

The DISTRICT MESSENGER



THE NEWSLETTER OF THE SHERLOCK HOLMES SOCIETY OF LONDON
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Percy Metcalfe, who died on 24 March at the age of eighty-four, was a barrister who became, says *The Times*, 'the doyen of law reporters in the criminal appeal courts'. He is listed among the members of our Society in the very first issue of *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, and he contributed to the SHJ and other Sherlockian publications over a period of forty years. He was a frequent and amiable attendee at our meetings until quite recently.

Film designer and art director **Michael Stringer**, who died aged seventy-nine on 7 March, created the look of *Genevieve*, *The Sundowners*, *Robin and Marian*, *Fiddler on the Roof* and many others, including the 1983 film *The Hound of the Baskervilles* with Ian Richardson. Tall and thin, with deep-set eyes and a sepulchral voice, **Philip Locke** (d. 19 April, aged seventy-six) was an actor of integrity and versatility, capable of an intensely moving Lear at the Young Vic in 1980, and of a masterly comic performance as Sir Roderick Glossop in the TV series *Jeeves and Wooster*. His Professor Moriarty in the 1974 Royal Shakespeare Company production of William Gillette's *Sherlock Holmes* is summarised by *The Independent* as a 'glittering-eyed embodiment of evil ... a vital element of the evening's heady, energy-fused panache, a worthy opponent to John Wood's masterly Holmes'. If only that production had been committed to film! Before becoming head of BBC Television drama in 1969, a post he held till 1981, **Shaun Sutton** directed many plays and serials, including *The Bruce-Partington Plans* and *The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax* with Douglas Wilmer & Nigel Stock in 1965. He died on 14 May aged eighty-four.

The auction of **The Conan Doyle Collection** at Christie's in London last Wednesday was an exceptionally interesting occasion. Much of the successful bidding was by two antiquarian dealers, Peter Stern of New York and Bernard Quaritch of London, but the British Library acquired over 1200 documents and Doug Wrigglesworth, for the Conan Doyle Collection in Toronto, bought a lot of papers relating to Canada. Nearly a quarter of the lots failed to reach their reserve prices, but the British Library has hopes of acquiring some of them. The auction has been well covered in the better papers, and *The Independent* for 19 May has an interview with Charles Foley, one of the beneficiaries of Anna Conan Doyle's will, explaining the situation behind the sale.

David Stuart Davies has written several good Sherlock Holmes novels, but his imaginative curiosity has been most evident in the 1997 novella *Sherlock Holmes and The Reichenbach Secret* and, of course, in his play *Sherlock Holmes — The Last Act!* And now we have *The Veiled Detective* (Robert Hale Ltd, Clerkenwell House, 45-47 Clerkenwell Green, London EC1R 0HT; £18.99). We are used to the idea that some of what we read in the Canon is wrong — the dating of 'Wisteria Lodge' to 1892 when Holmes was believed dead after the Reichenbach incident, Watson's knowledge of Professor Moriarty at the time of the Birlstone murder in the late 1880s and his ignorance of him in 1891 — but *The Veiled Detective* requires us to accept that a great deal of what we know from the Canon is wrong. For a start, Dr Watson is actually Dr Walker, and he was cashiered from his regiment rather than honourably invalidated out. This all sounds outrageous, but really it's no more so than the premise for Nicholas Meyer's *The Seven-per-Cent Solution* (and much less so than that for Michael Dibdin's *The Last Sherlock Holmes Story*). Walker's predicament leads plausibly to his recruitment by Professor Moriarty to infiltrate Sherlock Holmes's household, and the result, for the reader, is a remarkable tension between the familiar investigations and the hitherto unrevealed machinations of the arch-criminal through his reluctant underling. I'm not wholly sure of the

meaning of the title, but *The Veiled Detective* gives us an intelligent, thought-provoking and fresh view of one of the great friendships in all literature, without diminishing the stature of either Holmes or Watson.

The setting of *Murder in the Bath* is actually the great Roman bath in the city of, er, Bath. Four years ago I gave a very appreciative review to Michael Mallory's collection *The Adventures of the Second Mrs Watson*, and I'm delighted to welcome Amelia Watson's first novel-length adventure. A part of the pleasure of these tales is the mutual distrust between Sherlock Holmes and Amelia Watson. Holmes knew where he stood with Mary Watson, but he thinks that Amelia takes up too much of the doctor's time. She has quite a different view on the matter, and as she is pretty much the detective's match in ingenuity, intelligence and stubbornness the relationship is rather tense. There's also an atmospheric and ingenious mystery involving a pagan cult and murder by a dead man, and a style that's light and engaging. *Murder in the Bath* (Deadly Alibi Press, PO Box 5947, Vancouver, WA 98668-5947, USA; \$16.99) has deservedly attracted plaudits from the critics, though I'd have to take issue with the one who says, 'Pack your deerstalker and your gasogene because Mallory takes you on a wonderful trip to 1905 Bath', since a gasogene is not the sort of thing one would travel with. They're damn' heavy for one thing!

Brian Freemantle's *The Holmes Inheritance* (Severn House Ltd, 9-15 High Street, Sutton, Surrey SM1 1DF; £18.99) could have benefited from some of Mr Mallory's lightness, as the writing is distressingly clumsy ('The omens were ominous immediately prior to my leaving London.' Well, of course they were ominous. Otherwise they wouldn't be omens). Having said that, the story itself is more what we should expect from a master of the espionage novel. Mr Freemantle's protagonist is not Sherlock Holmes but his son, the result of a relationship with a very unconventionally-minded nurse while recovering after Reichenbach. In 1913 Sebastian Holmes is sent, entirely unofficially, to the USA to investigate pro-German factions seeking to influence American policy in the inevitable forthcoming conflict. The relationships between Sebastian, Sherlock, Mycroft (now Cabinet Secretary) and Winston Churchill (First Lord of the Admiralty and instigator of the mission) are subtle, tense and believable. It's a pity that the book seems to have been written in a hurry and not checked by an editor before being printed.

On the Level with Conan Doyle, and Other Journeys by Michael L Higgs (Hansom Press Ltd, 1026 West Keith Road, North Vancouver, B.C., Canada V7P 3C6; Cdn\$12.95, US\$10.95, £6.50) is a second collection of short essays from the roving reporter of the Stormy Petrels of British Columbia. All twenty-one were first published in *The Petrel Flyer*, and all will bear re-reading. Mike Higgs sees the world with a fresh, amused and intelligent eye. Who else would take the imaginative step from a Canadian newspaper report about a limb transplant to Holmes's journey through Persia, amputees in the Canon, one of Conan Doyle's less successful horror stories, and one of his most impassioned campaigns against injustice? The author's travels take him to Bart's Hospital, the Opera House in Warsaw, the Panama Canal, Transylvania, Persia, the museum of the Berkshire regiment, Netley — and elsewhere. He is a most engaging guide.

In his twelve-page pamphlet *A Case of Identity* (Sherlock Holmes Museet, Egebjergvej 206, 4500 Nykøbing Sjælland, Denmark; Kr.50) Anders Fage-Pedersen makes a curiously convincing case for the common identity of Sherlock Holmes and Guy Boothby's sinister mastermind Dr Nikola. At the very least he emphasises the literary debt that Boothby owed to Conan Doyle.

Basil Copper wrote *Solar Pons versus the Devil's Claw* (Sarob Press, Ty Newydd, Four Roads, Kidwelly, Carmarthenshire SA177 4SF; £25.00 or \$45.00) nearly thirty years ago, but it remained unpublished until now. Copper has continued the chronicles of August Derleth's sleuth, 'the Sherlock Holmes of Praed Street', with great success over several volumes, and it's good to have this novel available at last. The introduction is one of the last things Richard Lancelyn Green wrote. Besides the limited hardback edition there's a deluxe edition priced at £55.00 or \$95.00.

Sherlock Holmes' Lost Adventure: The True Story of the Giant Rats of Sumatra by Lauren Steinhauer (iUniverse Inc., 2021 Pine Lake Road, Suite 100, Lincoln, NE 68512, USA) is available as a paperback at \$12.95 or as an Adobe e-book. At the author's website, www.laurensteinhauer.com, you can read a couple of chapters and gauge how well he's captured the Canonical style.

An author who has done it with consistent success is June Thomson, whose latest volume, *The Secret Notebooks of Sherlock Holmes*, is newly out from Allison & Busby (Suite 111, Bon Marche Centre, 241-251 Ferndale Road, London SW9 8BJ) at £18.99.

Due shortly from Black Coat Press (PO Box 17270, Encino, CA 91416, USA) is a new English translation of Maurice Leblanc's dazzling mystery thriller *The Hollow Needle*, which pits Sherlock Holmes against the 'gentleman-cambrioleur' Arsène Lupin (and incidentally restores the detective's true name). This edition is introduced by Kim Newman, and also includes the short story 'Sherlock Holmes Arrives Too Late'.

Susie Drost tells me that **The Mongolia Society** can import editions of Sherlock Holmes in the Mongolian (cyrilliz) script. If you collect the Canon in different languages, contact Susie for details at: The Mongolia Society, 322 Goodbody Hall, Indiana University, 1011 East Third, Bloomington, IN 47405-7005, USA (e-mail monsoc@indiana.edu).

There are new catalogues available from **Janus Books** (PO Box 40787, Tucson, AZ 85717, USA; website janusbooks.com) and **Nigel Williams Rare Books** (25 Cecil Court, London WC2N 4HE; nwrarebook@tcp.co.uk).

Martin Hirst, a former member of our Society, invites offers for two single issues of *The Strand Magazine*. June 1904 includes 'The Three Students', and March 1923 has 'The Creeping Man'. Martin says, 'They are in good condition as they have had plastic covers made for them by a previous owner, but the earlier one the front cover has become detached from the rest of the book.' Drop a line to Martin at The Old School House, 21B Pool Green, Neston, Corsham, Wilts. SN13 9SN; or e-mail gizmomrdsduck@aol.com.

Ted Schulz recently bought a copy of the Royal Edition of volume one of *The Strand Magazine*, inscribed by Sidney Paget 'To dear Josky from Sidney'. Does anyone know who Josky was? (It might be Fosky or possibly Tosky.)

The Barnstormers Theatre in Tamworth, New Hampshire, will put on William Gillette's play *Sherlock Holmes* from 6 to 10 July. Get information from PO Box 434, Tamworth, NH 03886, USA; or check the website at www.barnstormerstheatre.com. Tim Evers will perform his one-man play *The Demons of Sherlock Holmes* at the **Cody Stage** in Cody, Wyoming on 9 & 10 August. You can e-mail Tim for details at TheatreBahHumbug@aol.com. Maldon Drama Group will stage Tim Kelly's play *The Hound of the Baskervilles* at the Town Hall in Maldon, Essex, from 14 to 16 October. For information and tickets call George Greenham on 01621 854289.

Forbes Gibb notes that there are three records for Conan Doyle and his family on the American Family Immigration Center website at www.ellisland.org. 'You have to register — but it's free!'

Take a look at www.petitiononline.com/CCJB2005/. Please read the petition to dedicate a garden space within Clapham Common in memory of Jeremy Brett and consider signing it. This is the work of Kelley Sweat and the Jeremy Brett Memorial Group.

The second series of *The Further Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, written by Bert Coules and starring Clive Merrison and Andrew Sachs as Holmes & Watson, began transmission on BBC Radio 4 at 2.15pm last Tuesday. Four of the plays (*The Abergavenny Murder*, *The Shameful Betrayal of Miss Emily Smith*, *The Determined Client*

and *The Tragedy of Hanbury Street*) are being released on both cassette and CD. The fifth is *The Striking Success of Miss Franny Blossom*.

Amanda Field is at Southampton University studying Basil Rathbone's Sherlock Holmes films. She asks if anyone can provide her with access to the pressbooks for *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*, *SH & the Voice of Terror*, *SH & the Secret Weapon*, *SH in Washington*, *SH Faces Death*, *The Spider Woman* and *The House of Fear*. Please contact her at amanda@oscar.freeserve.co.uk.

Geraldine Beare is a member of RSVP: **The Research Society for Victorian Periodicals**, whose conference entitled 'Image and Text, Image in Text' will be held at the University of Ghent in Belgium from 8 to 10 July. Among the many panel discussions will be 'Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's Sherlock Holmes Stories: Crime and Mystery from the Text to the Illustrations'. I think it's too late to register now, but you can get information from Griet Vandermassen at the Department of English, Rozier 44, 9000 Gent, Belgium.

The CD-ROM *The World of Sherlock Holmes*, which I reviewed enthusiastically some time ago, is now available at just £9.95 including postage and VAT — a real bargain. Visit the website www.worldofholmes.com or send a sterling cheque payable to Peter Brown, to World of Holmes, 7 Candover Street, London W1W 7DN. Or e-mail <enquiries@worldofholmes.com>.

Sherlock no. 59 features Robert Sanderson on *CSI*; Paul M Chapman on the gothic world of Sherlock Holmes; David Stuart Davies on the Golden Age of crime fiction; Calum McCleod on Lee Childs; M J Elliott on TV incarnations of Philip Marlowe; Gavin Collinson on the cinematic enemies of Sherlock Holmes ... There's a new story by June Thomson, and a host of further articles. The magazine is published six times a year by Atlas Publishing Ltd, at £3.95 or \$6.50 the issue. A six-issue subscription is £23.70 (rest of world £26.00 or \$40.00) from Atlas Publishing Ltd, Jordan House, Old Milton Green, New Milton, Hants. BH25 6QJ. The US representative is Classic Specialties (PO Box 19058, Cincinnati, OH 45219, USA; sherlock@sherlock-holmes.com). Check the website at www.sherlockholmes.com.

Periodicals received. *Quivers on the Web*, April 2004 (221B, Philip Weller, 6 Bramham Moor, Hill Head, Fareham, Hants. PO14 6RU). *The Illustrious Clients News*, May 2004 (**The Illustrious Clients**, Steven T Doyle, 540 W Sycamore Street, Zionsville, IN 46077, USA). *The Parallelogram*, April 2004 (**The Parallel Case of St Louis**, Joseph J Eckrich, 914 Oakmoor, Fenton, MO 63026, USA). *The Camden House Journal*, April & May 2004 (**The Occupants of the Empty House**, Debbie Tinsley, PO Box 21, Zeigler, IL 62999, USA). *The School Report*, Summer Term 2004 (**The Priory Scholars**, Horace L Coates, 21 Butcombe Road, Leicester LE4 0FY). *The Whaling News*, April & May 2004 (**The Harpooners of the Sea Unicorn**, Michael E Bragg, PO Box 256, St Charles, MO 63302-0256, USA). *The Baker Street Bugle*, issue 19 (**The Deerstalkers of Welshpool**, Roy Upton-Holder, Baskerville, 146 Little Henfaes Drive, Welshpool, Powys SY21 7BA). *The Baker Street Journal*, Spring 2004 (Steven Rothman, 220, West Rittenhouse Square, #15-D, Philadelphia, PA 19103, USA; subscriptions, PO Box 465, Hanover, PA 17331, USA; correspondence for **The Baker Street Irregulars** should go to Michael Whelan, 7938 Mill Stream Circle, Indianapolis, IN 46278, USA). *Three-Pipe Problem Plugs and Dottles*, April-May 2004 (**The Nashville Scholars of the Three Pipe Problem**, Kay Blocker pkblocker@comcast.net). *Mayday Mayday*, May 2004 (**The Crew of the SS May Day**, Oscar Ross, 19 Ardcarne Way, Belfast BT5 7RP). *Communication*, May-June 2004 (**The Pleasant Places of Florida**, Wanda & Jeff Dow, 1737 Santa Anna Drive, Dunedin, FL 34698, USA). *Ineffable Twaddle*, May 2004 (**The Sound of the Baskervilles**, Terri Haugen, 3606 Harborcrest Court NW, Gig Harbor, WA 9832-8981, USA).

Scuttlebutt from the Spermacti Press, April 2004 (Peter E Blau, 7103 Endicott Court, Bethesda, MD 20817-4401, USA; pblau@dgsys.com).

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