

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by MATTHEW J ELLIOTT, MARK MOWER, JEAN UPTON, NICHOLAS UTECHIN and ROGER JOHNSON

The Worst Man in London: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of “Charles Augustus Milverton” by Arthur Conan Doyle with Annotations and Commentary. Edited, with an Introduction, by Daniel Stashower and Constantine Rossakis. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2019. 198pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

\$70 in 1923... \$244,500 in 1999 (in an auction lot including a Frederic Dorr Steele original drawing for the story): thus the increase in the market value for the original MS of “Charles Augustus Milverton”. It is an enduringly popular canonical heavyweight and it is generous of Dr Rossakis to share one of his most prized possessions in the latest of the Irregulars’ facsimile series.

Thus it is a pity to have to say that the reproduction of the pages of the original (which is, after all, the main point of the publication of these volumes) is not good. I am aware of how the photographs of the pages were taken, and the manuscript is clearly bound very tightly — with resultant creases at the spine end. I also know that the BSI production manager, John Bergquist, worked extremely hard on this project — but it might have been advisable to hold this MS back until a better reproduction option became available.

The scholarly additions are exemplary. As ever in this series, Randall Stock’s detailed notes on the manuscript itself and its ownership history are splendid; Carla Coupe introduced to me some illustrators of the story of whom I was unaware; I enjoyed Maria Fleischhack’s investigation into the mysterious woman who shot Milverton; and Jonathan McCafferty’s history of Charles Augustus Howell (the model for Milverton) is surely definitive.

NU

The Milvertonians of Hampstead: Forgotten Writings from The Worst Men in London. Introduced, Collated and Edited by Nicholas Utechin. *Gasogene Books*, 2020. 144pp. \$18.95 (pbk)

The obvious publisher would be the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, as the Milvertonians were our first (only?) fully accredited branch. Founded by Humphrey Morton and Peter Richard, they were active only from 1960 to 1969, and concentrated entirely upon “The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton”, with special reference to the suburb where he lived, regular membership being limited to those living “within 15 minutes walk of Hampstead Heath”. It all sounds very restrictive, but their now rare publications include four of exceptional interest, the last being *The Milverton Manuscript: An Analysis Together with Other Milvertoniana*, which would ideally have been included in the BSI’s book *The Worst Man in London*. Fortunately, all the Milvertonians’ writings are transcribed in Nick Utechin’s book, making it a must for Holmesians in general, not just those interested in the doings of a rather obscure and eccentric group.

RJ

Nick Utechin has copies of the book “at advantageous prices for UK and European readers”. Contact him at highfieldfarmhouse@gmail.com. I should also mention that

the Milvertonians’ delightful short film “Return to Hampstead” features on the DVD set The Sherlock Holmes Society of London, 1959-1974, available from the Merchandising Officer at www.sherlock-holmes.org.uk/product/the-sherlock-holmes-society-of-london-1959-1974-dvd/. Ed.

Education Never Ends: Educators, Education and the Sherlockian Canon. Edited, with an introduction, by Marino C Alvarez, EdD, BSI and Timothy S Greer, BSI. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2019. 222pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

Education is a profession that we may not immediately associate with Sherlock Holmes, though it’s of importance throughout the saga, from the board school to the exclusive private school and the great university — not forgetting home-tutoring by a governess, which features in six stories (Reginald Musgrave evidently had a male tutor at Hurlstone). Perhaps the board school was the most significant, as Holmes realised. Many wealthy and educated people still regarded those below them as essentially sub-human; Holmes knew that the poor and the ignorant were capable of learning, to the benefit of themselves and of humanity. It’s a truth that Arthur Conan Doyle gratefully endorsed.

Tim Greer looks at teachers in the canon: the decent types like Heidegger of the Priory School, Harold Stackhurst, Hilton Soames, Violet Hunter or Violet Smith; and the wrong ’uns, most obviously ex-Professor Moriarty, though Jack Stapleton and Professor Coram run him close. Mattias Boström and Martin Fido ponder Holmes’s and Conan Doyle’s education, respectively. Catherine Cooke considers the importance of libraries. The final section examines Sherlock Holmes as an aid in today’s schools. Michael Dirda’s introduction is characteristically perceptive; other contributors include Robert S Katz, Alex Werner, Henry Boote, James O’Brien and Ashley Polasek. This book is a nice addition to an excellent series.

RJ

Villains, Victims, and Violets: Agency and Feminism in the Original Sherlock Holmes Canon (A Studious Scarlet Society Anthology). Edited by Resa Haile and Tamara R Bower. *Brown Walker Press*, 2019. 338pp. £32.95 (pbk)

Some distressing aspects of the limits imposed on women’s lives in Holmes’s time still linger, but much seems very foreign to us. The first section of this book is provocatively and commendably headed, “Are Women Persons in the Victorian Era?” — real people, that is, rather than just *dramatis personae*. Some of the book’s contributors examine the women in specific stories: interacting in “The Copper Beeches”, “The Illustrious Client” and “Thor Bridge”, for instance; standing alone in “The Musgrave Ritual”, “The Yellow Face” and “The Second Stain”. Irene Adler is *the* woman, but was it she who beat Holmes, or was that Rachel Howells? Consideration of the attitudes towards women is complicated by the fact that some are notably “exotic” foreigners, such as Beryl Stapleton, Mme Fournaye, Mrs Ferguson and Maria Gibson. Several of the essays consider aspects of women’s status generally, exemplified by

the plight of female characters in the canon. The contributors to this admirable volume include Molly Carr, Sonia Fetherston, Jayantika Ganguly, Bonnie MacBird, Tracy J Revels and Amy Thomas.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes and Conan Doyle in the Newspapers: Volume 5, July-September 1894. Edited and Annotated by Mattias Boström, Mark Alberstat and Leah Guinn. *Gasogene Books*, 2020. 232pp. \$36.95 (pbk)

In “The Final Problem”, published in December 1893, Sherlock Holmes died, and a grateful Conan Doyle could apply himself to what he considered better things. In the second half of 1894 he began to chronicle the adventures of the brave, boastful Brigadier Gerard, of Napoleon’s Hussars, and he published a volume of short stories called *Round the Red Lamp*, which included “A Straggler of ’15”, the tale of an English veteran of the Napoleonic wars. That one story led him to become a dramatist: as a one-act play, *A Story of Waterloo*, it became a triumphant success for the great Henry Irving.

Meanwhile, Sherlock Holmes was not forgotten. He was the ideal to which other detectives, real or fictional, were compared. An unauthorised play was produced and reviewed. Parodies were published (this volume includes four that eluded the eagle-eyed Bill Peschel). With or without him, Conan Doyle became a renowned international speaker. This excellent series shows us author and character as their contemporaries saw them.

RJ

“Aboriginals” — The Earliest Baker Street Irregulars, 1934-1940 by Harrison Hunt and Linda Hunt. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2019. 273pp. \$24.95 (pbk.)

This volume, I would suggest, is for fascinated completists only. Its contents are exactly — in the modern vernacular — what it “says on the tin”: biographies of varying lengths of all those (men) who were originally drawn in as “kinsprits” at Christopher Morley’s occasional lunches, to those who attended the second major dinner of the Irregulars — held at the Murray Hill Hotel, New York, on 30th January 1940.

Many are well known: H.W. Bell, Elmer Davis, Vincent Starrett, Frederic Dorr Steele and the like. William Gillette came to a gathering in 1934 and Denis Conan Doyle attended the 1940 dinner. Scholars and Holmesian historians should know of Morley’s two brothers, Felix and Frank, as well as Harvey Officer and Robert Keith Leavitt. Oh, and Edgar W Smith! But there are tens of other names of men who came within the orbit of what the authors call “the Stalwarts” and then, in many cases, fell away; it is these whose lives are revealed by the Hunts after exhaustive research.

Photos so often tell their own stories — so it is a pity that in many cases (and this is apologised for), the images of these seminal figures in the BSI are so small and blurred (many having been ripped from a commemorative photograph taken at that 1940 dinner).

NU

Baring-Gould of Baker Street: The Life and Footprints of William S. Baring-Gould (The Baker Street Journal 2019 Christmas Annual) by Julie McKuras, Timothy J Johnson, Richard Sveum and Gary Thaden. *The Baker Street Irregulars* 2019.

Baring-Gould was a pre-eminent Sherlockian for three reasons: he compiled the ground-breaking two-volume *Annotated Sherlock Holmes* (1967), wrote an important chronology (first for the *BSJ* and then in a self-published limited edition: 1953) and introduced me and undoubtedly many others to Holmesiana by providing the address of *The Sherlock Holmes Journal* (and thus, in those days, of the Society itself) in the reference section of his 1962 *Biography*. His papers are deposited at the Sherlock Holmes Collections at the University of Minnesota, and all four authors of this *Annual* are or have been associated with the Collections. This is a good canter through Baring-Gould’s life, which does not forget his non-Sherlockian publications (involving Mother Goose, Limericks and Nero Wolfe) — and there is much detail (to which the 175 footnotes attest). As a checklist of this great scholar’s activities goes, this is most informative; but I could have done with more discussion — and reviewing — of those three vital Sherlockian publications, and more of a feeling of the *man* himself.

As ever, it must be pointed out that these exemplary *Annuals* are only available as part of an annual subscription to *The Baker Street Journal*. The sub. covers a calendar year, so if someone wishes to take out a subscription in, say, August of this year, they will receive the preceding 2020 Spring and Summer issues with the Autumn mailing, to be followed by Winter and *this year’s Annual*. An overseas subscription is \$55 and details for payment by PayPal are available via the BSI website: <https://bakerstreetirregulars.com>.

NU

The Annotated Hound of the Baskervilles by Arthur Conan Doyle, annotated and with an introduction by Kelvin I Jones. *Cunning Crime Books*, 2020. 381pp. £13.85 (pbk)

Do we need another annotated edition? Yes, when the editor brings fifty years of research and a lively intelligence to the task, as Kelvin Jones does here. (It hadn’t occurred to me that aspects of the novel reflect the turmoil of ACD’s personal life, but Mr Jones makes a very plausible case.) His fifty-page introduction brings together the several monographs that he’s published over the decades: *The Mythic Hound*, *The Psychology of the Hound*, *The Phantom Hound*, *Sherlock Holmes and the Cromer Hound* and others. And after Conan Doyle’s extensively annotated text are nineteen appendices, covering the writing of the novel, its relation to the gothic tradition in literature, Lombroso and the theory of criminal atavism, the chronology and topography of the narrative, and much more, including a short story about Conan Doyle and Fletcher Robinson.

I must declare an interest, as I wrote the preface (and carelessly attributed the two Coptic Patriarchs to the wrong story).

RJ

Being Sherlock: A Sherlockian’s Stroll Through the Best Sherlock Holmes Stories by Ashley D Polasek. *Lyons Press*, 2019. 448pp. £17.95 (hbk)

In 1987 Congleton & Weed published *The Baker Street Dozen*, thirteen of the best stories from the Sherlock Holmes canon, each introduced by a Sherlockian scholar. *Being Sherlock* is not dissimilar, except that the introductory essays are all the work of one notable scholar, Dr Ashley Polasek. The choice of adventures can’t be faulted — ten short stories including my favourite, “The Bruce-Partington Plans”, and *The Hound of the Baskervilles* — and the essays are

entertaining and intelligent. The book is handsomely produced and reasonably priced. However, 87% of the content was written by Arthur Conan Doyle, so it's surely unfair to omit his name entirely from the front cover, the spine and the title page.

RJ

Saratoga: At the Finish Line: From “Silver Blaze” to “The Crooked Man”. Edited by Donny Zaldin & Barbara Busch. *The Bootmakers of Toronto*, 2019. 97pp. \$20.00 (US) + postage (pbk)

This is the fourth book in a very engaging “Silver Blaze” series that began in 2009. Four of the twelve papers collected here were presented at the BSI's August 2018 seminar in Saratoga Springs, NY, following the running of the Seventh Triennial “Silver Blaze” Race at Saratoga Race Course. Topics covered include Sidney Paget's illustrations for “Silver Blaze”; the preparation of curried mutton; the Saratoga Race Course as “graveyard of champions” — and as home to the BSI's classic; the Kipling connection; and, briefly, the “Silver Blaze” races in Toronto and at Kempton Park. There are also a quiz and a song! Like the previous volumes, this one's splendidly illustrated.

RJ

Upon the Turf: Horse Racing and the Sherlockian Canon. Edited by Candace J Lewis, Ira Brad Matetsky & Roger Donway. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2019. 215pp. \$25.95 (pbk)

This lavishly illustrated book is divided into five sections. “Racing in the Canon” examines such aspects of “The Adventure of Silver Blaze” as the horse's pedigree, how he was disguised, and the effects of the opium. There's also an excellent piece about horse racing in art. “Racing in Victorian England” shows us what a day at the races was like, for rich and poor. “Gambling and the Canon” covers a topic that features quite heavily throughout the stories, to the ruin of some. (Did Watson have a serious gambling problem? Discuss.) “Sherlockians and Beyond at the Races” updates Wayne Swift's 2000 *History of the Silver Blaze*, with some coverage of the other seven races in the USA, and those in Denmark (the third oldest “Silver Blaze”), Canada and England. There are also good pieces on the great racehorse Brigadier Gerard, and the legal relevance of inactive dogs. “Further Reading” offers many worthwhile suggestions, though it overlooks Robert Ellis's admirable *Dr Watson's Handy Guide to the Turf* (2010) and *The Silver Blaze Wessex Cup* (2018).

RJ

Conan Doyle's Wide World: Sherlock Holmes and Beyond by Andrew Lycett, *Tauris Parke*, 2020. 336pp. £20.00 (hbk)

ACD was a great traveller, from his early time as surgeon on an arctic whaler and a less enjoyable experience on an African coaster, to his tours of North America and the antipodes, first as a popular author and later as the leading champion of Spiritualism. He countered his first wife's tuberculosis by taking her to the Swiss Alps and then to Egypt. He served as a surgeon in South Africa during the Second Boer War, and visited the British and French troops on the front line in 1916. And as author, campaigner, cricketer, and keen photographer, he travelled all over Britain and Ireland. With few exceptions, though, his travel writings

— evocative, often pithy, always perceptive — are scattered throughout his published works. The author of *Conan Doyle: The Man Who Created Sherlock Holmes* has collated passages long and short from Sir Arthur's letters, essays and books, fact and fiction. The result is illuminating, and it reminds one that Sir Arthur was a damn' good writer.

RJ

Something of Themselves: Kipling, Kingsley, Conan Doyle and the Anglo-Boer War by Sarah LeFanu. *Hurst & Company*, 2020. 352pp. £25.00 (hbk)

Rudyard Kipling first met Conan Doyle in 1894, which was probably the year of his first meeting with Mary Kingsley. The men are celebrated today, and their books are still widely read; Mary Kingsley's fame has declined, but in her time she was well-known as a writer, traveller, ethnologist and campaigner for the rights of native West Africans. That time was short. When the second Boer War broke out in 1900, all three went to South Africa: Kipling (though it may not have been his original aim) as a journalist, Conan Doyle as a surgeon, and Kingsley as a nurse, but the horror of war was compounded by the outbreak of typhoid, made worse, as Ms LeFanu says, by the “snobbish, antiquated, English upper-class frame of mind that viewed the digging of latrines as work beneath the dignity of white men,” and led to so many hundred more deaths. Mary Kingsley herself died of the disease, aged thirty-seven. Three different people, whose stories interweave. John Donne was right: “No man is an island, entire of itself.”

RJ

Historical Dictionary of Sherlock Holmes by Neil McCaw. *Rowman & Littlefield*, 2019. 450pp. £70.00 (hbk)

Professor McCaw is Academic Director of the Conan Doyle Collection at Portsmouth. During the Society's 2018 visit to Winchester he gave a first-rate talk on Victorian attitudes to crime, and there's much good material in this book. Unfortunately, there are also far too many errors and inconsistencies. Thomas Bewick's name is misspelled “Hewick”; Christopher Redmond's *Sherlock Holmes Handbook* is ascribed to his father Donald; we read of “Miss Violent Hunter” and are told that Holderness Hall is in Bangor, actually the location of Carston Castle. The Bristol barmaid who married McCarthy had a husband in the Bermuda Dockyard, but we're told that “no actual bigamy has actually been committed” [*sic*]. Some of the unrecorded cases are listed under “Case”, while others, such as the Hammerford Will case, are under the relevant word. There's an entry for William Claridge, who doesn't feature in the stories, but none for Claridge's Hotel, mentioned in “Thor Bridge” and “His Last Bow”... I really wish I could recommend this book, but it's like an unsatisfactory combination of Jack Tracy's *Encyclopaedia Sherlockiana* and Chris Redmond's *Lives Beyond Baker Street*, both of which are more reliable, and together cost less.

RJ

The Adventure of the Peculiar Protocols by Nicholas Meyer. *Minotaur Books*, 2019. 238pp. £19.99 (hbk)

It's been some years since Nicholas Meyer last released a previously unknown case from the Journals of John H. Watson MD. And while this book is not as polished as *The Seven-Per-Cent Solution* or *The West End Horror* it is still a great read. Holmes and Watson are commissioned by Mycroft

Holmes to investigate the appearance of a mysterious manuscript which purports to be a Jewish manifesto for World domination. The great detective realises just how explosive *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion* is likely to be in parts of Europe susceptible to anti-Semitic propaganda. With Watson by his side — and the assistance of glamorous Russian translator Anna Walling (formerly Strunsky) — Holmes heads for Russia aboard the Orient Express to determine the origins of the tainted document.

Set against the backdrop of social and political upheaval in Tsarist Russia, the second part of the book moves at a fair pace and is cinematic in its feel. There is plenty of action as our heroes are pursued across borders by spies who seem to anticipate Holmes's every move. Watson plays his part in the drama and candidly records some of the devious tactics that Holmes must employ in revealing the truth behind the dissemination of the Protocols.

The period detail is extensive and well-judged, and overall the narrative is enjoyable and compelling. It casts fresh light on some familiar global concerns which still dominate our headlines. A neat novel and a very welcome return by Nicholas Meyer.

MM

Sherlock Holmes — Playing the Game by Cenarth Fox. *Fox Plays*, 2020. 192pp. £9.99 (pbk)

Holmes is preparing to retire, leaving Baker Street, when Mrs Hudson announces that she has written a candid account of his years as her tenant at 221B, in which she records his failures and the mistakes committed by him and Dr Watson. Of course, he's horrified, as is Watson when he arrives. The detective's astonishment deepens when he learns that Watson's narratives are handled by one Arthur Conan Doyle, who in turn submits them to the editor of *The Strand Magazine*. Mrs Hudson, meanwhile, unaware of that revelation, visits the magazine's offices, where the receptionist politely refers her to Sir Arthur, who naturally thinks that she is mad, because he knows that Mrs Hudson is no more real than Holmes and Watson... Conan Doyle's faithful secretary Alfred Wood has an important rôle; J.M. Barrie and A.E.W. Mason play their part, as does Inspector Lestrade. This is a complex, ingenious and deliciously funny story of intersecting realities, and the conclusion is entirely satisfactory. I love it!

RJ

A Knife in the Fog by Bradley Harper. *Seventh Street Books*, 2018. 288pp. \$15.95 (pbk)

I'm always delighted to discover a new author I can recommend unreservedly! This is the debut novel of a retired US Army pathologist who has recently turned to writing. In *A Knife in the Fog*, the young Southsea doctor Conan Doyle assists the Metropolitan Police in the hunt for Jack the Ripper, joined by his former Edinburgh Professor, Joseph Bell and Miss Margaret Harkness, a real-life historical author and Suffragette who was living in Whitechapel at the time. The mix of real-life characters in a fictional setting works remarkably well, and they interact in a believable manner. The author excels at capturing Conan Doyle's uncomplicated, direct style of prose. Despite the occasional Americanism, it's a good story with a realistic and sympathetic approach to the desperate life of the poor in the slums of the East End. Unsurprisingly, the book was a Finalist for the Edgar Award for Best First Novel, and went on to win the Silver Falchion

for Best Mystery at Killer Nashville. The audiobook, narrated by Royal Shakespeare Company alumnus Mathew Lloyd Davies won *Audiofile Magazine's* 2019 Earphone award in the Mystery and Suspense category.

JU

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part XIX: 2020 Annual (1882-1890) (580pp); **Part XX: 2020 Annual (1891-1897)** (464pp) and **Part XXI: 2020 Annual (1898-1923)** (484pp); edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*. 2020. Each £28.99 (hbk), £17.99 (pbk)

These three latest volumes maintain the high standard set in 2015 by editor and publisher. Here are sixty-four new stories, all as faithful as possible to the canonical tradition and style. Familiar names among the thirty authors include David Leal, Hugh Ashton, Mark Mower, S.F. Bennett, Sonia Fetherston, Sean M Wright and David Marcum. And I'm particularly pleased to have previously unpublished radio scripts by Leslie Charteris & Denis Green, and M.J. Elliott. As always, all royalties from this admirable series will go to help the restoration of Undershaw, Conan Doyle's former Surrey home, which now houses Stepping Stones School. The books are treasurable and the cause is excellent.

RJ

The Hound of the Baskervilles by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, read by Simon Hester (unabridged). *Head Stories Audio*. 2019. Download only.

No professional reading of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* is ever unwelcome. Conan Doyle's gothic horror/murder mystery plot, combined with his crispest, most beguiling prose makes the tale almost narrator-proof, even when the reader fails to rise to the occasion. Hugh Burden's 1981 version suffers from rather lacklustre delivery, as does Tony Britton's effort over a decade later, the latter being all the more disappointing since Britton had earlier been responsible for one of the very best Sherlock Holmes audiobooks — his 1982 performance of *The Sign of Four* is a true *tour-de-force*. But *The Hound* is still *The Hound*, and will always intrigue and entertain.

Then we come to the latest version, read by Simon Hester, which is, if you will forgive the reviewer, a most interesting beast. Hester's delivery is paradoxically crisp and precise while at the same time containing a slight drawl, which is in no way a distraction. In fact, it is possible to imagine that one is listening to the voice of Sherlock Holmes himself, reading aloud the account of his friend Dr Watson. Should one choose to make such a leap, it takes the production to quite a different level from those that have gone before.

While a few unusual choices in pronunciation might occasionally jar, this is really a small price to pay for a fresh approach to a classic tale, one that never disappoints.

MJE

The recording is available online, from www.scribd.com, playgoogle.com, www.kobo.com, www.walmart.com and other suppliers. Ed.

In brief

He wrote some superb weird fiction, but don't look for entertaining chills in *The Uncanny Worlds of Conan Doyle, Volume One: The Spiritualist Writings of Arthur Conan Doyle*, selected, edited and annotated by Kelvin I Jones (Cunning Crime Books, 2020; £11.70, pbk). Besides the complete *Wanderings of a Spiritualist* and *The Vital Message*,

here are numerous articles and letters on the subject to which ACD devoted much of his last two decades, with perceptive essays and notes by Kelvin Jones.

From the proprietors of Gasogene Books comes a splendid large volume: *The Annotated White Company: The Classic Adventure of the 14th Century* by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, annotated and with an introduction by Doug Elliott & Roy Pilot; with a foreword by Nicholas Meyer (Wessex Press, 2020; \$48.95, pbk). There are illustrations in full colour by N.C. Wyeth, and in black & white by George Willis Bardwell. www.wessexpress.com

Sherlock Holmes and His Adventures on American Radio by Ian Dickerson (BearManor Media, 2020; £29.40 [hbk], £21.65, pbk) tells the story of Holmes and Watson on American radio from 1920 to 1950. A great detail of material is lost, of course, but Mr Dickerson — who discovered and edited the scripts that Leslie Charteris and Denis Green wrote for *The New Adventures of Sherlock Holmes* in the mid-1940s — has unearthed far more than would have been possible even twenty years ago. Despite the industry's standard practice of not crediting the supporting actors, Mr Dickerson has managed to put names to several voices. The text would have benefited from better proof-reading, but the book fills a notable gap on my shelves.

There have been two excellent independent Holmesian journals, not published by a society: *Baker Street Miscellanea* (1975-1993) and *The Sherlock Holmes Review* (1986-1996), both American. The latter was the creation of Steven T Doyle, now co-proprietor of Gasogene Books, who have embarked on the ambitious and laudable publication of the complete run in facsimile. In *The Sherlock Holmes Review: Anthology Volume One, 1986-1987* (Gasogene Books, 2020; \$27.95, pbk) containing issues 1, 2 and 3/4, are interviews with Jack Tracy, Jeremy Brett and Peter Cushing; a study of the "Red Circle" manuscript; "Medieval Romantic Influences in 'The Speckled Band'" by Steve Hockensmith; Stafford G Davis on

"The Literary Influences of Arthur Conan Doyle"; Alvin Rodin & Jack Key on "The Scientific Holmes" — and more, including "A Reichenbach Diary" by, er, me.

In the first Sexton Blake story in 1893, the detective was distinguished by little except his name, but before long he moved to Baker Street, and became known as "the office-boys' Sherlock Holmes", though he was more accurately Britain's equivalent of Nick Carter. His thousands of exploits, devised by many different writers, continued to appear until the 1970s, with sporadic additions since. *Sexton Blake and the Great War*, edited by Mark Hodder (Rebellion Publishing, 2020; £8.99, pbk) contains three novels, first published 1908, 1915 and 1916. *Sexton Blake Versus the Master Crooks* and *Sexton Blake's Allies* will follow later this year.

No Holmes Barred, Being a Scrapbook of Holmesiana edited by Paul Thomas Miller is the first (non-profit) publication of Doyle's Rotary Coffin, whose motto, you may remember, is: "No Holmes Barred — Especially Dreadful Holmes, Bizarre Holmes and Sacrilegious Holmes." It is, as the editor says, "a collection of wildly varying contents: fiction, poetry, essays, and art celebrating Holmes in many ways, from the traditional to the most outré Holmeses imaginable". Contributors whose names you may recognise are Mattias Boström, Les Moskowitz, Wanda & Jeff Dow, Phil Attwell, Brad Keefauver and Amy Thomas. And me (sorry about that). You can download the book as a pdf file from sites.google.com/site/doylesrotarycoffin or buy it in paperback from Amazon.co.uk for £3.68.

RJ

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