



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
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MINUTES of the meeting of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION June 7, 2007

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, August 2nd, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at:

The Westmount Public Library
(Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Montreal, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

“The Adventure of the
Creeping Man”

prepared by Carol Abramson
This meeting's quiz:
“The Adventure of the Noble
Bachelor” by Erica Penner

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, June 7th, 2007 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Stanley Baker, Mack Belfer, Paul Billette, Patrick Campbell, Geoff Dowd, Sarah Dowd, David Dowse, David Kellett (absence of absences for five years!), Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Amy Shulman, Ron Zilman

Regrets: None. We try to maintain a positive attitude.

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called promptly to order at 6:32 by our co-sovereign Jack Anderson, who conveyed salutations from Wilfrid deFreitas from London, England. Jack announced that he was going to try to finalize our summer activities at this meeting.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Show and Tell, Up and Down, Now You See It and Now You Don't)

1) **A Collectable Plate**

Paul Billette showed a book plate signed by Leslie Klinger, author of the most recent *Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. Paul pointed out that the Quality Paperback Book Club was running a promotional special on the first two volumes of the exciting ~~Klinger~~ Klinger set for \$9.95 for both volumes!

2) **The Campbells Are Coming!**

Patrick Campbell, always a treasure-trove of interesting facts, artifacts, and memorabilia, shared with us the sad obituary from *The Globe and Mail* about the passing of Reginald Russel, founder-owner of Russel Books, long a Montreal landmark. Patrick added to this an anecdote of how our own Wilfrid deFreitas had become a bookseller, a genesis not unconnected with the late Mr. Russel. The showstopper of the evening was Patrick's grand Sherlock Holmes Tankard, an oversized, very heavy pewter stein with all kinds of artistically presented icons of TWGCD in its casting. Truly a marvelous piece of craftsmanship offered in the not-too-distant past by some company skilled in the art of preying on us passionate Sherlockians with above-average memorabilia that would make us protest that yea, we *do* have room on the shelf for yet another truly magnificent piece that we cannot possibly do without, share with our friends, and cause them to wonder, "Gee, how can I get me one of those ...?"

And then the question was put: Why is there a piece of glass at the bottom of a British tankard? To which we, who have been to college, answered almost to a man and woman: "To espy on our enemies whilst quaffing in ye olde nefarious public houses." And we did so with such conviction that you would have thought our earnestness would have averted any correction in the matter. But nay, not so. We were sagaciously informed by David Kellett that due to the way in which young, unsuspecting quaffers of the past were impressed into His Majesty's Royal Navy, it became a matter of necessity to build these public house tankards with a glass bottom so that the drunken louts could see the king's coin sitting at the bottom before they chugged their first glug. To drink from such a coin-infected tankard signified the acceptance by the unsuspecting young man of the king's vicarious offer, through his recruiting agents, to service in the navy. The things you learn when you come to a Bimetallic meeting, no? Bring friends.

3) **Hound's Afoot in London**

We were read Wilfrid's e-mail from London, announcing that he and Susan had just attended a *Hound of the Baskervilles* play in the west end, in which three actors played all the roles in a farcical treatment of the original novel. Susan added that Holmes's Spanish accent was quite humorous, and that the play was quite enjoyable

4) **First Toast – To the Master**

By Jack Anderson

Sherlock Holmes of Montague Street?

Holmes said of Victor Trevor: "He was the only friend I made during the two years I was at college." It was the advice of Trevor's father that Holmes should become a detective. "It seems to me that all the detectives of fact and fancy would be children in your hands. That's your line of life, sir, and you may take the word of a man who has seen something of the world." (in "The Gloria Scott")

The "hobby" of which Holmes spoke ultimately made him the figure of some notoriety at his college. In "The Musgrave Ritual" he tells Watson of Reginald Musgrave's arrival one day at his lodgings at Montague Street when the visitor declared: "I understand, Holmes, that you are turning to practical ends those powers with which you used to amaze us?" Thus, having become convinced of his abilities and opportunities, in 1877 or 1878, he set out for London to establish himself as the world's first consulting detective.

Aside from those cases that were presumably solved while he was in school and thus pass into the period of his amateur years, Holmes's first actual case was the affair of "The Gloria Scott," which was solved before he left for London.

Once in London, he situated himself in Montague Street and began the long road to success. Among his early cases were several failures, as mentioned in "The Five Orange Pips" when Holmes declared, "I have been beaten four times – three times by men, and once by a woman."

Case by case he grew in prominence both among the criminal classes and begrudgingly, among the officers and men of Scotland Yard. A fact of his increasing success was made clear by his desire to find new rooms, although he was still not financially independent as can be seen by his need to have a fellow lodger.

As fortune would have it, Holmes knew young Stamford and through him met Dr. John Watson. The two went to inspect 221B Baker Street together and decided to move in, ending the saga of Sherlock Holmes of Montague Street.

Please raise your glasses to The Master.

(Excerpted from *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana* – Matthew E. Bunson)

5) **Excessive Bone-builder**

David Kellett introduced us to two incontrovertible facts:

1 – He has had uninterrupted attendance at our bi-monthly meetings for the past five years. We applauded this achievement, and wish David many more years of uninterrupted attendance.

2 – The caltrop (first misheard by your Lowly Scribe as a "cowtrap.")

Once David spelled the word, your faithful L.S. interpreted it as follows:

cal = abbreviation for "calcium," essential in the building of healthy bones.

trap = French for "too much" or "excessive."

Wrong again.

David patiently explained that a caltrop is verily as my *Webster's* defines it: "a device with four metal points so arranged that when any three are on the ground the fourth projects upward as a hazard to the hoofs (not hooves) of horses or to pneumatic tires." The etymology is in *calketrappé*, Middle English for "star thistle" and the "puncture vine" family. Some people correctly spell it "calthrop," but not your Lowly Scribe. He never spelled it either way because he'd never heard of it until the night of June 7, 2007. Another reason why you should bring all your friends to our society meetings, not just the annual dinner which some people mistakenly believe is more entertaining.

6) **Second Toast – To Dr. Watson**
By Geoff Dowd

By Geoff's recollection, he was probably the seventh member of our society. He visited us with his daughter Sarah. Hope to see you again soon!

John Hamish Watson was born, according to W.S. Baring-Gould, on August 7th, 1852.

While still young, his mother passed away, and the family emigrated to Australia. He was thus familiar with the goldfields of that country as noted in "The Sign of Four."

John returned to England to attend school when he was about 13, where he met Percy Phelps.

Unlike Holmes, the young Watson seemed to be both sociable and popular – he took part, for example, in the cruel treatment of young Phelps that was considered such a "piquant" thing by the schoolboys. ("The Naval Treaty") Watson's family must have been doing well as he attended the same school as Phelps, whose uncle was the powerful politician Lord Holdhurst.

In 1872, Watson entered the University of London Medical School to pursue a medical degree. As part of his training, he worked at St. Bartholomew Hospital in London as a staff surgeon, where Stamford was his dresser. Having graduated in 1878, he proceeded to Netley to follow another course for Army physicians, then was posted to the Fifth Northumberland Fusiliers in India. On landing in Bombay, he learned that his corps had advanced into Afghanistan, so he was temporarily reassigned to the Sixty-Fourth Foot Regiments (Berkshires) and took part in the Battle of Maiwand on July 27, 1880.

During the bloody fighting, he was wounded by a Jezail bullet, and would have been captured by the enemy but for the courage of his orderly, Murray. Recovering from his wound in Peshawar, he was then struck with enteric fever to the point where "his life was despaired of."

He was sent home to Britain, released from the Army, and found himself "free as the air – or as free as an income of eleven shillings and sixpence a day will permit a man to be."

He naturally gravitated to London, "that great cesspool into which all the loungers and idlers of the Empire are irresistibly drained."

By early January, 1881, he had decided to find cheaper lodgings than his current hotel in the Strand, fortuitously meeting Stamford at the Criterion Bar. Their conversation led to Watson's meeting with Sherlock Holmes, and you know the rest of the story!

Please raise your glass to Doctor Watson!

(Excerpted from *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana* – Matthew E. Bunson)

7) **The Old Sticky Wicket Ploy**

Patrick Campbell questioned how it would have been possible for anyone to be beaten with a wicket as described by Watson.

8) **Distinguished Guest**

Amy Shulman made her Bimetallic debut at this meeting. She had been invited by Stanley Baker, our party whip. (This "whip" thing is not meant in a pejorative sense. A party whip is the functionary of any political party in our parliamentary structure whose chief responsibility is to in-gather the members for a crucial vote. There was no intention to evoke the imagery of Stanley in black leather, or chains, with spikes, shackles, implements of torture [well, maybe his humor], or anything like that. Let us allay that impression immediately. We meant "whip" only in the good sense.

Back to Amy Shulman. Ms Shulman, a thespian (someone who thespys with some regularity, your Lowly Scribe believes), had just performed in a play the day before at Victoria Hall. He was also scheduled to perform dramatic readings of plays in the Westmount Library in the coming months.

Welcome, Amy. We hope to see you again at our meetings!

9) **Quiz – Results**

"The Adventure of the Noble Bachelor" prepared by Erica Penner.

Possible total: 100 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Carol Abramson	61½	bookmark
2.	David Kellett	60½	bookmark
3.	Geoff Dowd	51½	bookmark

The next quiz will be based on "The Adventure of the Creeping Man," prepared by Carol Abramson.

10) **Elucidation of Tonight's Story**

1. Patrick began the discussion on this night's story by voicing doubt that the piece in the agony (personals) column in *The Morning Post* would never in reality have been inserted there because it was more of a news item.

His second point was that in the St. Simon family, the second son would never had had a title. Therefore why was he described as titled?

2. David Dowse's response was that we have to assume that the first son had died. As evidence he cited that since the comparative degree was used rather than the superlative (-er rather than -est), there were only two sons, giving credence to the theory that the first son was no longer alive and that as a result, the younger son, being next in line, was now titled.

3. David Dowse explained that the word "noble" was used sarcastically since the bachelor was anything but noble.

4. Those who had read the story liked it.

Paul Billette said it contained "the most masterful put-down in history."

11) **Third Toast – To the Woman**

By Patrick Campbell

It is very strange how, in some of the cases of Sherlock Holmes, as recorded for us by Dr. Watson, some single character will engage our attention and stand out, even though the parts they played were small.

Take the case of Irene Adler, who really appeared in only one (SCAN) of the sixty tales, although there was a passing reference to her in three others (Ident, Blue, Last). And in that one tale Irene is recorded as having spoken only five ("Good night, Mister Sherlock Holmes) words!

Scores of writers have tried to establish some romantic attachment between Holmes and Irene Adler, but generally unconvincingly.

There are many references in the Canon, in several stories, that make our hero's opinion of the woman quite clear, and although Dr. Watson assured us that, to Holmes, she would always be THE woman, he assures us that Holmes felt no emotion akin to love for her ... admiration and respect are more fitting words – so let us raise our glasses then ...

To The Woman!

12) **The Perfect Murder**

David Dowse asked us once again to come up with a method to produce a story of the perfect murder in which the perpetrator does not get caught. Here are his instructions:

The perfect crime – getting away with it

Murder:

- Most murders are crimes of passion where a person acts on impulse in an instant.
- What I want is to use the imagination, meticulous preparation and planning, and high tech gadgetry to outwit the CSIs of our world.

It is so easy to take your victim out on a boat in the ocean and at the height of a storm just push him overboard.

You must figure out a way to disconnect yourself from your victim so that the police cannot trace the crime back to you through the motive. You must be seen by many to be somewhere else when the actual deed is done.

How the murder is accomplished is not nearly as important as being invisible and unattached.

Every person that you take into your confidence is a potential loose thread that the police can latch onto and connect to you; as well as being a ready-made blackmailer who must also be dealt with severely. So you must do it all yourself.

You must know your victim: all his habits, likes, and dislikes, routines, family, friends, home, car, etc., but you must learn all this without being noticed.

You must learn how criminal detection has advanced into forensic investigation so that you can leave as few clues to your identity as possible.

What are the advantages and disadvantages of committing the murder in a public place versus a private space?

I think that committing the murder in as remote and isolated a locale as possible would be best. Poisoned mushrooms in a stew made over the campfire. A quick shove of the victim over a scenic cliff. (Caution: 1. Remove paper and writing implements so he can't scribble a condemning note on the way down! 2. If it's a short fall and your victim knows shorthand, you're still potentially in trouble if he's got so much as a postage stamp on him. 3. Make sure there are no parrots in the area. If your vic encounters one on the way down, blabs to the parrot and the parrot squawks to the cops, you're toast.) Get him drunk so he stumbles and spread-eagles on the ground over a huge nest of fire ants as his favorite pot of honey he always carries in his vest pocket shatters while the fire ants go insane and reduce him to bones.

How to get rid of the body? Cut it up into little pieces and feed it to the sharks, piranhas, grizzly bears, or pigs?

How delicious is your murder menu going to be?

13) **Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson**
By Sarah Dowd

The long-suffering landlady of 221B Baker Street was surprisingly, never directly involved in any of the published cases of the Canon, although she aided Holmes in "The Empty House," and summoned Dr. Watson into the affair of "The Dying Detective."

She was always there to give Holmes, and Watson, when he resided at Baker Street, all of his needed comforts, particularly his meals, especially breakfast.

Holmes was apt to complain of her presence in his rooms while he was on a case, but he also rewarded her with money, and, on a few occasions, with his praise. In "The Naval Treaty," he declared that "her cuisine is a little limited, but she has as good an idea of breakfast as a Scotchwoman." (This is praise? Have you ever met a haggard you liked? Acquired tastes don't count.)

Dr. Watson was more effusive: in "The Dying Detective" he described her as "a long-suffering woman." Not only was her first-floor flat invaded at all hours by throngs of singular and often undesirable characters, but her remarkable lodger showed an eccentricity and irregularity in his life which must have sorely tried her patience.

She was fond of Holmes, too, for he had a remarkable gentleness and courtesy in his dealings with women.

Ladies and gentlemen, please raise your glasses to

Mrs. Hudson!

(Excerpted from *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana* – Matthew E. Bunson)

14) **Challenging Activities for Inquiring Minds**

Our discussion on summer activities evoked all manner of responses, one of them so risqué that your Lowly Scribe's hand shook at the mere mention of it, and he cannot read his own writing. Fortunately, the other activities were not as shocking, and they are faithfully reproduced here:

Victorian Garden Party
Target Shooting with Air Guns
Serious Play Reading
Crime Solving
Visit to a Crime Lab
Victorian Potluck Dinner

15) **Fifth Toast – To the Society**

By Maureen Anderson

The Bimetallic Question is one of the youngest Sherlockian societies in North America, founded in May 1979 by two Montreal Sherlockians, David Dowse and Wilfrid de Freitas. Their current lodgings are located in the Westmount Room of the Westmount Public Library.

The society's members range from Baker Street Irregulars, Holmes and Watson wannabees, and at times (may I dare say it), Moriarty's bandits desperately trying to learn Sherlock's next moves.

All members are dedicated to the concept that our meetings should be at the very least, scholarly, social, or entertaining. If the game is afoot, then we can testify that the Bimetallic Question has played the "game" unusually well by offering over the years, on a bi-monthly basis, presentations which were scholarly, social, or entertaining, and not infrequently, all three!

Some of the society's wholesome diversions – all designed to keep the memory of Sherlock Holmes alive and fostering an appreciation of Dr. John Watson's "sacred writings" range from Victorian garden parties, air gun target practices, trips to the falls, friendly games of billiards, birthday celebrations to name a few all showing our camaraderie, lavishly supported by fine food and drink.

To our past, present, and future Society!

Our dear friends, you would confer a great favour upon us by joining us at the next meeting of "THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION" which is being held on Thursday, June 7th, 2007, at 6:30 p.m.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to www.bimetallicquestion.org

