

“I AM AN OMNIVOROUS READER”

Book reviews by CATHERINE COOKE, ALISTAIR DUNCAN, GORDON DYMOWSKI, MATTHEW J ELLIOTT, MARK MOWER, SARAH OBERMULLER-BENNETT, VALERIE SCHREINER, JOHN SHEPPARD, JEAN UPTON, NICHOLAS UTECHIN and ROGER JOHNSON

This August and Scholarly Body: The Society at 70 edited by Nicholas Utechin; design and layout by Heather Owen. *The Sherlock Holmes Society of London*, 2021. 116pp. £11.00 (pbk)

They say that when drowning, one’s life flashes before one’s eyes. Reading this book is rather like that — only somewhat drier! While I do not go back to the Society’s foundation in 1951, I do go back over half the Society’s existence and have had much to do with the 1951 Festival of Britain in Westminster Libraries. This is a fitting record, a highly enjoyable read and an invaluable reference book. There are lists of the Presidents, Chairmen and Honorary Members and a useful list of all the Society’s publications, so you can check for any gaps on your shelves that need filling. There follows a complete list of all the Society’s meetings and excursions — a very useful index to the accounts in the *Journal*. What one would give to have attended some of the early ones! More discursive are the reminiscences of the Chairmen, and the history of the Society’s genesis and of the *Journal*. All this is lavishly illustrated with myriad black & white and colour photographs, including the infamous Dancing Men — what we got up to on our excursions! (Is that a file Geoffrey Stephens is holding in the photograph on page 80? It looks suspiciously like the record of the soundtrack of the 1951 Festival Exhibition.)

The book captures the unique blend of scholarship, humour and sheer fun that is the Society’s hallmark. Reading the reminiscences brings back many happy memories — a former Chairman, dressed as a cow, pirouetting into a room because... No — you will have to buy the book!

There is one erratum which we should mention. On page 83 it is stated that The Golden Jubilee Cruise of the Baltic was organised by Guy Marriott. It was not: Peter Horrocks was the mastermind behind it.

CC

The Curious Book Of Sherlock Holmes Characters by Mike Foy. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 572pp. £34.99/€39.99/\$44.95 (hbk)

This comprehensive directory of every character in the Canon sensibly proceeds in a simple alphabetical format (by character rather than story) and, equally sensibly, has a comprehensive index. Characters I didn’t even consider characters are represented, such as Desborough, a horse from *Silver*

Blaze. If it had a name it’s in the book!

For each character we are given the name, story, sex, and whether they are alive or dead in the Canon. In addition, depending on the importance of the character, are details which can range from physical appearance to occupation and, if relevant, what Holmes deduced about them. Holmes himself has a predictably long entry, whereas, for instance, Captain Ferguson (“The Three Gables”) is concisely described: “A retired sea captain who owned the house before Mrs Maberley. Holmes asked if there was anything about remarkable about him, and if he had buried something. Mrs Maberley answered in the negative.”

Illustrations by all manner of artists are included; it is very interesting to see how the different illustrators approached their commissions.

Finally, there are three tables, listing the stories in order of occurrence (though Foy does not say which chronology he has used); in alphabetical order, by four-letter abbreviation; and in order of publication.

The book is large and over 500 pages — rather cumbersome, but when it is this comprehensive it’s hard to see how it could have been smaller. Some might be deterred by the price. To them I would say that if you don’t already have such a book, it is very much worth it. If you do, and you are not a completist, you might decide this one is not for you. I would buy it, even though I already own similar books.

AD

The Mystery of the Parsee Lawyer: Arthur Conan Doyle, George Edalji and the Case of the Foreigner in the English Village by Shrabani Basu. *Bloomsbury Publishing*, 2021. 320pp. £20.00 (hbk)

Ten years ago I wrote that Roger Oldfield’s *Outrage; The Edalji Five and the Shadow of Sherlock Holmes* seemed unlikely to be surpassed as a comprehensive, intelligent, balanced and intensely readable account of this tragic affair. It’s pleasing to know that Mr Oldfield provided assistance to the author of this new book, which, if it doesn’t excel his own, at least equals it. George Edalji, son of an Indian father and an English mother, was convicted of brutally maiming livestock in his father’s Staffordshire parish. Released early, he wrote to the creator of Sherlock Holmes, who, on meeting him, immediately noticed that his eyesight was so poor as

to render him incapable of the crimes for which he'd been imprisoned. Eventually cleared on appeal, Edalji was refused compensation on the grounds that he was guilty of writing a series of threatening letters, an offence for which he had never been tried, let alone convicted. The police, under Chief Constable George Anson, pursued a clearly racist agenda, with apparent Home Office approval. Conan Doyle's evidence was derided or ignored. There have been other very good accounts of the affair, but *The Mystery of the Parsee Lawyer* has a special value, as Shrabani Basu, herself born and raised in India, helps us understand the achievements and the tribulations of the Revd Shapurji Edalji and his family. Her research in Portsmouth's Conan Doyle Collection, the Staffordshire Record Office, the George Edalji papers at Birmingham Central Library, and elsewhere is exemplary. And, my goodness, she can write!

RJ

The Staunton Tragedy: A Facsimile of the Original Manuscript of "The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter" by Arthur Conan Doyle with Annotations and Commentary. Edited, with an Introduction, by Michael F Whelan, BSI. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2020. 216pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

The latest in this marvellous series of facsimile editions comes courtesy of the British Library, to whom (as the British Museum) the manuscript was presented in May 1959. Its journey thither is told in detail by Randall Stock: prestigious previous owners of this treasure were William Randolph Hearst and Vincent Starrett. Stock also provides a detailed report on the physicality of the manuscript itself, and Phillip Bergem is as meticulous as ever in his textual annotations. The reproduction of the manuscript pages, scanned by the British Library, makes perusal easy.

The editor, Mike Whelan, recently-retired "Wiggins" of the Irregulars, had a nice idea: he and friends recently founded a scion society called MISS3Q, whose membership is limited to those over the age of seventy-five — and all eight founding members have contributed scholarly papers to this volume. There is much concentration on the game of rugby — understandable for what will be primarily a non-British readership. Side-line topics explored include the history of telegrams, whether Dr Leslie Armstrong is *really* comparable to Professor Moriarty, and how allotment sites in Cambridgeshire provide an important topographical clue.

I enjoyed Don Novorsky's "alternative solution" to the case (Godfrey Staunton's young lady did not die from consumption); and Peter Blau's charting of dramatisations of the story is exhaustive (although his assertion that there is no extant copy of Michael

Hardwick's, broadcast on the BBC Light Programme in August 1962, is inaccurate).

The Irregulars have now embarked on the facsimile publication for next year: "The Norwood Builder". I am looking forward to it already.

NU

The Lost World: Manuscript by Arthur Conan Doyle. *SP Books*, 2020. 336pp. €180 /£150 (hbk in slipcase)

To read the manuscript itself, you'd have to visit the New York Public Library. This magnificent volume, limited to 1,000 hand-numbered copies, can save you the trouble. As with the 2016 facsimile of "The Abbey Grange", co-published by the Society, the MS is superbly reproduced at full size, and as always Conan Doyle's handwriting is elegant and legible. The illustrations from the original British and American serialisations were reproduced in the 1996 Wessex Press *Annotated Lost World*; this edition features equally impressive illustrations by Géo Dupuis, from the original French publication, in *Je Sais Tout*. In his perceptive and informative foreword, Jon Lellenberg remarks: "As one observes Conan Doyle's handwriting becoming 'busier' in the course of composition, it is impossible not to feel the author's excitement and impatience to reach the climax." *The Lost World: Manuscript* is available from the publisher at <https://www.spbooks.com/>.

RJ

The Baker Street Journal Christmas Annual 2020: The 100-Year Adventure of The Unique Hamlet edited by Richard Sveum. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2020. 68pp (pbk)

"Holmes," I began, "I am delighted to see, amongst the heady onrush of often ludicrous pastiches of our adventures, a scholarly study of that which is regarded as one of the very greatest."

Holmes languidly stretched out a hand for the proffered volume. "Indeed, by Vincent Starrett, an American who holds, I believe, a special place in the pantheon of those who engage in the idolatry of — well — frankly, myself. In this famous 1920 publication, he came up with the idea that I solved the case of an apparently missing Shakespearian treasure. It is not, I may say, the best of these attempts to copy your overblown accounts, Watson, but I understand it has other elements in its favour."

"Indeed so, my dear Holmes," I cried. "It is believed that only 110 copies were published and that an up-to-date census shows twenty-six of them as being in public institutions, twenty-three in private hands and five — as of last Christmas — on sale. The various scholars who have put together this excellent *Annual* — you will recognise the names of Sveum,

Ray Betzner, Susan Rice, Randall Stock and Julie McKuras — provide a paean of praise for this collectible. There is, however, the curious case of the price for collectors.”

“You play me at my own game, Watson. Suffice: there *is* no mention of the cost.”

I smiled contentedly. “That is the curious case. Perhaps it is too terrifying. Copies of that slim booklet change hands for some £5,500. And you may be sure that one held by our Swiss friend Michael Meer, who writes here of his miraculous find, might attract even more: it is inscribed by Starrett to no less a person than your friend Arthur Conan Doyle.”

Holmes snorted. “I feel sad for book collectors; their sufferings of lust and inadequacy are indeed tortured — feelings, I believe, that were amply satirised by Starrett in this very pastiche. Do you know, Watson, I think we should take out a subscription to *The Baker Street Journal*, for that is, I know, the only way in which such delightful literary excursions are to be obtained.”

NU

Corporals, Colonels and Commissionaires: The Military and the Sherlockian Canon edited by Michael J Quigley, BSI and Marsha Pollak, BSI. *The Baker Street Irregulars*, 2020. 252pp. \$39.95 (hbk)

A Study in Scarlet begins with an account of Watson’s brief career as an army surgeon; a little later the request for Holmes to go to Lauriston Gardens is brought by a former sergeant in the Royal Marines. So in the very first chapter we have the Army and the Royal Navy, as well as the Corps of Commissionaires. Active, retired and deceased, military types are present throughout the canon. Although much is familiar to today’s reader, there have been many changes, even since the Great War ended, and not only in the way of technology. This fourth volume in the BSI’s “Professions Series” features essays from Sweden (Mattias Boström with what must be the last word on the voyage of HMS *Orontes*), England (Catherine Cooke on the Commissionaires, and David Stuart Davies on the wartime movies of Rathbone and Bruce), India (Jay Ganguly outstanding on the British forces in India), Canada (Clifford Goldfarb on Napoleon, and Doug Wrigglesworth on Queen Victoria’s army), and a round dozen from America, of which I was especially impressed by Burt Wolder on the Victorian and Edwardian Navy; Monica Schmidt on British military wives in India; Ross Davies and Jeffry Bradway on canonical colonels; and Dan Andriacco on Irish regiments in the British Army. Two very minor caveats: the system of ranks, particularly in the Army, was much more complex than in Phillip Bergem’s glossary; and the editors should note that MBE, OBE

and CBE are *not* orders of knighthood. Those apart, the whole book is a jolly good read, informative, enlightening, and very handsomely presented.

RJ

Sherlock Holmes: A Three-Pipe Christmas edited and with an introduction by Dan Andriacco. *Belanger Books*, 2020. 162pp. £18.95/\$24.95 (pbk), £7.50/\$10.38 (Kindle)

A Three-Pipe Christmas is the perfect holiday tome, mixing Sherlockian canon, scholarship, and pastiche.

“The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle”, illustrated by Jeffrey B McKeever, precedes three essays on the story. Julie McKuras and Monica M Schmidt highlight its reflection of the joy and the melancholy of the holiday. As one introduced to Holmes in his youth, I found the musings of Shannon Carlisle on introducing Holmes to her fourth-grade students especially touching and insightful.

As a first-time reader of “The Unique Hamlet” by Vincent Starrett (illustrated by Karen Gosselin), I enjoyed its sly sense of humour as well as its prose styling. With its focus on book collecting and literature, the story has more than earned its high reputation. In their essays, Dan Andriacco and Randall Stock discuss how Starrett deftly balances pastiche, parody, and satire, and the late Susan Rice describes the story as the “gold standard” of pastiche in its balance of humour and style, noting (to its credit) that the setting is “more Lewis Carroll than Conan Doyle”.

Finally, “The Adventure of the Unique Dickensians” by August Derleth, illustrated by Brian Belanger, features Solar Pons and his friend Dr Parker. Pons is inspired by Holmes (and this story seems to be inspired by “The Unique Hamlet”), but Pons is not simply a pastiche of Holmes. As the essays by David Marcum, Bob Byrne and Roger Johnson attest, Sherlockians may find much to enjoy in the Holmes-inspired yet modern-spirit tales of Solar Pons.

A Three-Pipe Christmas serves as an excellent introduction to Sherlockian thought, and would be the ideal gift for a long-term student of the canon. Proceeds benefit the Beacon Society’s Joel Senter Memorial Essay Contest, so the book also enables us to foster the holiday spirit of giving.

GD

Sherlock & Irene: The Secret Truth Behind ‘A Scandal in Bohemia’ by Chris Chan. *MX Publishing*, 2020. 172pp. £8.99 (pbk)

Did Irene Adler actually beat Sherlock Holmes? Chris Chan has identified several inconsistencies and improbabilities in Dr Watson’s account and has

devised a scenario that could account for them. Can we really believe that Holmes failed to recognise the cross-dressed Miss Adler, even when she bade him goodnight — immediately after he had *publicly* told Watson that he knew where the incriminating photograph was, and that he and the King would call at Briony Lodge the next day? “His seeming blundering was a clever feint,” says Mr Chan, “to get Adler to run away with the photograph. This means that Holmes did not want to help the King after all. Holmes had his own agenda in this case.” There was, it seems, another, darker significance to the photograph, and the King was in the power of a master criminal, who undoubtedly provided the burglars and the footpads who had failed to retrieve it. Ultimately, the theory raises as many questions as it attempts to answer, but it is ingenious and intriguing.

RJ

The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes and The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, read by Simon Hester (unabridged). *Head Stories Audio*, 2020. Download only.

It was my recent very good fortune to review an unabridged reading of *The Hound of the Baskervilles* by Simon Hester. I am pleased to report that he has now turned his talents to the Holmes short story collections.

I noted in my earlier review that Hester’s precise, clipped style put me in mind of Holmes himself reading Watson’s prose, a unique and rather enjoyable notion. For *Memoirs*, the reader does more to differentiate between the voices of our two heroes — not that that was ever a huge stumbling block. Whenever I heard his Holmes, I was irresistibly reminded of the actor Edward Petherbridge’s brief stint as the detective in a series for National Public Radio. Any good reading of a beloved work of fiction could and should be the equivalent of viewing something through fresh eyes, and Simon Hester succeeds admirably, his sharp delivery accentuating the detail-oriented features of Doyle’s prose, and bringing an unsettling menace to some of Conan Doyle’s most memorable villains — Grimesby Roylott, Jephro Rucastle, and, of course, Professor Moriarty.

No doubt Mr Hester will go on to record the remainder of the Canon, and his particular gifts will ensure that it will be a most welcome addition to any audiophile’s collection.

MJE

[The recordings are available online, from audiobooksnow.com, books.apple.com, kobo.com/gb/en, and other suppliers. Ed.]

The Three Locks: A Sherlock Holmes Adventure by Bonnie MacBird. *Collins Crime Club*. 2021. 412pp. £14.99 (hbk)

In the extremely hot September of 1887, Holmes and Watson are drawn into three new and intriguing cases, all of which require them to unlock secrets...

This is a neat and very welcome prequel to MacBird’s three previous Holmes novels. The clever and well-crafted plot makes it a solid and captivating read, and the action is interspersed with customary good humour. For fans of the truly traditional pastiche, this is one you will not wish to miss. Unlike so many of the novels I have read during lockdown, I had no idea where this story was heading, and was intrigued to find out how the various strands would come together. It did not disappoint. Similarly, the meticulously researched and extensive period detail only added to my enjoyment. I like my Holmes tales to be different, but I also like them to be canonical in feel and true to the period in which they are set. The pace of the book is also spot on, with never a dull moment, and the tale is rich in both atmosphere and suspense. MacBird is an extremely talented writer and this is an admirable addition to her long list of credits.

MM

Mrs Hudson Goes To Ireland by Susan Knight. *MX Publishing*, 2020. 268pp. £9.99 (pbk)

In Sherlock Holmes pastiches, there is an increasing trend to concentrate not on the Great Detective himself, but on other canonical characters, from police inspectors to Baker Street Irregulars. Susan Knight gives Mrs Hudson centre stage in this tale of murder in the Irish countryside. Feisty, brimming with good common sense and not short of pluck, Knight’s Mrs Hudson is a formidable character and superb story-teller with her own voice, not afraid of speaking up for herself or confiding her opinions to the reader. This is true of all the characters in Knight’s book; each with a story to tell and all with distinct, fleshed out personalities, from the good to the bad and everyone else. The case itself is intriguing, with plenty of twists and turns, and unexpected revelations. For me, however, the beauty of this story lies in the writing and the depth of research and insights into Irish folklore that are scattered lightly, and delightfully, throughout. Rarely do I finish a book in one sitting; on this occasion I had to burn the midnight oil to find out what happened in the end. If Mr Holmes ever worried about his competition, he need only look under his own roof; in Mrs Hudson, he may have well and truly met his match in terms of her investigating skills!

SO-B

The Meeting of the Minds: The Cases of Sherlock Holmes & Solar Pons, Part I edited by David Marcum. *Belanger Books*, 2021. 286pp. £18.95/\$24.95/€21.95 (pbk)

Vincent Starrett called August Derleth's tales of Solar Pons "the best substitutes for Sherlock Holmes known to this reviewer". A particular pleasure for me is that, although Pons deliberately models himself on Holmes, he doesn't pretend to *be* Holmes. However, the two detectives certainly knew each other, and we can hardly doubt that they worked together — several times, as this latest collection bears witness. We learn that Pons played an essential part in the breaking of Von Bork's spy ring, and that Holmes, along with Dr Thorndyke and Nayland Smith, had a hand in "The Bizarre Adventure of the Octagon House", a case briefly mentioned by Dr Parker in "The Frightened Baronet", published in 1945. In "The Serpentine Angel", ex-DCI Lestrade tells the up-and-coming Inspector Jamison about one of his own experiences with Pons and Holmes. All eight stories are ingenious and exciting, and they capture the slightly theatrical touch of Derleth's original narratives, without parodying Conan Doyle's; it's a clever trick, very neatly done. I'm looking forward to Part II. (And I'll declare an interest, as I contributed a foreword to this volume.)

RJ

Sherlock Holmes: The Baker Street Epilogue by Mark Mower. *MX Publishing*, 2021. 180pp. £8.99 (pbk)

These six stories are, like those published in 2019 as *Sherlock Holmes: The Baker Street Legacy*, compiled by one Christopher Henry Watson, MD, writing in 1952. This young gentleman informs us that he inherited a prized collection of stories from his uncle, Dr John H Watson. This latest selection, which may or may not be the final offering, features the same ingenuity in plots and Canonical referencing as the earlier one. The sixth story is an interesting and cheerful sequel to Holmes and Watson's encounter with the veiled lodger, and tells of the great improvement to Mrs Ronder's fortunes once she had responded to Holmes's encouragement not to take her own life in despair.

All these stories feature the customary elements we all enjoy so much; scandal, skulduggery, child-abduction (or baby-farming as it was called in the nineteenth century), murder and attempted murder. Also featured in one story is a well-known sportsman of those times, (no name here, read it for yourself!) In conclusion, an entertaining read and another worthy contribution to the world of Holmesian pastiche.

JS

A Proof Reader's Adventures of Sherlock Holmes by Nick Dunn-Meynell. *MX Publishing*, 2020. 387pp. £17.99 (hbk), £11.99 (pbk)

Never judge a book by its title! I didn't know what to expect when this splendid volume came into my possession. By the time I had read the two introductions telling me what the book *wasn't*, I was starting to wonder what it *was*. I was in for a treat. Here are the twelve *original* stories of the *Adventures*, dissected, analysed, turned inside out and on their heads, and re-presented for the reader's edification with explanations that attempt to resolve some of the inconsistencies in the canon. If this sounds rather dry, have no fear. Dunn-Meynell enlivens his conversations between Holmes and Watson with a wonderfully witty, tongue-in-cheek humour, which had me variously smiling, nodding sagaciously or laughing out loud. Do I believe the Brothers Holmes have developed a system of eating toast noiselessly to meet the Diogenes' strict standards? Yes, absolutely. It seems the only natural thing to do under the circumstances. The author's depth of knowledge of the canon is first-rate, the language true to the original stories and the additional asides can only be labelled as touches of brilliance. A thoroughly enjoyable read, which had me hoping that Dunn-Meynell turns his attention to the *Memoirs* next to see what he can make of them.

SO-B

Remarkable Power of Stimulus by Gretchen Altabef. *MX Publishing*, 2020. 254pp. £9.99 (pbk)

The first President of this Society, S.C. Roberts, once observed "Certain imaginative playwrights, with a greater regard for popular sentiment than for documentary evidence, have boldly portrayed Sherlock Holmes not only as a lover, but as husband and father".

This book is a Sherlock Holmes adventure with heart, states the author. This is a boldly portrayed Holmes who wears his heart on his sleeve, and who not only acquires an adopted daughter, but a wife, namely the by-then-widowed Mrs Irene Norton! The plot weaves together a number of themes; an attempted re-launch of Moriarty's organisation, repeated attacks on Holmes by Moriarty's daughter, and, the key element, a series of murders of women connected with the suffragist movement.

Canonical references and characters abound, and the knowledgeable Holmesian will chuckle over many of them. Some novel elements have been introduced, Inspector Chandra Das, for example, and one chapter features the "Russian Influenza" which menaced Britain and most of Western Europe in the late nineteenth century. How topical is that!

All in all, this book is exciting, ingenious, and a delight to read. I hope it will attract the modern generation to our Holmes and Watson.

JS

Sherlock Holmes and the Case of the London Dock Deaths by Margaret Walsh. *MX Publishing*, 2020. 190pp. £8.99 (pbk)

A lively and captivating tale in which Holmes and Watson assist Inspector Lestrade in investigating the stabbing to death of a man in the East End. The story is set against the backdrop of the Great London Dock Strike of 1889 and draws cleverly on the rising tensions between the dock owners and dock workers at that time.

The characters in the tale are well drawn and I particularly liked the inclusion of Scotland Yard's Inspector Edmund Reid, the real-life detective who helped to investigate the Jack the Ripper murders of 1888. There are some nice nods to the history of the dockland locations in which the action is set and great use of some East End colloquialisms! And despite the grim nature of the crimes committed, the novel is interspersed with well-judged humour throughout. All in all, an enjoyable and neatly paced pastiche.

MM

Sherlock Holmes and the Thames Murders by Johanna M Rieke. *MX Publishing*, 2020. 159pp. £8.86 (pbk), £4.99 (Kindle)

Given the central role the mighty Thames plays in London's history, I am surprised that it does not feature more prominently in pastiches. The odd boat, the occasional dock-worker, a glimpse of the river in the distance: Old Father Thames starts to look rather neglected compared with the heady days when Holmes and Watson pursued Jonathan Small along its murky waters. It is refreshing, therefore, to find a story where London's artery has been placed at the forefront of the action. A series of ghastly and grisly murders near the river leaves Lestrade perplexed and the capital quivering. Accompanied by the faithful Watson, Holmes throws himself into the case with gusto, only to find that the crimes are multi-layered and indicative of some deeper, sinister intent. Holmes is on fine form, with deductions coming thick and fast and full of good logical reasoning. The regular characters are here, with the welcome return of minor players, including Mary Watson, who turns out to be a brave, sensible woman who saves the day. Rieke has a flair for writing Holmes and makes full use of his talents, whether in disguise, where he artfully tricks poor Watson, or grappling with knife-wielding villains. The author has published six Sherlock

Holmes pastiches of which this is the second to be translated into English. I hope the others will soon follow.

SO-B

The MX Book of New Sherlock Holmes Stories — Part XXII: Some More Untold Cases (1877-1887), Part XXIII: Some More Untold Cases (1888-1894), and Part XXIV: Some More Untold Cases (1895-1903), edited by David Marcum. *MX Publishing*. 2020. 532pp (Part XXII), 592pp (Part XXIII), 564pp (Part XXIV). Each £28.99 (hbk), £17.99 (pbk)

In 2015, there appeared a collection of stories by Sherlockians from around the world: it was the start of a seemingly unending series. In these three volumes are 64 new adventures, re-creating some of those cases that get just a mention in the canon.

"The Singular Affair of the Aluminium Crutch" by William Todd opens in the familiar sitting-room at 221B, and we are there, next to Watson, as Holmes relates an exploit from his early years. "The Adventure of the Abducted Bard" by I.A. Watson takes Holmes, Watson and us to Oxford, to investigate the disappearance of a manuscript, the work of William Shakespeare himself, from a locked library. In "The Murdered Millionaire" by Kevin P Thornton, the mystery of Mr James Phillimore, who disappeared after stepping back into his house for his umbrella, is given a thoughtful explanation.

There are 61 more stories, offering hours of enjoyment for any Sherlock Holmes enthusiast. The books also support a wonderful cause, the Stepping Stones School housed in Sir Arthur's former home in Surrey, and therefore are worth every penny.

VS

In brief

The Sherlock Holmes Review: Anthology Volume Two, 1988-1990 (Gasogene Books, 2020; \$34.95). *The Sherlock Holmes Review*, edited and published for ten years by Steven T Doyle, was that rare thing, a successful independent Holmesian journal. Now joint proprietor of Gasogene Books and publisher of *The Baker Street Journal*, Steve Doyle is issuing the complete run in annual volumes. In this one, Dennis O Smith, author of first-rate new Holmes stories, is interviewed; William Lawrence considers the importance of book jackets; Chris Redmond ponders Holmes's proposed visit to Norway; Dave M Hershey identifies "York College" where Jefferson Hope obtained his poison; Donald Gray looks at the Holmes stories in the context of *The Strand Magazine*; there's a good pastiche by Dan Andriacco,

and much more. It's well worth your attention.

The Most Curious Case of the Dog in the Night-Time: A Conan Doyle Investigation by Kelvin I Jones (Cunning Crime Books, 2020; £8.92). Like the dog's inactivity in the night-time, an innocuous fact may, rightly interpreted, point to something significant. A mundane report in the long-defunct *Norfolk Chronicle* set Kelvin Jones thinking about that other nocturnal canine, *The Hound of the Baskervilles*, and about Conan Doyle's complicated life — including his love life. There's nothing prurient here, but Mr Jones's insights help us to appreciate Sir Arthur as a complete human being. "Sherlock Holmes and the Norfolk Connection" in this issue resulted from the same research. (Did ACD really hate Sherlock Holmes? That's not what his daughter Dame Jean told us.)

Charlie Peace: Murder, Mayhem and the Master of Disguise by Ben W Johnson (Pen & Sword, 2016. £12.99). In "The Illustrious Client", Holmes said: "A complex mind... All great criminals have that. My old friend Charlie Peace was a violin virtuoso." The two may have met (though "My old friend" is surely an exaggeration) and Peace was apparently an accomplished violinist. Without employment after being crippled at the steel mill where he worked, he became a career criminal, in his native Yorkshire and then in Manchester. After 22 years, twelve of them in prison, he killed a policeman — and attended the trial at which an innocent man was convicted. Only weeks later, back in Sheffield, he murdered a former friend, Arthur Dyson. He fled to Nottingham and then to south London, where he lived quietly as an inventor, while committing a series of burglaries in Blackheath. Caught in the act, he was tried and convicted at the Old Bailey, and then taken to Sheffield where he was convicted of Dyson's murder. He was hanged at Armley Gaol in February 1879. The actor and lawyer H.B. Irving wrote: "The only interesting criminals are those worthy of something better. Peace was one of these."

Sister Sleuths: Female Detectives in Britain by Nell Darby (Pen & Sword, 2021; £14.99). It's interesting to compare the life and work of real-life investigators with those of their fictional counterparts, especially in the 19th and early 20th centuries. Police detectives are well covered, of course, but material about British private enquiry agents is sparse. In our minds, male private eyes tend to dominate, so it's good to be reminded that women have done the job no less effectively. For many decades there were no female police detectives, but women's talents could still prove essential to the police. Nell Darby's intensive research in newspaper archives and census returns has uncovered some remarkable stories and individuals, including former

actresses Kate Easton, Dorothy Tempest and Margaret Cooke; spiritualist Rosalie Kennedy; policeman's daughter Patience Lawrence — and Kate Easton's rival, Maud West. The whole subject is fascinating, not least the contrast with the female detectives of fiction.

The Wandering Civil Servant of Stradivarius: Themes and Variations by Desmond Cecil, CMG (Quartet Books, 2021; £22.00). Desmond Cecil has been a professional musician, a resident of Switzerland, a British diplomat, and a nuclear environmental adviser in Russia. He is now a *pro bono* worker for various arts charities around Europe, a long-time member of this Society — and always a dedicated violinist. Lockdown inspired him to write this engaging and entertaining memoir, which includes a chapter on Sherlock Holmes, describing Mr Cecil's first visit to the Reichenbach Falls and his conversations with Adrian Conan Doyle at the Château de Lucens. Like Holmes, he owns and plays a Stradivarius violin. (All royalties from the sale of this book will be donated to arts charities, especially to support young musicians, who need all the help that they can get nowadays.)

The Man in the Gray Jacket: A Sherlockian Mystery by Albert L Weintraub (Sandra Weintraub Irrevocable Trust, 2020; £4.03). Mel Robinson and Roger McIntosh, sent by Scotland Yard to New York, to assist the NYPD, become involved in a curious case of amnesia, deception and mistaken identity. The oddities take a sinister turn, and we learn that the detectives' nicknames, Holmes and Watson, are literally *fantastically* appropriate. The author says: "This book has been written for the express purpose of honoring and thanking the Sherlock Holmes Society of London and its members for the pleasures they have brought to me while in pursuit of the most famous fictional detective in the world, Sherlock Holmes." It's a charming tribute from our respected American member.

"A Quiet Air of Mastery": An Appreciation of Michael Francis Whelan edited by Leslie S Klinger (The Baker Street Irregulars, 2020; \$25.95). This is the first book published as a tribute to a living (former) head of the BSI; it's well deserved, given Mike Whelan's achievements in his 23 years as "Wiggins", including the creation of the Baker Street Irregulars Press, the resurrection of the BSI *Christmas Annual*, the introduction of major international conferences, the establishment of the BSI Trust and the BSI Archive, and the Distinguished Speaker Lecture. More than forty Irregulars have contributed to this book, in appreciation of Mike's leadership and his friendship.

Holmes Reads Holmes: Reflections on the Real-Life Links Between the Jurist & the Detective, in the

Library, in the Courtroom, and on the Battlefield, edited by Ross E Davies and M.H. Hoeflich (Talbot Publishers, 2020; £21.95/\$35.63). We believe Conan Doyle borrowed his detective's surname from the American essayist Dr Oliver Wendell Holmes, of whom he wrote, "Never have I so known and loved a man whom I had never seen." It's pleasing to know that Dr Holmes's son, a lawyer who served nearly thirty years as a Supreme Court judge, enjoyed the stories of Sherlock Holmes and was apparently amused at the occasional rumour that he was related to the detective. This attractive slim volume (84 pages, of which "The Adventure of the Blue Carbuncle" takes up 33) is not a must-have, but it is a charming extra.

A Sherlockian History of England is a 28-page monograph by Christopher Redmond. Using canonical references, it progresses from prehistoric times into the Victorian era. Chris is offering it as a free PDF file, which you can request by emailing him at redmond2@execulink.com.

Was Sherlock Holmes an Elephant? by Paul Thomas Miller (Doyle's Rotary Coffin, 2021; £3.99). We could all use a dose of silliness right about now. Was Sherlock Holmes an elephant? Paul has collated evidence from the Canon and the known facts about elephants to prove that, er, he wasn't! (The appended canonical details about Holmes are well chosen, though the spud mentioned in "Wisteria Lodge" is a spade, not a potato.)

JU & RJ