

## “I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by DAN ANDRIACCO, LISA BURSCHEIDT, ALISTAIR DUNCAN,  
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**Adventures in The Strand: Arthur Conan Doyle & The Strand Magazine** by Mike Ashley. *The British Library*. 2016. £25.00. 288 pp (hbk)

Mike Ashley begins with the early lives of Doyle, George Newnes and Herbert Greenhough Smith to illustrate how they came to overlap at *The Strand*. He then considers the magazine's origins and Doyle's contributions across a range of areas, covering fiction with sections on Holmes, Brigadier Gerard and other short stories, and non-fiction with items such as the Boer and First World War output, before turning to the Cottingley Fairies and Spiritualism. The final chapter looks at *The Strand* after Doyle's death. It struggled because of the Second World War's impact on paper prices and availability. It also suffered with the loss of Doyle, and repeatedly turned to Sherlock Holmes in attempts to boost flagging sales — ultimately to no avail — closing in 1950.

Particularly interesting to me was the trouble Doyle's licensing caused the editor of the American edition of *The Strand*, notably with *The Return of Sherlock Holmes*, whose UK rights were with *The Strand* while the US rights were with *Collier's*. The pressure this put on the US editor to fill the gaps was something I had never considered before. Doyle's contributions to other magazines are also covered. I had no idea that Greenhough Smith had actually rejected offerings from Doyle which then found their way into *The Strand's* competitors. Two useful appendices detail the articles by Doyle that appeared in, respectively, the UK and US editions of *The Strand*.

The book gives a wonderful insight into the relationship between Doyle and *The Strand's* principals — arguably the second most important relationships in his life after his family.

AD

**The Real World of Sherlock** by BJ Rahn. *Amberley*. Revised & expanded edition 2015. 256pp. £9.99 (pbk)

Conan Doyle drew inspiration from Poe, from Gaboriau, from Joseph Bell, and in later years from the pioneer criminologist Hans Gross. BJ Rahn naturally examines these famous influences, but she looks also at the Metropolitan police — which, when Holmes and Watson met, was recovering from the corruption scandal known as the Trial of the Detectives — and the development of criminology and criminal investigation. Holmes was a pioneer but, curiously, his scientific knowledge featured less often than we think in his detective work. Although he knew that every fingerprint is unique years before the police adopted fingerprinting, he made no practical use of that knowledge, and his microscopic identification of glue was an odd procedure for a scientist. None of

which lessens our respect for him.

An excellent new chapter on “the Fair Sex” demonstrates that Holmes's opinion of women, his attitude to them and his treatment of them were rarely consistent with each other — a very human trait. Even more valuable is the description of women's social and legal status, which should be understood in order to appreciate the stories properly. I said of the first edition that even old hands could learn from it, and enjoy doing so. That goes double for this admirable paperback.

RJ

**Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle in the Newspapers: Volume 2 January-June 1893** edited and annotated by Mattias Bostrom and Matt Laffey. *Gasogene Books*, Indianapolis. 2016. \$28.95. 197 pp (pbk)

The first volume covered 1881-92, for most of which time Doyle was not yet famous. By 1893 he certainly was, and the editors can build an entire volume around press coverage from a mere six months. Many of the cuttings refer to the comic opera *Jane Annie*, libretto by Doyle and JM Barrie, which had a seven-week run at the Savoy in May-June. But Doyle was also garnering reviews for his novel *The Refugees* and his play *A Straggler of '15*, and was becoming something of a literary man-about-town (thus mentioned in reports of the Author's Club, the Vagabonds and the Booksellers' annual dinner).

The depth of work by Messrs Bostrom and Laffey is shown by two cuttings, from *The Wilmington Messenger*, of Wilmington, NC, on 26th March, and *The Hawke's Bay Herald* of Napier, New Zealand, for the following day. The juxtaposition is fascinating: the latter assumes readers' total knowledge of Doyle's creation in a paragraph about the weather (“It would not have required the sagacity of Conan Doyle's detective, Sherlock Holmes...”), while the former is startling in its ignorance: “Dr A Conan Doyle, the new Irish [*sic*] novelist, has been referred to by us as a clever, entertaining romanticist... His ‘The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes’ is [*sic*] detective stories and said to be really fine. We have not read them.”

I cannot speak too highly of this archival project and congratulate Steve Doyle and Mark Gagen, of Gasogene, for taking it on.

NU

**Spain and Sherlock Holmes** edited by Maria C Veiga-Hayzen & Donald J Hobbs. *Baker Street Irregulars*. 2015. ix + 195pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

These scholarly essays, plus two poems, two stories and a satirical cartoon, were written and selected

by members of the Amateur Mendicant Society of Madrid. Although a couple of the names are familiar to me, this fifth volume in the BSI's International Series makes some exceptional Holmesian scholarship available for the first time in English, superbly translated. After a wittily erudite introduction to the AMS, Antonio Iriarte considers the possible Spanish ancestry of Lady Frances Carfax; Miguel Dominguez states that Mary was John Watson's only wife; Sergi Garcia gives a new time-period for "The Second Stain"; Juan Requena links the Persian slipper with Horace Vernet; Miguel Huart provides an imaginative coda to "The Copper Beeches"... There's more, of course, but outstanding for me is "Tonga: The Long Shadow of Revenge" by José Luis Errazquin. Editors and contributors alike deserve our thanks for a grand collection.

RJ

**Lives Beyond Baker Street** by Christopher Redmond. *MX Publishing*. 2016. 300pp. £11.99 (pbk)

I find reference books about Holmes and his world irresistible. But none is quite like *Lives Beyond Baker Street: A Biographical Dictionary of Sherlock Holmes's Contemporaries*. Other books offer brief entries on some of the people mentioned in the Canon, but Redmond serves up mini-bios of 800 real-life Victorians and Edwardians. As he explains: "These are the people about whom Watson read in the newspapers, the people Holmes might have encountered in the Marylebone Road, and people who made 1895 (and the surrounding years) what it was." The organization is unusual: it proceeds in chronological order, the first entry being George Wombwell (born 1777, mentioned in "The Veiled Lodger") and the last Marjorie Kay (born 1898, acted in William Gillette's 1916 film *Sherlock Holmes*). "The time period I have tried to keep in mind is the years Sherlock Holmes is said to have been in professional practice, that is, from about 1880 to 1902." However, the exhaustive index — which includes both those who are the subject of biographies and those mentioned in the bios of others — is in alphabetical order. I expect to refer to this book constantly in the coming years. But more than that, it's also tremendous fun to just browse through it.

DA

**Never and Knowledge: Doctors, Medicine and the Sherlockian Canon** edited by Robert S Katz and Andrew L Solberg. *Baker Street Irregulars*. 2015. 222pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

At University College London last year Catherine Cooke told us about her research into John Watson's medical training. The full account is in this book, and it stands out among a wealth of excellent essays because it reveals facts that overturn decades of assumption, proving that Watson's qualifications were far from mediocre. Here too are Jeffrey & Peter Kaplan on the significance of Bart's Hospital, Marina Stajić on poisons, Christopher Zordan on canonical pharmacology, Enrico Solito & Stefano Guerra on

brain fever, Clifford Goldfarb & Hartley Nathan on medical malpractice, EJ Wagner on Watson's melodramatic descriptions of the dead — and thirteen more fascinating papers. *Nerve and Knowledge* is a book of great interest and unusual importance.

RJ

**Let Me Recommend This Book: The Society's Gladstone Library Weekend, 4-6 October 2013** edited by Bob Ellis and Roger Johnson. *The Sherlock Holmes Society of London*. 2016. 60pp. £7.75 post-paid (pbk)

The Society is lucky to have many talented and creative members. It is no surprise then that *Let Me Recommend This Book* was a joy to read. I have several booklets published by the Society; this one certainly lives up to its predecessors. From Jonathan Hopson's article "A Dreadful Record of Sin: Episodes From the History of Hawarden" and the text of Martin Edwards' talk, "The Great Detective and the Grand Old Man", to a short story by Richard Brown, "Sherlock Holmes and the Tichborne Claimant", this is surely a must-have for attendees and a piece of Society history that others would want in their collection. It was almost as if I was there myself. And, more importantly, I want to visit the Gladstone Library!

VS

**Art in the Blood: Cartoonist & Illustrator Scott Bond Meets Sherlock Holmes** edited and introduced by Mark Gagen. *Baker Street Irregulars*. 2016. xi + 103pp. \$23.95 (pbk)

Under the heading "Art in the Blood", Scott Bond has contributed a cartoon to every issue of *The Baker Street Journal* since 1982, combining superb draftsmanship, a zany imagination and topical awareness. In recent years Messrs Downey, Cumberbatch, Miller and Gillette have featured, as has Barack Obama. Along the way Scott has provided cartoons and illustrations for *Baker Street Miscellanea*, for *Armchair Detective*, for publications of the BSI and of our own Society, for the BSI's Annual Dinner menus... His Christmas cards usually feature a beautifully designed feature to cut out and assemble: a toy theatre, a robot Holmes, a tree decoration, or just a seasonal Holmesian scene. I love Scott's work, and — especially if you have a sense of humour — I think you'll love this book.

RJ

**A Quick Succession of Subjects: Lectures and Speeches on Sherlock Holmes** by Christopher Redmond. *Gasogene Books*. 2016. 276pp. \$19.95

Redmond is the author of the essential *A Sherlock Holmes Handbook* (1993, 2009) and the clever *In Bed With Sherlock Holmes* (1984). He has also long been at the forefront of dealing with matters Holmesian on the internet; happily he still deals in the spoken word and books. This is a fascinating selection of material he has presented over the years, much of it never previously published. Dip in at random, and you are likely to come up with a gem. I had never before

really thought about the importance of footwear in the canon (as a stalwart of The Bootmakers of Toronto, Redmond naturally has). The title of another piece tells readers all they might need to know: “Mr Sherlock Holmes and the Immense, Hideous, Horrible, Grave, Painful, Abhorrent, Disastrous, Unsavoury Scandal”. I was fascinated by how ahead of the game he was back in his 2001 talk “Good Old INDEX.HTML: The Future of Sherlock Holmes on the Internet” and much enjoyed his clever “Advice from Professor Moriarty on the Presentation of Sherlockian Papers”.

These pieces were written to be read to an audience. I have never heard Redmond speak, but I hope his delivery is as droll as his words: “When I was writing *In Bed with Sherlock Holmes*, I took the trouble to survey several groups of Sherlockians, asking them what they imagined Irene Adler looked like. The answers varied widely, including heights anywhere from 5 feet even to a full 6 feet tall, and there was a consensus that she was either brunette, blonde or redhead.”

NU

**Sherlock Holmes Consulting Detective** by Kelvin Jones. *Cunning Crime Books*. 2015. 338pp. £10.14 (pbk)

This biography, originally published in nine parts, is based on the canon and on what can reasonably be deduced from it, by Mr Jones or by other scholars, whose work is properly credited. It is, for the most part, a refreshing antidote to the imaginative fiction of earlier writers, though it repeats Baring-Gould’s invention of a home in Baltimore for the Abernethy family. The book isn’t definitive, of course. Some facts were unknown at the time of writing, and some, such as the widely accepted identification of no. 31 Baker Street as the real 221B, appear to have been ignored. That may be simple carelessness, like the statement that Joseph Vernet married the Pope’s Naval Commandant rather than that officer’s daughter. Sadly, there are other errors, and the layout, with its wide margins, irregular gaps between paragraphs and clumsy indicators of endnotes, makes for hard reading. A pity, because the book could and should have been very much better.

RJ

**Private Investigator** edited by Alistair Rolls & Rachel Franks. *Intellect*. 2016. 187pp. £25.00 (pbk)

*Detective*, also in the *Crime Uncovered* series, would probably be more relevant to the SHJ, but there’s much of interest in this very expensive book for the devotee of crime and mystery fiction. Sherlock Holmes isn’t among the PIs covered individually — nor, oddly, is Philip Marlowe. A stimulating essay on Samuel Spade is unexpectedly preceded by one on Captain Arthur Hastings. Eight more follow, from Lew Archer to Louise Morvan. Holmes is briefly mentioned in a piece on “The Nineteenth Century Private Eye”.

RJ

**The House at Baker Street** by Michelle Birkby. *Pan Macmillan* 2016. 252pp. £7.99 (pbk).

Mrs Hudson has been eavesdropping on Holmes and Watson ever since they became residents of 221B Baker Street. When Holmes turns away a young woman who is being blackmailed, Mrs Hudson takes the case, assisted by her friend Mary Watson. Michelle Birkby uses multiple canonical characters well and always to a purpose. For me, the key thing is the use of Holmes and Watson. Inevitably we feel strongly about them and if an author crosses our personal red lines we may well give up on the book. Birkby uses the characters so sparingly that she avoids offending my view of them. She knows how to create atmosphere and tension and she has a wonderful ability to evoke images of Victorian London in your mind.

AD

**The Scarlet Thread of Murder** by Luke Benjamin Kuhns. *MX Publishing*. 2015. 255pp. £9.99 (pbk)

Three detectives — Sherlock Holmes, Martin Hewitt, and Inspector Edmund Reid, the real-life policeman who began the hunt for Jack the Ripper — are engaged in the search for “The Goblin”, a killer who stalks London in 1890, dressed in a horrific mask. At first they work independently but soon begin to co-operate as the case becomes more complex and more menacing. The plot is gripping and the characters realistic. A second, shorter story teams Holmes, Watson and Irene Adler in the United States to solve the mystery of Godfrey Norton’s death. Murder, a secret society and Wild West bravado feature in a tale told with panache. Finally comes a short tale of a prima ballerina who is plagued by a figure from her past. Mr Kuhns writes about the life and times of Sherlock Holmes with care and much empathy, and, with proper editing, his work will be further enhanced.

DJ

**Sherlock Holmes and the Adventure of The Grinning Cat** by Joseph W Svec III. *MX Publications*. 2015. 139pp. £6.99 (pbk)

In February 1898, three odd visitors turn up at 221B: a cat who grins, speaks, disappears and appears again; a rabbit who stands upright, wears a blue waistcoat, carries a gold pocket watch and cries, “Are we late? Are we late?”; and a hatter who wears a topper almost as tall as he is, and declaims, “I am never really quite sure of anything except teatime.” They are of course the Cheshire Cat, the White Rabbit and the Mad Hatter, keen to enlist the help of Sherlock Holmes to find Alice, who has disappeared. Holmes rises to the occasion, though his deductive powers are challenged again and again by the mad logic of Lewis Carroll’s Wonderland characters. He even plays croquet by the ridiculous rules of the Queen of Hearts and *wins!* This is a fantastical story full of puns, silly jokes, riddles and logic puzzles.

AJ

**Sherlock Holmes, The Missing Years: Timbuktu** by Vasudev Murthy. *Poisoned Pen Press* 2016. 270pp. £11.30 (pbk)

This book is presented as the true account of what Holmes did immediately after the events at Reichenbach. An ancient manuscript, hundreds of years previously, was deemed too dangerous to mankind and was split into two parts. One comes into the possession of an Italian academic who brings it and its story to Holmes. From Baker Street we head to the Vatican and from there to other exotic locations. Along the way we encounter opponents old and new, who seek the manuscript and its secrets. The plot, mostly, is good but we frequently go straight from the action to chapters of background information, often at the wrong time and usually for too long a period. While the information is sometimes necessary to understand what's going on, the important data could have been woven into the central narrative. The plot moves at a reasonable pace and I was carried along until the last thirty or so pages when it drifted into territory more worthy of Indiana Jones. I came away with the feeling that the author was unsure of what type of tale he wished to tell.

AD

**Sherlock Holmes vs Dr Nox** by Pierre Clement, translated into English by Lloyd Lewis. *Nouvelles Editions Loubatières* (20 avenue Pierre-Marty, F-31390 Carbonne, France). 2015. 112pp. €25 00. (pbk)

This musical comedy, in two acts and thirteen scenes, is intended to approach the famous detective "in a way that has never been done before". The humour includes banter between the French and the English, some great slapstick in the best pantomime tradition, and some teasing of the pianist/conductor. I will only make one specific reference, to the character "Sir Fryder", who is accused of making too many waves! The script is generously illustrated with atmospheric engravings by Gustave Doré, and almost as many photographs from, I assume, the 2011 performances, which amply illustrate the tongue-in-cheek nature of the whole piece. The author, a pianist and conservatoire professor, has specified an eclectic range of around twenty composers, from Handel to Holst and John Barry to Beethoven, whose works are to be included. Thus you can hum or sing them for yourself if they are familiar. Whilst it is improbable that this work will ever be staged at the Royal Opera House, if it gets to the Nottingham Playhouse, I will certainly buy two tickets!

JS

**The Lost Chronicles of Sherlock Holmes, Volume 2** by Denis O Smith. *Robinson*. 2016. 531pp. £10.99 (pbk).

Denis Smith has published several collections of Holmesian pastiche, carefully written for those, like me, who want period mysteries with pea-soup fogs and all.

The twelve stories in this book are all good, but if I were to single out one for particular praise, it would be "The Secret of Shoreswood Hall", a case which was distinctly not a success for Holmes. Mr Smith's style is much more relaxed than the Canonical stories. However, the latter were written for a monthly magazine, so a certain journalistic conciseness was obviously necessary. I also noted the occasional point of Canonical familiarity, e.g. some villainous types are referred to as having "the vilest antecedents". A little of this sort of thing is excellent, since it serves to keep us grounded, as it were. With regard to Mr Smith's plots, much seems nicely familiar, but then, it has said that all literature is based on only seven plots. Having not read all the world's literature, I cannot comment further, it being a capital error to theorise without data! I enjoyed this collection, and heartily recommend it.

JS

**Killing Dr Watson** by Matt Feraz. *MX Publishing*. 2015. 245pp. £8.99 (pbk)

As a schoolboy Jeremy Bellamy watched *The Baker Street Sleuth*, starring Bartholomew Neville as the very embodiment of Sherlock Holmes. But the BBC cancelled the series. It was suggested that Neville was difficult to work with and that no actor playing Dr Watson — there were five in all — stayed for long. Jerry attends a convention to see his hero in person, and when Neville appears, dressed as Holmes, Jerry is entranced. Then at question time a beautiful red-haired girl asks the actor to help find the man who killed her father. Jerry determines to solve the mystery himself and discovers that the murdered man is one of the actors who played Watson. He and Neville begin to work together to discover why the Watsons are being killed off one by one. It's an unlikely partnership, but Jerry turns out to be a damn' good detective. There are odd turns of phrase and Americanised dialogue, but it is fast-moving and keeps the reader guessing as Jerry realises that his hero is not the great man he had thought him to be.

AJ

**Warlock Holmes: A Study in Brimstone** by GS Denning. *Titan*. 2016. 384pp. £7.99 (pbk)

This Holmes is a warlock, shockingly bad at detection, who nonetheless fights magical crime, together with vampire Lestrade and ogre Grogsson. Their exploits are chronicled by a Watson who often feels out of his depth. The quality of the six stories is mixed. Some turn the concept of Holmes as defender of justice on its head and are delightfully subversive, others read a little as if someone did a search-and-replace routine on a canon story and threw in the odd original sentence. It is an amusing read, poking fun at both the horror and the detective genre. The author acknowledges Terry Pratchett as an influence, and there is a flavour of very early Discworld to the whole thing, indicating a probable target audience.

LB

**Bookmarked for Murder** by Dan Andriacco. *MX Publishing*. 2015. £8.99. 243pp (pbk)

Who has been selling drugs to the athletes at St Benignus College? Who killed the proprietor of Erin, Ohio's only used-book store with a replica of the Maltese Falcon? Who's been posting controversial footage of a St Benignus history professor on YouTube? It's a case for the sharp-witted, humane Jeff Cody, and his brother-in-law, Professor Sebastian McCabe, BSI — magician, detective-story writer, and amateur sleuth. If Cody is Watson, McCabe is perhaps less Sherlock Holmes than a sort of sociable Mycroft. This is excellent, intelligent entertainment.

RJ

**The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories, Part IV: 2016 Annual** edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*. 2016. 473pp. £28.99 (hbk), £17.99 (pbk)

I'll admit to a conflict of interest as I have a story in this handsome new volume, but there are twenty-one more, all written in traditional style (no ghosts, no time-travel) by authors including Daniel D Victor, Mark Mower, Jayantika Ganguly, Denis Smith, Bonnie MacBird, Andrew Lane, David Stuart Davies and Nicholas Utechin. As before, publisher, editor and authors have given their services to support the restoration of Undershaw and the Stepping Stones

School, a cause enthusiastically supported by the Conan Doyle Estate.

RJ

#### In brief

*The Redacted Sherlock Holmes, volume II* by Orlando Pearson (MX, £7.99) opens with a clever satire on a recent political controversy of our own time. Holmes stays in his own time period for the scandalous demise of James Windibank and a commission for the Prince of Wales, but the other tales are entertainingly reckless with chronology. (*The Redacted Sherlock Holmes, volume I* is published by Clink Street.)

Daniel D Victor continues his excellent series "Sherlock Holmes and the American Literati" with *Seventeen Minutes to Baker Street* (MX, £8.99), in which we learn of the part Mark Twain played in solving the problem of Thor Bridge and the previously unchronicled crimes that followed.

*The Intelligence of Sherlock Holmes and Other Three-Pipe Problems Psychological Studies of the Great Detective and his companion Dr John H Watson* by Professor John Radford was rightly praised on its initial publication in 1999. A revised edition is now available in Kindle form from Amazon for £6.47.

## THE COMPLETE CLASSIC ADVENTURES OF SHERLOCK HOLMES

reviewed by ROGER JOHNSON

THE ONLY COMPLETE dramatisation of the Holmesian canon was produced by BBC Radio 4, between 1989 and 1998. At least, that was the case until very recently. Nearly 5,000 miles away, Jim French's Imagination Theatre, probably the most active radio drama company in North America, has been making and broadcasting *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* since 1998, and in 2005 one of its regular writers, Matthew J Elliott, adapted a couple of the more obscure stories, "The Yellow Face" and "the Three Students", beginning a parallel series, *The Classic Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. If you know Matthew only as the knowledgeable and witty presenter of our Society's annual Film Evening, you should acquaint yourself with some of the many plays he's written for American radio.

Earlier this year *The Sign of Four* completed the *Classic Adventures* series — fifty-nine plays in all, as *The Return of Sherlock Holmes* combines "The Final Problem" and "The Empty House". Holmes and Watson are played by John Patrick Lowrie and Lawrence Albert, and all the scripts were written by Matthew Elliott, making this the first complete

dramatisation with the same leading actors and the same writer throughout. That in itself is a notable achievement, and the plays live up to it.

Like Bert Coules, whom he naturally admires, Matthew Elliott knows that his listeners are intelligent and don't need to have every person, object and action described for them. He also knows how to create mystery, excitement and suspense in sound alone. He also knows his Sherlock Holmes — and his actors. He plays to their strengths, and they to his. John Lowrie's Holmes has the incisive tone that I associate with Rathbone and Hobbs; Larry Albert's Watson is brave, loyal, humorous and, thank goodness, *intelligent*.

The plays differ from the BBC productions in some respects. They were recorded before an audience, and though the British accents range from acceptable to impeccable most of the actors are American. If, like me, you enjoy the plays of American radio's golden age, when Rathbone and Bruce played the detective and the doctor, then you'll enjoy *The Classic Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*. The recordings are available as CDs or MP3 downloads from the Imagination Theatre website at <http://jimfrenchproductions.com>.