — The Last Act!* and *Sherlock Holmes — The Death and Life* will probably be available in the autumn.

Roger's tour with *Sherlock Holmes — The Death and Life* continues. On 11 June he'll be at **South Holland Arts Centre** in Spalding (01775 764777; [www.southhollandcentre.co.uk](http://www.southhollandcentre.co.uk)); 19 June at **Queens Hall**, Hexham (01434 652477; [www.queenshall.co.uk](http://www.queenshall.co.uk)); 21 June at **Grassington Festival**, Grassington (01756 752694; [www.grassington-festival.org.uk](http://www.grassington-festival.org.uk)); on 24 June at **Civic Theatre**, Barnsley (0845 180 0363; [www.barnsleycivic.co.uk](http://www.barnsleycivic.co.uk)); and on 30 June at **Guildhall Arts Centre**, Grantham (01476 406158; [www.guildhallartscentre.com](http://www.guildhallartscentre.com)).

*Hound* by **John Patrick Bray** will be staged at **Robert Moss Theater** at 440 Lafayette Street in New York's East Village, as part of the Planet Connections Festivity. Performances will be on 17, 20, 22, 23, 24 and 25 June. See [www.planetconnectionsfestivity.com/shows.html](http://www.planetconnectionsfestivity.com/shows.html).

Look out for *John Sergeant's Tourist Trail* on ITV in July. One programme in the 3-part series will feature Sherlock Holmes's Dartmoor. (Thanks to Paul Spiring and Brian Pugh for this.)

**Alistair Duncan's** campaign to raise awareness of Arthur Conan Doyle in South Norwood has borne fruit. *The William Stanley*, a JD Wetherspoon pub in South Norwood High Street, now houses an attractive display about Sir Arthur and his residence in the area. (Alistair Duncan's book *Close to Holmes: A Look at the Connections between Historical London, Sherlock Holmes and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle* is highly recommended. See DM 291.)

If you've read and enjoyed *Stage Whispers: The Memoirs* by **Douglas Wilmer** — and if not, why not? — I think you'll enjoy Matthew

Coniam's interview with him at <http://movietone-news.blogspot.com/search/label/Douglas%20Wilmer>.

The next major symposium for Conan Doyle's 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary will be 'The Remarkable Characters of Sir Arthur Conan Doyle', to be held at the Lilly Library at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana on 26 September. Speakers include Nicholas Meyer, Leslie Klinger, Susan Rice, Clifford Goldfarb, Roy Pilot and Steven Doyle. Information and registration is at <http://lillylibraryholmesconference.ning.com/>.

*Sherlock Holmes Mystery Magazine* is published quarterly by Wildside Press LLC (9710 Traville Gateway Drive, #234, Rockville, MD 20850, USA) and edited by **Marvin Kaye**. The second issue features fiction, not all Holmesian, by Ron Goulart, Darrell Schweitzer, Gary Lovisi, MJ Elliott and others, as well as a reprint of 'The Musgrave Ritual', plus reviews by Carol Buggé and Kim Newman, and some amusing trivia. Annual subscriptions are \$36.00 in the US and \$72.00 elsewhere.

Jon Lellenberg notes that the Estate of Dame Jean Conan Doyle is finally closed, and that the various rights are now registered with **Conan Doyle Estate Ltd**.

Chris Music reports that **The Amateur Mendicant Society of Detroit** is still going strong after sixty-three years. The society's website is at [www.amateurmendicant.blogspot.com](http://www.amateurmendicant.blogspot.com).

Peter Blau reminds me that **Edward Judd**, whose most important starring rôle was in Val Guest's film *The Day the Earth Caught Fire*, played Barrymore in the 1983 Mapleton film *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, with Ian Richardson as Holmes. Edward Judd died on 24 February at the age of seventy-six.

The music of **Richard Arnell**, who died on 10 April aged ninety-one, is only now receiving its due in the way of recording. His delightful score for Kenneth Macmillan's 1953 ballet *The Great Detective* was released last year on Epoch.

The dramatist **Royce Ryton** died on 14 April aged eighty-four. His greatest success came in 1972 with *Crown Matrimonial*, a play about the abdication crisis. 1981's *To Kill a King*, in which Sherlock Holmes investigates a plot to assassinate Edward VII, was less successful.

**Dom DeLuise**, the plump baby-faced actor and comedian, died on 4 May aged seventy-five. His performance as the blackmailer Gambetti is one of the best things in Gene Wilder's uneven comedy *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes' Smarter Brother*.

**Joseph J Fink** ('Tonga', BSI) died on 9 May. Scott Monty recalls: 'One of the things that always struck me about Joe was that he was such an unassuming, seemingly retiring and quiet man, yet he could bring the house down with a single line. He was a giant in the world of humor.'

Philip Cornell reports the death on 15 May of the Australian actor **Charles Tingwell** at the age of eighty-six, after a career of more than sixty years. In 1968 he played Bob Carruthers in the BBC TV production of *The Solitary Cyclist*, with Peter Cushing — a lost episode.

Periodicals received. *Arthur Conan Doyle Newsletter and Birthday File XVI*, 22 May 2009 (**The Conan Doyle [Crowborough] Establishment**, Brian Pugh, 20 Clare Road, Lewes, Sussex BN7 1PN). *The Camden House Journal*, May 2009 & June 2009 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *The Illustrious Clients News*, April 2009 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, May 2009 & June 2009 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *The Moor: Magasin för Sherlockianer*, April 2009 (**The Baskerville Hall Club of Sweden**, Anders Wiggström, Byggmästarvägen 29, 168 32 Bromma, Sweden). *Sherlockiana*, Nr 1 2009 (**Sherlock Holmes Klubben i Danmark**, Bjarne Rother Jensen, Højbovangen 24, 9200 Aalborg SV, Denmark). *The Torr*, Spring 2009 (**The Poor Folk Upon The Moors**, Reggie Musgrave, Drummond Cottage, Old Tavern Yard, Westbourne, Chichester, West Sussex PO10 8TA).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, April 2009 and May 2009 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; [blau7103@comcast.net](mailto:blau7103@comcast.net)).

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