



THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower
Montreal, Canada H4Z 1K2

MINUTES of the meeting of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION August 2, 2007

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, October 11th, 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 Priory
School" prepared by
Wilfrid de Freitas
This meeting's quiz: "The Adventure
of the Creeping Man" prepared by
Carol Abramson

CHANGE OF DATE FOR NEXT MEETING

Due to the Jewish High Holidays¹,
our October meeting will take place

one week later, on

Thursday, October 11.

See you there!

¹ There are no "Low Holidays" per se although one is permitted to feel
"under the weather" on a High Holiday. Contrary to what some people
believe, the "High" Holidays do not involve smoking weed.

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August
2nd, 2007 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West,
Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Stanley Baker, David Kellett*, Paul Billette, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Veronica Islas, David Kellett*, Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Erica Penner, David Kellett*, Arlene Scher, Amy Shulman. (For explanation of [*] please see top of next page.)

Regrets: Joan O'Malley

* Neither we nor David Kellett (who was at home recuperating from surgery just a few days earlier – a poor excuse for non-attendance if ever there was one) can explain the multiple appearances of his signature on our attendance sheet, and in different handwriting. This may be an extension of David Dowse's handwriting experiment.

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called promptly to order at 6:35 by our co-sovereign Jack Anderson.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Show and Tell, Abbott and Costello, Ferry and Mersey, and others)

1. **Patrick Carded?**

Patrick Campbell introduced us to the cigarette cards of Conan Doyle characters, published by the Alexander Boguslavasky Company, a proud old London name. Patrick then moved that David Kellett be declared officially present at the meeting this evening.

So said us one, so said us all.

This was an interesting and delightful pastime, and one we are considering adopting for all future meetings. What fun we will have, declaring someone officially there when they are already there.

If we can just get Walter Cronkite over for an evening, we can have him host a special session of "You Are There, Bimetallic Version."

2. **Mouth of the Port?**

Wilfrid deFreitas announced that when he and Susan were in England recently, they visited the City Museum and Records Office in Portsmouth. Why, you ask? This is because the late world-renowned Sherlockian scholar, Richard Lancelyn Green, had bequeathed his collection of Doyle research, books, and memorabilia, to this institution. Again, you ask, Why? Probably because Sir Arthur Conan Doyle began his medical practice in Portsmouth. The collection consists of first editions, some still in their dust jackets, immaculate copies of the Memoirs and Adventures, his diaries, bank book, passport, and more.

3. **First Toast – To the Master**
by Patrick Campbell

I will sing a song of Sherlock,
I will praise him once again.
I will tell you of his triumph,
I will tell you of his pain.

You will shudder at the dangers,
You will learn of all his woes
You will study all his habits,
You'll have hatred for his foes.

We will study all the Canon,
We will read it once again.
We will marvel at his wisdom,
We will follow in his train.

They will know the way he did it,
They will see him work it out.
They will read the famous stories,
They will never have a doubt.

He will always be our hero,
He will never let us down.
He will surely live forever,
He has earned his great renown.

Holmes's spirit's always with us,
Watson's tales will ever shine.
So we'll drink this toast together,
For the sake of auld lang syne.

4. **First-and-a-half Toast – To the Master**
by Elliott Newman

(Due to a double-booking of toasts, Elliott prepared the following. Pedantic and self-indulgent as usual, Elliott had to turn a simple assignment into a veritable Titanic which having avoided the iceberg, blithely headed for razor-sharp shoals on a calm sea under clear skies and sank anyway. – Lowly Scribe)

This toast is a little unusual since it incorporates "Show and Tell." Since I thought long and hard about what to toast and how to do it, you might call this my five-pipe problem. It has been designed for your entertainment, elucidation, and delight. Because there has been so much reference to The Master's pipe-smoking, I felt it long overdue to share with you a brief pipe-smoking history of The Master. Don't raise your glass yet. Your arm will get tired.

a. First, a word about pipe-smoking and what it means to someone who takes it seriously.

There are meditative and soporific effects of certain legal pipe tobaccos that cause the world to slow down and turn one's thoughts inward. If you are planning to smoke a pipe and you don't hitch your horse to this ride, you are fighting the pleasure of the pipe-smoking passion, and might just as well suck caffeine tabs. Friends had told me about the need to step out of my usual pace and wear a different hat while smoking a pipe. At first I didn't believe them, even though I too was a pipe smoker. It's something you have to experience for yourself. But you have to be ready. We note that Mr. Holmes of Baker Street always sets a mood when he smokes his pipe. In the vernacular of the American Indian, he is "taking counsel with himself." Specific reference is made to the process of pipe-smoking when Holmes is confronted with a particularly fiendish or dastardly situation that seems to defy all conventional avenues to a satisfactory resolution. On

these occasions he retires to his rooms and smokes himself, his clothes, books, rugs, apertures, and mental processes *in extremis* according to what he would describe as a "three-pipe problem." Invariably, as the last embers of the last bowl die, and the cosmos is reduced to dottle and ash, Holmes emerges from the ethereal other-worldliness of his night-long meditations, the solution laid out before him. Or a plan by which he will reach a solution. For with Mr. Sherlock Holmes, the key is in the plan. His action, seemingly frenetic; his motives, seemingly inscrutable; his results, apparently miraculous although the process has been explained, render us all geniuses with perfect hindsight.

And the plan came about by retaining the relevant facts, and discarding the useless ones until only the solution remained. Usually, Mr. Holmes's three-pipe illuminations defied verbal explanation. Rather, the man of action leaped into his disguises, disappeared into the seamy, fiery, or Stygian underworld in the same manner as Jung and Freud would describe our plunge into the subconscious, and he would surface in some mysterious fashion, with traces of another persona clinging to him like smoke, to be shed with the clarification of facts, Watson, facts, since facts are what give birth to the world and keep it running despite our reluctance – yes, our reluctance – to surrender our misguided convictions – and to see what is there.

b. Next, a description of Mr. Sherlock Holmes's tobaccos.

In the contemporary bible of pipe-smoking, *The Ultimate Pipe Book*, U.S. author Richard Carleton Hacker informs us (p. 164): "In Victorian times, shag was a very coarse-cut tobacco and was the favored smoke of Sherlock Holmes. Today, however, shag has come to mean (paradoxically) a finely cut tobacco which is often found in Cavendish tobaccos.

Here, so early in our discussion of Holmes's choice of tobacco, we have our first conundrum. Why? because "shag" with a small "s" is a *cut* of tobacco. The coarse-cut shag of Sherlock Holmes was probably a mixture of the light-colored, fast-burning Virginia, and the relatively neutral and slow-burning Burley, both leaves of which were most likely imported from America. A coarse cut means that the tobacco will burn more slowly than a fine cut. It will smolder. Embers will be hard to find, and because of the slow-burning, relatively tasteless Burley, you may suspect that the pipe has gone out. But a meditative pipe smoker knows better. Trust that golden Virginia to keep the pipe alive and the process going.

There is a skill to keeping that pipe alive and Holmes knew it well. In the transaction between Holmes and his pipe, a sub-set of mental and spiritual energies are at play that can involve intense powers of concentration. Where is the ember? Where is that spark? What is there about the mind that keeps that hidden ember alive, that shifting, elusive ember which will eventually cast light on the problem at hand? Never underestimate the strength of the ruminations of a contemplative pipe smoking man or woman.

Back to the tobacco. I suspect that Holmes may have also enjoyed anywhere from a hint to a liberal dose of the pungent Turkish Latakia in his shag blend. Incidentally, Latakia has never been grown in Turkey, but Syria. When tobaccos are prepared in the English tradition, we find no casing or flavoring added. The Brits do not like their tobaccos adulterated, which means they smoke the non-aromatic (unsweetened) tobaccos. By contrast, the Americans get off – indecorously – on as many fragrances and flavors as you can imagine: whiskey-flavored, rum, wine, fruit, you name it. I suspect they also like to add glycerides and other chemicals to aid in the smooth and quick burning of their pipe tobaccos, as they do to excess in cigarettes.

What is now known as shag tobacco – that finely shredded mainly lower-quality Virginia leaf, is primarily used in cigarettes, either ready-made or roll-your-own.

As far as I can tell, Mr. Holmes's "shag" was not a brand of tobacco, but a cut. We can – and should – speculate on what brands he preferred, or if he had a private blend prepared for him at a London tobacconist's. Incidentally, private blending was initiated on a large scale by Alfred Dunhill in his tobacco store in the second decade of the last century.

Before leaving the subject of Victorian tobacco, let us bid a smoky farewell to the pre-eminent position of Craven A tinned tobacco. The "A" was for Arcadia, suggested by Sir James Barrie, the pipe smoking creator of Peter Pan. This too may have been Holmes's tobacco of choice.

Hacker (p. 214) tells us that Holmes smokes Shag (capital "S") tobacco, identifying it as a brand, while Watson smokes Ship. However, he doesn't give us the contents of those blends.

Hacker also reckons that given Holmes's penchant for experimentation, he probably tried many different tobaccos and combinations thereof.

A closing word on tobacco and Sherlock Holmes. Since pipe smoking was an intrinsic part of his life, he would not have restricted himself to a single brand or type of tobacco. As the current line of Dunhill tobaccos bears out, there are early morning mixes, after-breakfast, lunch, mid-afternoon, aperitif, evening, and good night tobaccos to suit your mood, your meal, your drink, and the ratiocination of the spheres.

c. Sherlock Holmes's unorthodox and disgusting smoking habits.

According to Hacker (p. 213) in the course of 60 stories, The World's Greatest Consulting Detective smokes his pipe in 54 of them, while Watson smokes in only seven. In my opinion, this makes Watson far less of an aficionado than Holmes, and this may account for the fact that Watson does not tell us about the brand or composition of tobacco that Holmes smokes. Hacker points out that "for all of his pipe and tobacco expertise, Holmes persists with some of the vilest smoking habits ever recorded upon the printed page. For example, he saves all of the 'plugs and dottles' (those tar-stained remnants left in the moist heel of the pipe) from the previous day's smoke, dries them out and resmokes them! Holmes also keeps his tobacco in the toe of a Persian slipper that hangs by the fireplace in what must be one of the driest spots in all of London. And he stores his pipes with the bits lower than the bowl, thereby letting everything to drain into the mouthpiece. There are so many *faux pas* in the foregoing, that it is a miracle that Holmes ever survived into his bee-keeping dotage!

d. Fourth, a word about the calabash.

In the pipe bible (pp. 68-69), Hacker tells us, "The calabash pipe is most often associated with the character of Sherlock Holmes, which is ironic since that legendary detective never once smoked a calabash in any of the stories Sir Arthur Conan Doyle wrote about him ... Nevertheless, the calabash is still one of my favorite companions when watching the old Basil Rathbone reruns on television, or for any other form of 'mysterious' at-home smoking."

Hacker continues, "The calabash is a South African gourd which has been artificially shaped during the growing process to give it a gracefully hooked neck. After harvesting, the gourd is trimmed at both ends, hollowed out and dried, etc.

e. Holmes's Pipes and his Portrayers

Since Sherlock Holmes is never described as having smoked a calabash or even a meerschaum, this pretty well leaves him with a small collection of briar, clay, and cherrywood pipes. Clay smokes hot, breaks easily, and is usually not too interesting to look at. Cherry is far too porous and problematic, not to mention that it burns through easily. The briar is taken from the large, clumpy root of the white heath tree which grows in the rocky Mediterranean soil. It is by far the most popular pipe-smoking material, and is chosen because of its combination of porosity, resistance to heat, and stark natural beauty. No other woods on this planet can equal the performance of a good briar, although many have been tried. Surpassing the briar in smokability is the solid block meerschaum, a naturally white-colored lightweight, porous material created over millions of years from compressed organic sea matter. Meerschaums are soft and easy to carve, resulting in some of the beautiful carved pipes you can still find in tobacco shops and museums. If properly cured, waxed, respected, and smoked enough, these pipes will turn a rich, deep honey color over time. It is the lathe-turned and bored meerschaum that is fitted into the specially-grown calabash gourd which results in a unique if somewhat cumbersome smoking instrument which again, should have no place in any discussion on Sherlock Holmes.

The calabash seems to have begun its erroneous connection with The Master when (Hacker, p. 214) the actor William Gillette portrayed Holmes on stage from 1901 to 1937 and used the calabash in the smoking scenes. He chose this oversized pipe because he didn't know what to do with his hands.

Peter Cushing smoked a briar in the 1967 version of *The Hound of the Baskervilles*.

Until the appearance of Jeremy Brett, the most famous of all theatrical Holmeses was Basil Rathbone who took up smoking only to be more convincing in the role.

And Brett himself may have smoked a variety of pipes in his 41 Granada episodes. I do recall seeing a photo of him with a long-stemmed churchwarden pipe. This would be the briar equivalent of the long-stemmed clay pipes of which Holmes probably had several.

That being said,

I give you ... The Master!

5. **To Book or not Two Books?**

Rachel Alkallay had a probing question that prompted unfettered stream-of-consciousness responses from our attendees (always a provocative thing). It had to do with a conundrum stemming from a discrepancy in second-hand book prices for similar or even different books. Rachel wanted to know why there were different prices. As the dust settled, Wilfrid the bookseller said that the market determined these fluctuating and often apparently incongruous prices. This means that if you, Rachel, go into Sotheby's and espy a volume of Dame Edith Frigwell's *Memoirs of a Hampstead Heath Madam* at a price of £350, and your *Lowly Scribe* slithers next door into Happy Harry's Porno and Licorice Shoppe and sees the exact same book in the same condition in the discards bin for £1.50, this is a silent virtue of the free market economy. It also explains why it always pays to shop on eBay.

6. **Klingons on Sale.**

As if in response to #5 above, Jack Anderson showed a two volume set of the *Klinger Annotated Sherlock Holmes*. He had ordered this extra two-volume set from the Quality Paperback Book Club for a deep-discount price. The price was ridiculously low, and he generously offered to part with it to a lucky member for the price he had paid, plus postage. Your *Lowly Scribe* immediately threw down his pen and placed his order, thus becoming the second member of the society to own a softbacked Klinger. That bit of excitement having passed, the *L.S.* picked up his pen and resumed scribing.

7. **"Happy Birthday, Watson."**

These are words we've have never heard pass the lips of TWGCD. We can only imagine with wonder and awe, the *panache* with which Jeremy Brett might have uttered them had the improvident television people only but written those three simple words into a script – any script. However, we had the honour to do what Jeremy Brett, and Sherlock Holmes (in that order) did not: wish Watson and our own Paul Bilette a happy August 7 birthday. Cheers!

8. **Yes, but those quarters add up.**

Carol Abramson told us she got a complete copy of the canon at a garage sale for 25¢ Canadian. (Rachel, please see #5 and 6 above.)

9. **Was Kim gay?**

Now that we have your attention, this is to say that Jack Anderson brought in the required pieces for Kim's game, and set us to task. In three minutes we had to memorize as many as we could of the Dinky toy-sized pieces on the table, and write as many of them down as possible. These items ranged from a

Sherlockian matchbox to a £5 note, a Mini-Monkey (from an Austin Simian spy spoof movie about an ape with a hairy chest who thinks he's James Bondage and goes on a tail quest because he has been hypnotized by the evil doctor into believing that his has been fallen off) and a host of other instantly forgettable items. The game was won by Veronica Islas, a first-timer to our meetings, proving that with increased attendance at Bimetallica we are either shaving I.Q. points, or we need new people to remind us that there is life beyond the doors of the Westmount Library Reading Room.

10. **Second Toast – To Dr. Watson**
by Geoff Dowd

Jack Anderson read Geoff's toast from the last meeting. Please see Minutes for the Meeting of June 7, 2007.

11. **Whodunnit?**

An esteemed member of the society whose name we will never forget, and which your *Lowly Scribe* omitted to write down, brought in a one-sheet mystery we all had to try to solve. We have all heard about authors murdering the English language, and critics killing authors. But when was the last time a customer in a second-hand bookshop was found murdered on the premises? So it was understandable that nary a one of us had a clue as to the real perp, until David Kellett stepped in with the right answer, and the usual logical and reasonable explanation. Doesn't he always?

12. **Third Toast – To the Woman**
by ?
Extemporized, succinct, a gem.

13. **Quiz – Results**

"The Adventure of the Creeping Man" prepared by Carol Abramson.

Possible total: 100 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Wilfrid de Freitas	63	traveling cribbage set
2.	Erica Penner	62	
3.	Patrick Campbell	59	

Wilfrid and Erica had tied at 62 points each for first place. We held a run-off quiz which Wilfrid won.

Erica, is the appropriate Latin quotation in this case, *sic transit gloria mundi*? We know what it is in English, and it ain't pretty.

Wilfrid presented Maureen with a prize for the lowest score (21). It was a poster-sized facsimile of the London *Daily Chronicle* featuring a story about a murderous attack upon the person of one Sherlock Holmes.

Wilfrid, who is a founding member of the BmQ twenty-eight years ago, has never won a quiz. Congratulations, Wilfrid! You're not getting older; you're getting wiser.

The next quiz will be based on "The Adventure of the Priory School," prepared by Wilfrid .

14. **Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson**
by Stanley Baker

It is surprising that Doyle never wrote "The Mystery of Mrs. Hudson," for though she appeared in 14 of Holmes's stories, we know little about her life and personality. What did Mr. Hudson do? Is he still alive, and were there any children? One can speculate about her age, though in some S.H. movies she was portrayed as middle-aged, with greyish hair. She was more than Holmes's landlady; she was a provider to him and Watson of sustenance as needed. She tolerated Holmes's moods, eccentricities, and a continuous arrival of strange visitors with problems.

If she is ever in Montreal, I am extending an invitation to her to join us at one of our Bimetallic Question sessions, so we can toast her in person. But as she does not seem to be present this evening, we must toast her *in absentia*.

Fellow Sherlockians – TO MRS. HUDSON!!

15. **BmQ's Edgar Award**

Many moons and several meetings ago, David Dowse threw down a challenge to the society in the form of an invitation to draft the outline for a story based on *the perfect murder*. Since your faithful *Lowly Scribe* who usually sits beside David at the society meetings had just leaned downward to retrieve a dropped pencil, it was naturally assumed that he had bent over, rather, to pick up the challenge that David had just thrown down. Rumors continue to abound. Your *Q. S.* maintains that it was the merest of coincidences that caused him to *appear* to accept David's challenge. In fact, as he leaned over *ostensibly* to pick up the challenge, certain actions took place indicating that more than a few stalwart members misunderstood the thrust of David's invitation. We conclude this because over the *Q. S.*'s head and about his person, the following took place: (a) the lights went out; (b) bullets whizzed; (c) a Bowie knife, a stiletto, an *épée*, and a lance all stuck in the table directly in front of him, from a trajectory point behind the hard-working *Q. S.* indicating that if he, who has always been faithful

to the facts, had remained in his usual upright and conscientious seated position, the aforementioned weapons and projectiles would needs have massaged his spine and internal organs in an indiscriminate and traumatic manner causing termination of certain vital processes. In addition, the sudden appearance of a hangman's noose, assorted nostrums (*nostra?*) of arsenic and other powders, a dead fish, and a skull and crossbones from the dollar store on the table in front of your *L.S.*, obviously contributed by those who wish him well, less than well, and are challenged in terms of non-verbal messaging and require correction in the proper displaying of affection, seem to indicate an excess of non-channeled energy. The more syntactically-minded among you will note that while there are no run-on sentences in this paragraph, there is an urgent undertone to rally forces and accede to David's challenge. Because there has been little or no response to this provocative project, David has extended the deadline to a point in the future where all things that rise must inevitably converge. Dear friends, none of us has that long to wait. Sharpen your spears and please send David your submissions now.

To refresh your memories on the details of David's challenge, kindly refer item #12 in the Minutes of the June meeting.

16. **Fifth Toast – To the Society**
by David Kellett

By popular demand, David read the toast he had delivered on the occasion of the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Society.

When first asked to propose this year's toast to the society, I protested that I was not the man for the job as I have only been a member for the last two years; and would be unable to address the goings on of the previous twenty-three. For it is, indeed, an auspicious occasion marking the landmark twenty-fifth year of our society's existence, as well as the sesquicentennial of Holmes's birth.

So I will tell you how I came to be a member and what this has meant to me. It's a convoluted story that begins with me, a perfectly innocent citizen, attending a play at the Centaur. The play in question was *The Last Act*, a Holmes retrospective, if you will. During the intermission I encountered a charming young lady discussing her original sketches, drawings, and silhouettes of Holmes, which were laid out on a table. With my usual tact and aplomb, I jumped into the conversation with both feet. Now, Holmes has been with me all my adult life, but I never actively pursued the matter. In the course of that conversation, this interest became apparent and she encouraged me to attend the next meeting of this society, which I didn't even know existed. Now I'm not a joiner, but I took the plunge and did in fact attend. I was met with a show of kindness and courtesy. I was exposed to a wealth of Sherlockian erudition, and was invited to engage in intelligent conversation which is at a far remove from much of the rest of my life. But the key to it for me was CHARLES – Charles Purdon who has since passed away. Again happenstance plays a role. As it turned out, Charles lived a mere few blocks away from me and was most grateful for a ride home on a cold winter's night. All manner of things were discussed on those rides and our association grew into a treasured friendship.

So for me, he was the door – the door that led to this society. Members come and go, but the society endures. The door is always open, and to enter leads to a world of camaraderie, intellectual stimulation, and the joy of Holmes, the man himself. It is the society that provides it, being an entity greater than the sum of its parts. So it is with the greatest of pleasure that I ask you all to stand ... as we together for the twenty-fifth time raise our glasses to toast our society. Ladies and gentlemen, I give you The BIMETALLIC QUESTION.

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, October 11th, 2007, at 6:30 p.m.

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