

THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON

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Pursuing Sherlock Holmes by **Bill Mason** (Xlibris, www.xlibris.com; hardback \$29.99; paperback \$19.99; e-book \$9.99 – prices exclude postage) reminds us that the best Holmesian commentary is not limited to the four essential periodicals – the SHJ (of course), the BSJ, *The Passengers' Log* and *Canadian Holmes*. Most of the essays in this book first appeared in *The Holmes and Watson Report*, which, I'm sorry to say, I know only by name. In style and approach *Pursuing Sherlock Holmes* is refreshingly diverse. Serious examination of the relevance of Horace and Petrarch, the sexual perversion that was the real curse of the Baskervilles, and the true nature of Dr Sterndale's work, is juxtaposed with light verse about Nathan Garrideb, and a very neat account by Mrs Neville St Clair of how she turned Holmes's discovery of her husband's double life to her (and their) advantage. It's a splendid, entertaining and thought-provoking read altogether – attractively presented and properly proof-read. Signed copies are available from the author for \$24.00 (hardback) and \$16.00 (paperback), postpaid in USA only. Send check or money order to Bill Mason, 2367 Lights Chapel Road, Greenbrier, TN 37073, USA.

I don't know how he does it [*I do, actually: great talent and damned hard work*] but **Gyles Brandreth's** Oscar Wilde Murder Mysteries get better and better. *Oscar Wilde and the Nest of Vipers* (John Murray, 338 Euston Road, London NW1 3BH; £17.99) is positively dazzling. In 1893, at a glamorous *soirée* given for the Prince of Wales, Wilde is fascinated by an elegant young stranger, Rex LaSalle, who claims to be a vampire. The next morning he learns that his beautiful hostess, the Duchess of Albemarle, has been found dead, her body beaten and scratched, and with two small but deep incisions in her neck. The Prince commissions him, unofficially, to investigate the death, which he does, with the rather reluctant help of his friends Arthur Conan Doyle and Robert Sherard. The *dramatis personae* also include Bram Stoker (naturally), Antonin Dvorak, Lillie Langtry, Jane Avril, and an ominous police detective named Hugh Boone. Oscar is on sunny form, but the clouds are gathering. Like its central character, *Oscar Wilde and the Nest of Vipers* is both witty and profound. It's also devilishly clever.

Young Sherlock Holmes: Red Leech by **Andrew Lane** (Macmillan Children's Books, 20 New Wharf Road, London N1 9RR; £6.99) is the second in the series commissioned by the Conan Doyle Estate Ltd. The American bounty-hunter Amyus Crowe is still teaching fourteen-year-old Sherlock how to look and how to reason, but Crowe has other matters on his mind. Only three years ago Abraham Lincoln was murdered by John Wilkes Booth, who was shot dead twelve days later by Union soldiers. But Crowe fears that the assassin actually escaped and is now at the heart of a plot to destroy the United States government. Sherlock Holmes, Amyus Crowe, his daughter Virginia, and Sherlock's friend Matty Arnatt pursue the conspirators to New York, where they uncover even worse things. *Young Sherlock Holmes: Red Leech* is an intelligent and desperately exciting read. [*A couple of odd facts that I don't think Mr Lane mentions: the maiden name of Booth's mother was Holmes, and his escape after killing the President was almost foiled by Major Henry Rathbone...*]

The Watson/Conan Doyle style is deceptively hard to reproduce well. Among living writers, June Thomson and Denis O Smith have come close to perfection – and now there's **Paul W Nash**, whose collection *The Remains of Sherlock Holmes* (Strawberry Books, 19 Fosseyway Drive, Moreton-in-Marsh, Glos. GL56 0DU; £12.00) is the best I've come across in some time. All seven stories are strong, and all seem to derive inspiration from Holmes's remark: 'There is but one step from the grotesque to the horrible.' Here we find an assassin nearly ten feet tall, a ghostly jewel-thief, murder committed by a monkey... 'The Mystery of Dorian Gray' stands out as a very clever attempt to provide

a rational explanation for the events of Oscar Wilde's novel, though I prefer the tragedy of 'The Silent Valet' and the ingenious enigma of 'The Camden Rose', which seems to echo another tragedy, that of 'The Musgrave Ritual'. 'The Remains of Sherlock Holmes' is the detective's final case; he solves a tantalising puzzle, but the outcome is not a happy one, especially for Dr Watson. The stories are gratifyingly well-written, the proof-reading is good, and the book – a 230-page hardback – is handsome. *The Remains of Sherlock Holmes* is a winner!

The plotting in *The Lost Stories of Sherlock Holmes* by **Tony Reynolds** (MX Publishing, 335 Princess Park Manor, Royal Drive, London N11 3GX; £9.99) is very good. The truly chilling tale of the Giant Rat of Sumatra is followed by seven more, all clever, atmospheric and engaging. We read of a larcenous fortune teller; an explorer, apparently bled dry by leeches; a benign medium; an aristocratic anarchist; an eccentric collector; a grave-robber... and finally, in a charming comedy, the theft of a ruby necklace. It has to be said that the writing is not of the same quality as Dr Nash's, and the proof-reading is uncertain. However, the book has an outstanding advantage: each tale is enhanced with a superb illustration by **Chris Coady**, done in the style of Sidney Paget. (You can see a couple of the pictures here: <http://www.nbillustration.co.uk/index.php?go=q.art:7.4.4556>.)

Also from MX comes *A Study in Crimson: The Further Adventures of Mrs Watson and Mrs St Clair, Co-Founders of the Watson-Fanshaw Detective Agency* by **Molly Carr** (£12.99). Like its predecessor *The Sign of Fear* (see DM 306), it's not so much a novel as a collection of short stories with a succession of linking narrative threads. Much of the entertainment is in the clashes between Mary Watson and her cross-dressing partner. Each is a woman with a past, but that past remains largely untold. Mary, Emily and the ever-obliging John Watson (formerly Ormond Sacker) head for New York to investigate the Long Island Cave mystery, and immediately fall foul of the Red Circle when a trusted ally turns out to be no such thing. The gang's plan is to groom Watson to be the next Moriarty – and that's just the beginning. Add the Vatican Cameos, Hercule Poirot's regrettably criminal father and brother, Wilson the notorious canary trainer, A J Raffles, and the old Russian Woman, and you'll see that the Watson-Fanshaw saga is richly entertaining. As the theatre critics used to say, this one will run and run.

The Adventure of the Spanish Drums by **Martin Daley** (Irregular Special Press, Baker Street Studios Ltd, Endeavour House, 170 Woodland Road, Sawston, Cambridge CB22 3DX; £7.50) takes Holmes and Watson to Cumberland, to investigate the theft of a famous battle trophy – the Arroyo Drums, which were captured from the French 34th Regiment at the Battle of Arroyo dos Molinos in 1811 by the British 34th (Cumberland) Regiment, and which may still be seen at Carlisle Castle, in the Border Regiment Museum. Mr Daley's imitation of the Watson style is adequately good, though his punctuation lets him down. But it's an exciting story, with fascinating snippets about the city and the regiment, attractively embellished with period photographs.

The Friends of the Arthur Conan Doyle Collection at Toronto Public Library (Clifford Goldfarb, Scotia Plaza, Suite 3100, 40 King Street W, Toronto, Ontario M6C 1T1, Canada) have published the 2009 Cameron Hollyer Memorial Lecture as a nice 32-page booklet. This is *Arthur Conan Doyle as Essayist and Journalist* by **Michael Dirda** (no price given). Mr Dirda is one of North America's most respected literary critics, and a BSI to boot.

My Victorian Fantasy: 25 Years with Her Majesty at the Colne Valley Railway 'by Mr Punch' is a very attractive 52-page booklet of photographs, in full colour, taken at the Colne Valley Railway's 'living history' events from 1986 to the present by actor, author and Punch & Judy Professor **Des Turner**. For more than a decade, Sherlock Holmes

was among the historical figures there, in the person of our late friend Stephen Farrell, and I initially portrayed Dr Watson before moving up the social scale to depict various royal personages. We both feature in the booklet, among a gallimaufry of Victorian characters. (Des Turner, Richmond House, 2 Benington Road, Aston, Stevenage, Herts. SG2 7DX; e-mail: desturner@aol.com; £7.99 plus £1.11 postage. Please make cheques payable to Des Turner.)

Back in the late 1990s, Penguin Audiobooks released six sets of first-rate recordings from the Canon. The reader was our own honorary member **Douglas Wilmer**, and the producers were our former Chairmen, Philip Porter and Richard Lancelyn Green. Four recordings were never released by Penguin, but that curious omission has now been rectified by Porter Press International (Hilltop Farm, Knighton-on-Teme, Tenbury Wells, Worcs. WR15 8LY; phone 01584 781588; sales@porterpress.co.uk). *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes*, comprising 'Silver Blaze', 'The Cardboard Box', 'The Yellow Face' and 'The Stock-broker's Clerk', is available as four CDs (£9.99 plus postage) or as audio download (£7.99) from www.porterpress.co.uk. (Porter Press offers Douglas Wilmer's highly entertaining autobiography *Stage Whispers* at the seasonal bargain price of £15.99 plus postage - £2.00 in the UK).

Nearly forty years ago another great Holmes, **Peter Cushing**, recorded an unabridged reading of *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* – but very few of us will have heard it. The recording was made for the Royal National Institute for the Blind and for forty years was available only to registered blind and partially sighted people in the UK. On the 7th February, however, Cosmic Hobo (PO Box 223, Faversham, Kent ME13 7WU) will release Volume One on CD, the first of three, with liner notes by David Stuart Davies, at £19.99. The audio format enabled Peter Cushing, as it did Douglas Wilmer, to display a remarkable range of voices and accents that he rarely had the chance to use on film or television. See the website for details, or to pre-order, at www.cosmichobo.com. (Available now from Cosmic Hobo is Cushing's abridged reading of his second volume of autobiography, *Past Forgetting: Memoirs of the Hammer Years*.)

In 1993 BBC Radio 5 broadcast *The Unopened Casebook of Sherlock Holmes*, six new plays by **John Taylor**, with Simon Callow and Nicky Henson as Holmes and Watson. The stories were then published in narrative form, and very good they are. Now AudioGO, formerly BBC Audiobooks, has released *The Rediscovered Railway Mysteries and other stories* by John Taylor, read by **Benedict Cumberbatch** – four new stories on two CDs for £12.99 (AudioGO, St James House, The Square, Lower Bristol Road, Bath BA2 3BH). Or you can download the recordings for £9.99 at www.audiogo.co.uk/audiobook/30006/. 'The Conundrum of Coach 13' concerns the apparently impossible theft of gold bullion from a secure train, and the mystery of 'The 10.59 Assassin' is solved by an experiment with ballistics. The other two cases, 'An Inscrutable Masquerade' and 'The Trinity Vicarage Larceny', are just as baffling and just as satisfactorily explained. Mr Taylor has a sure touch with the Watson style, and Mr Cumberbatch is a splendid reader.

The latest and most ambitious recording by the Old Court Radio Theatre Company is now accessible on the Society's website at www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk/world/radio.php. This is a new radio adaptation, in two parts, of the classic play *Sherlock Holmes, or The Strange Case of Miss Alice Faulkner* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and William Gillette. Jim Crozier and Dave Hawkes once again play Holmes and Watson – rôles that they have made very much their own – and Cyril Bagshaw gives a wonderfully sinister performance as Professor Moriarty.

Both **The Sherlock Holmes Society of London** and **The Baker Street Irregulars** have seasonal offers on certain publications. Check www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk/shop.php for the special deal on *To Keep the Memory Green* and *Meet Me in Bohemia*, and www.bakerstreetjournal.com/ for the special deal on *Scandinavia and Sherlock Holmes*. All highly recommended!

Next month the BSI will publish *Bohemian Souls: A facsimile of the original manuscript of 'A Scandal in Bohemia'*, edited and introduced by **Otto Penzler**, *The Grand Game: A celebration of Sherlockian scholarship, Volume One; 1902-1959*, edited by **Laurie King** and **Leslie S Klinger**, and *Italy and Sherlock Holmes*, edited by **Enrico Solito** and **Gianluca Salvatore**.

At www.sherlock-holmes.com/e_times10-12.htm you'll find the December issue of *The Sherlockian E-Times*, the catalogue-magazine of **Classic Specialties** (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH, 45219, USA; sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com).

Vincent Delay points out that the booklet *Edmond Locard, le Sherlock Holmes Français* by **Jean-Pierre Crauser** is available from him at Chemin de la Chaumière 1, 1010 Lausanne, Switzerland, and not at the address I gave in DM 307.

Anthony M Cornish (Arch Cottage, Dolydd Road, Cefn Mawr, Wrexham LL14 3NH; 01978 822227; a.m.cornish@btinternet.com) invites offers for six issues of *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, all in fine condition: Volume 5 no. 4 to Volume 6 no. 4, plus Volume 7 no. 3.

There's little specifically Holmesian in the latest issue of **Geoff Bradley's** estimable magazine *CADS: Crime and Detective Stories* (Geoff Bradley, 9 Vicarage Hill, South Benfleet, Essex SS7 1PA; email Geoffcads@aol.com), but as always there's lots to interest the detective story devotee, including a detailed look at John Dickson Carr's classic 'locked room' lecture from *The Hollow Man*.

The 'Sherlock Holmes Spy Pocket Watch', now available from eBay, Amazon and other sources is a sophisticated electronic version of the spy cameras made a century and more ago.

The Undershaw Preservation Trust has instructed lawyers start judicial review proceedings to challenge Waverley Borough Council's decision to grant planning permission to convert Conan Doyle's Surrey home into flats. See www.saveundershaw.com, where you can also buy the Trust's lovely Christmas cards.

Actor, writer and director **Mark Gatiss** – co-creator of the BBC TV series *Sherlock* – has accepted the post of Patron and Sponsor of the Undershaw Preservation Trust.

Peter Blau notifies me that **The Red Circle of Washington** now has a website at www.redcirclec.org.

Herbert P Tinning, who died on 7 November, will be remembered with affection by participants in various of our Society's jaunts, especially to Switzerland, for which he adopted the character of the Revd Mr Roundhay, from 'The Devil's Foot'. He ran and, I think, founded the Devil's Foot Society, and his BSI investiture was 'Dr Leon Sterndale'. The rôle was well-chosen, as Herb was in real life a Deacon of the Episcopalian Church.

The masterwork of the director **Roy Ward Baker**, who died on 5 October, aged ninety-three, is certainly *A Night to Remember*, which remains the finest depiction on film of the tragedy of the *Titanic*. His prolific output includes *The October Man*, *The One that Got Away*, *Quatermass and the Pit* and the 1984 television movie *The Masks of Death*, which provided a worthy farewell for Peter Cushing's Sherlock Holmes. He also directed five films in Sheldon Reynolds' little-seen series *Sherlock Holmes and Dr Watson*.

Periodicals received. *The Baker Street Journal*, Autumn 2010 (Steven Rothman, 220, West Rittenhouse Square, #15-D, Philadelphia, PA 19103, USA; subscriptions, PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331, USA).

The Cri Bar Crier, December 2010 (**The Criterion Bar Association**, Susan Z Diamond, 16W603 3rd Avenue, Bensenville, IL 60106-2327, USA). *The Log of the SS May Day*, vol 1 no 4 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardearn Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). *The Morning Echo*, Civic Promenade Special Number 2010 (**The Elementary Victorians**, Steve Duke, PO Box 340, Reservoir, Victoria 3073, Australia). *The Moor: Magasin för Sherlockianer*, Dec. 2010 (**The Baskerville Hall Club of Sweden**, Anders Wiggström, Byggmästarvägen 29, 168 32 Bromma, Sweden). *Prescott's Press*, September 2010 (**The Three Garridebs**, Warren Randall, 15 Fawn Lane West, South Setauket, NY 11720-1346, USA).

And *Scuttlebutt from the Spermaceti Press*, October 2010 & November 2010 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; blau7103@comcast.net).

This issue has been held up by personal and seasonal commitments. I apologise for the delay. It's the last *District Messenger* of 2010, so I'll wish everybody

The Compliments of the Season!

Roger Johnson