

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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A Taste for Honey by **H F Heard** (Blue Dolphin Publishing Inc., PO Box 8, Nevada City, CA 95959, USA; \$16.95) is a welcome new edition of an unusual and rather brilliant detective novel, first published in 1941. When Mrs Heregrove dies after being stung by her unpleasant husband's bees, Mr Sydney Silchester, reserved and fussy, resolves to buy his honey elsewhere. At the far end of the village, he discovers another beekeeper, a tall, thin gentleman who calls himself Mr Mycroft — and who already suspects that Mrs Heregrove's death was not natural. Very clearly, this is Sherlock Holmes, guarding his privacy in his rural retirement. Eventually he admits: 'Mycroft is only one of my family names.' But one of the delights of the novel is that Sydney Silchester is not John H Watson; even if he knew who Watson was, he would have no wish to emulate him. On learning his new acquaintance's real name, he says, with devastating frankness, 'I have to own I have never heard of you before.' And when he comes to write an account of their curious investigation he can remember only that the name 'was something like Mycroft — Mycroft and then another word, a short one, I think.' (Early British editions of *A Taste for Honey*, published as by Gerald Heard, call the detective 'Mr Bowcross', to avoid trouble with the Conan Doyle estate.) Silchester's opinion of Mycroft in some ways reflects Watson's view of Holmes — 'I was nettled by his absorbed interest in his own wretched bees and then in Heregrove's supposed motives,' he writes — but his style and character are refreshingly different. As in some of the canonical short stories, the criminal's identity is evident almost from the beginning, and his motive and *modus operandi* are easily discovered. Mr Mycroft's task is to bring the crime home to its perpetrator and stop him killing again. It's a task that requires formidable intelligence, obscure knowledge and a nimble brain. The nice new edition, the first in 'The Mr Mycroft Commemorative Series', includes an entertaining foreword by Stacy Gillis and a most interesting afterword by Heard's literary executor, John Roger Barrie.

In a satisfyingly chunky 450-page anthology entitled *The Improbable Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* (Night Shade Books, 1423 33rd Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94122, USA; \$15.95), **John Joseph Adams** has gathered twenty-eight curious accounts by a remarkable array of authors. Amy Myers rubs shoulders with Michael Moorcock, Stephen King with Anne Perry, Edward D Hoch with Laurie R King, Tanith Lee with Peter Tremayne. The contributors seem to be drawn equally from the worlds of crime fiction and science-fantasy, so it's no real surprise to

discover that the problems facing the great detective range from the rationally explicable to the frankly irrational. Sometimes, as Mr Adams says, you can't eliminate the impossible. What all these tales have in common is improbability, and we can't say we weren't warned. On a literary level, Anthony Burgess's 'Murder to Music' and Neil Gaiman's 'A Study in Emerald', completely different otherwise, are superb. It's a grand collection altogether. My only reservation is that half of these stories are reprinted from anthologies that are still easily available.

In *Murder at Oakwood Grange* (New Generation Publishing; £7.99) **Avril Field-Taylor** reveals the story of the politician, the lighthouse and the trained cormorant. The book is available from amazon.co.uk and other online sources. I hope to review it in the next DM.

On 23 October Titan Books (144 Southwark Street, London SE1 0UP) will publish the first four in its series 'The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes', reprinting some of the best Holmes pastiches. They begin with *The Ectoplasmic Man* by **Daniel Stashower**, *The War of the Worlds* by **Manly Wade Wellman** and **Wade Wellman**, and *The Veiled Detective* and *The Scroll of the Dead*, both by **David Stuart Davies**. All are priced at £7.99. Future titles include *The Man from Hell* by **Barrie Roberts** and *The Stalwart Companions* by **H Paul Jeffers**.

Michael Lawrence wishes to sell his collection of Sherlock Holmes books. This could be your chance to buy some of the older and rarer titles. If you're interested, please e-mail Mr Lawrence for a list at MWLawrence99@aol.com.

At www.sherlock-holmes.com/e_times09-9.htm you'll find the September issue of *The Sherlockian E-Times*, the catalogue-magazine of **Classic Specialties** (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com). Also worth investigating is the special catalogue for Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 150th anniversary issued by **Preston Book Company** (68 Friargate, Preston, Lancs. PR1 2ED; 01772 252613; prestonrarebooks@halewood221b.freerve.co.uk).

A reminder of the lovely facsimile editions of guidebooks and maps published by **Old House Books**, (The Old Police Station, Pound Street, Moretonhampstead, Devon TQ13 8PA; www.OldHouseBooks.co.uk). Titles of interest to the Holmesian include *Baedeker's Great Britain 1890: A Handbook for Travellers* (£15.99), *Baedeker's London & Its Environs 1900* (£14.99), *Murray's Modern London 1860* (£13.99), *Bacon's up to date Map of London 1902*

(£9.99), *London Railways Map 1897* (£9.99), and *Dickens's Dictionary of London 1888* (£12.99).

It's 120 years since J M Stoddart, editor of the Philadelphia-based *Lippincott's Monthly Magazine*, invited Oscar Wilde and Arthur Conan Doyle to dinner at the Langham Hotel in London. That evening he commissioned a novel from each of them: *The Picture of Dorian Gray* and *The Sign of the Four* respectively. To mark that anniversary, and Oscar Wilde's 155th birthday, Naxos AudioBooks have released an unabridged reading of Wilde's story by **Greg Wise** (2nd Floor, 40A High Street, Welwyn, Herts. AL6 9EQ; £19.99). *Dorian Gray* is one of the quartet of great nineteenth century novels of terror, and it shares with *Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* the distinction of being a highly moral work of literature, so superbly written that it never seems in the least sanctimonious. Conan Doyle was more perceptive than the many critics who attacked the book, absurdly, as 'immoral'. (Perhaps they were repelled in part by the apparent cynicism of the epigrams that sparkle amid the horrors of Dorian Gray's descent into vice, seeming, as Gary Mead puts it in his notes to this recording, 'like diamonds scattered in a coal cellar'.) Wilde replied to the younger author's admiring letter: 'I am really delighted that you think my treatment subtle and artistically good.' Greg Wise's voice is pleasing, and his pacing immaculate. I confess I'd like to have some more obvious differences between the voices of the different characters, but after all those performances in Jane Austen, Wilkie Collins and the like, there's no doubt that Mr Wise sounds thoroughly at home in nineteenth century Society. As usual, the recording is enhanced by appropriate music from the Naxos archive — in this case, works by Schumann, Chabrier, and (a composer new to me) Léon Boëllmann. *The Picture of Dorian Gray* is an admirable addition to the Naxos AudioBooks catalogue.

Roger Llewellyn has recorded both of David Stuart Davies's plays for **Big Finish** (PO Box 3787, Maidenhead, Berkshire, SL6 3TF), who have gained a considerable reputation, initially for their *Doctor Who* audio plays. *Sherlock Holmes – The Last Act!* will be released in November, and *Sherlock Holmes – The Death and Life* in December. Both can be pre-ordered at www.bigfinish.com/ranges/Sherlock-Holmes,m as can *Holmes and the Ripper* by Brian Clemens, with **Nicholas Briggs** as Holmes, due in January.

Roger continues touring with *Sherlock Holmes – The Death and Life*. Dates for the rest of 2009 are: 25 October: **Memorial Theatre**, Broadstairs (0845 2626263; www.sarahthorne-theatreclub.co.uk); 30 October **Cornerstone**, Didcot (01235 515144; www.cornerstone-arts.org); 2 November: **Arts Centre**, Paisley (0141 8871010; www.renfrewshire.gov.uk); 6 November: **Bowhill Theatre**, Selkirk (the play is *Sherlock Holmes – The Last Act!*) (01750 22204; www.bowhill.org); 8 November: **The Maltings**, Berwick upon Tweed (01289 330999; www.maltingsberwick.co.uk); 11 November: **The Clocktower**, Croydon (020 8253 1030; www.croydonclocktower.org.uk); 13 November: **Quarterhouse**, Folkestone (01303 858500;

www.quarterhouse.co.uk); 20 November **Waterside**, Sale (0161 9125616; www.watersideartscentre.co.uk); 4 December: **The Ropery Hall**, Barton on Humber (01652 660380; www.the-ropewalk.co.uk); 18 December: **Borough Theatre**, Abergavenny (01873 850805; www.boroughtheatreabergavenny.co.uk); 24–28 December: **Tabard** London (08448 472264; www.tabardtheatre.co.uk).

On 28, 29 & 30 October, at the Cockpit Theatre in Gateforth Street, near Lisson Grove, our member **Sandy Easton** will play Dr Watson in his own play *The Matter of the Cardinal Jewel*, a production of the Venturers Drama Group for the Visually impaired. Sandy himself is blind. Holmes will be played by Lee Innel, a sighted actor. The rest of the cast is mainly blind and partially-sighted. Doors open at 6:30 pm for a 7:30 pm start. Tickets can be purchased at the Box Office on the day for £5.00. See <http://www.venturersdramagroup.org.uk/>.

Nearly thirty years ago **Christopher Lee** and **Patrick Macnee** played Holmes and Watson in two television films for a company called Harmony Gold. Made in Luxembourg, with excursions to South Africa, *Sherlock Holmes and the Leading Lady* and *Sherlock Holmes: Incident at Victoria Falls* show the detective and the doctor in the years before the Great War, investigating plots that threaten the stability of Europe and the Empire. It doesn't really matter that the actors were ten years too old, though the casting of Morgan Fairchild, three decades younger than Lee, as Irene Adler, the Leading Lady, doesn't help. Jenny Seagrove also was too young to play Lillie Langtry in *Victoria Falls*, but there were some very felicitous choices, particularly in the latter film, such as Richard Todd as Lord Roberts and Claude Akins as Teddy Roosevelt. On the other hand, Jerome Willis was physically quite wrong for Mycroft Holmes... At three hours each, the stories are stretched rather too much, especially *The Leading Lady*, but the films are certainly visually attractive, and they move along at a reasonable pace. Christopher Lee, of course, is always worth watching. The executive producer was the late Harry Alan Towers, who had made a memorable Sherlock Holmes radio series in 1954, with John Gielgud and Ralph Richardson. More bizarrely, Silvio Berlusconi was involved in the production of these films! Neither qualifies as a classic, rather as a sort of guilty pleasure. It's nice to know that they'll be released as a double-DVD set on 2 November by Revelation Films (Barn House, 38, Meadow Way, Ruislip, Middlesex HA4 8SY; £19.99).

Peter Wood, **MBt**, **BSI** reports that he has donated his own reference collection of Holmesian and Doylean books to the Rare Books Library at Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, where they will form part of the first such special collection on the West Coast of North America. (WAC Bennett Library, 8888 University Drive, Burnaby, BC, Canada V5A 1S6; www.lib.sfu.ca/special/).

Besides Guy Ritchie's film *Sherlock Holmes*, to be released on Boxing Day, and the series of films for BBC TV created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss, which will start transmission early next year, we can look forward to a

90-minute movie, also entitled *Sherlock Holmes*, from an American company called **The Asylum**. This one, featuring Ben Snyder and Gareth David-Lloyd as Holmes and Watson, is due for DVD release, probably in Region 1 only, on 26 January. Dominic Keating plays Thorpe, alias Spring-Heeled Jack. There's some information, including photos, at www.theasylum.cc/product.php?id=164.

From Peter Blau: Randall Stock notes that the typescript for 'A Chat with Conan Doyle' is now on-line. This is the script of the recording that ACD made for HMV on 14 May 1930, released as *Conan Doyle Speaking*. The first page is titled (apparently in his own handwriting) 'A Chat "with" Conan Doyle'. It's at www.tinyurl.com/lrre95e.

The Royal Mail marked ten of this year's anniversaries with its **Eminent Britons** First Class stamp set on 8 October, featuring Fred Perry, Henry Purcell, Matt Busby, WE Gladstone, Mary Wollstonecraft, Arthur Conan Doyle, Donald Campbell, Judy Fryd, Samuel Johnson and Martin Ryle. On 29 October Alderney will issue a set of six **Sherlock Holmes** stamps, which will be available from the Guernsey Philatelic Bureau (Envoy House, La Vrangué, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, Channel Islands GY1 1AB; www.guernseystamps.com). The Republic of San Marino got there first with its three stamps honouring Conan Doyle, Edgar Allan Poe and Raymond Chandler — issued back in June.

Martin Hickes' website *The Equinoctial Gales* is worth a look — <http://sites.google.com/site/martinhickes/>.

In the Beeton Auditorium at Toronto Reference Library (789 Yonge Street, Toronto) on 7 November at 1.00 pm **The Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection** will present *Arthur Conan Doyle Among the Fairies*, a free afternoon programme including a discussion of faerie folklore, a talk on the Doyle family's penchant for fairies, and the film *Fairytales: A True Story*. See www.acdfriends.org. The same day at 10.00 am **The Six Napoleons of Baltimore, The Carlton Club and Watson's Tin Box of Ellicott City** will present *A Gallery of Rogues: The Adversaries of Sherlock Holmes*, also a free event, at the Enoch Pratt Central Library in Baltimore, Maryland. Phone for details to 410 396 5494 or 410 997 9114.

The Baker Street Irregulars will mark the centenary of Ronald Knox's seminal essay 'Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes' with a competition open to all Sherlockians who are not Irregulars. It calls for essays 'that demonstrate originality in approaching unanswered canonical questions or in resolving those issues that have been unsatisfactorily addressed heretofore'. The deadline is 1 October 2010. The winner will deliver his or her paper as a guest at the January 2011 BSI Annual Dinner. Details are at www.bakerstreetjournal.com.

Iain Cuthbertson died on 4 September aged seventy-nine. Probably best remembered as the gangster Charlie Endell in the 1970s television series *Budgie*, or as 'Father' in Lionel Jeffries' film *The Railway Children*, he played several real people on film and television: Dr Louis Leakey, Lord Hailsham, Sir David Maxwell-Fyfe — and

Arthur Conan Doyle, in a 1985 series called *Stamp of Greatness*. There's curious tradition of casting the wrong actors as Conan Doyle, but the tall, imposing and Scottish Cuthbertson was excellent in the rôle.

Peter Blau reports the death of **Richard S Warner** ('High Tor', BSI) on 19 September. He was responsible for naming Holmes Peak in Osage, Oklahoma, the only officially recognised American geographical feature named after Sherlock Holmes.

Periodicals received. *The Baker Street Bugle*, 1 July 2009 (**The Deerstalkers of Welshpool**, Roy Upton-Holder, Baskerville, 146 Little Henfaes Drive, Welshpool, Powys SY21 7BA) [**this one is number 50B**]. *The Camden House Journal*, September 2009 & October 2009 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *Communication*, no. 294 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA). *The Formulary*, September 2009 (**The Friends of Dr Watson**, Nino Cirone, Highcroft Cottage, 14 Totteridge Common, Totteridge, London N20 8NL). *The Illustrious Clients News*, September 2009 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 9 Calumet Court, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, October 2009 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA). *Ironmongers Daily Echo and Franco-Midland Branches Advertiser*, August 1909 [**sic**] (**La Société Sherlock Holmes de France**, Thierry Saint-Joanis, 15 rue Grande, 03370 Saint-Sauvier, France). *The Magic Door*, Summer 2009 (**The Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection**, Doug Wrigglesworth, 16 Sunset Street, Holland Landing, Ontario, Canada L9N 1H4). *Mayday Mayday*, October 2009 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcarney Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). *Prescott's Press*, September 2009 (**The Three Garridebs**, Warren Randall, 15 Fawn Lane West, South Setauket, NY 11720-1346, USA). *The School Report*, Autumn 2009 (**The Priory Scholars**, Horace L Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY). *The Scion*, Autumn 2009 (**The Musgraves**, Anne Jordan, Hallas Lodge, Greenside Lane, Cullingworth, Bradford BD13 5AP). *The Serpentine Muse*, Fall 2009 (**The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes**, Evelyn Herzog, 301 Warren Ave, #203, Baltimore, MD 21203, USA) [**the hundredth issue — I look forward to many more!**].

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, September 2009 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

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