



# THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION

Box 883 Stock Exchange Tower  
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*MINUTES*  
*of the meeting*  
*of the*  
*BIMETALLIC QUESTION*  
*December 6, 2007*

**Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on  
Thursday, February 7<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at 6:30 p.m. at:  
The Westmount Public Library  
(Westmount Room)  
4574 Sherbrooke Street West  
Westmount, Quebec

**The Quiz at the next meeting**

**" The Adventure of the Dancing  
Men"**  
prepared by Roger Burrows  
This meeting's quiz: "A Scandal  
in Bohemia" prepared by  
David Kellett

**Minutes** of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

**Present:** Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Jack Anderson, Stanley Baker, Mac Belfer, Roger Burrows, Marie Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid deFreitas, David Dowse, Ann Elbourne, David Kellett, Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Joan O'Malley, Kathryn Radford, Arlene Scher

**Regrets:** Anna Chebchenko, Andrew Henry

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called promptly to order at 6:40 by our co-sovereign Jack Anderson.

## ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Show and Tell, Saccho and Vanzetti, Astaire and Rogers, Various and Sundry)

### 1. **Hey, Mister Snowman ...**

Although this item could not be brought indoors, because parquet flooring tends to lift when dripped upon, we nonetheless commented upon the weather. We saw, *and we observed*, that (1) there was snow on the ground outside; and (2) there were seventeen people in attendance at the meeting; *and we concluded* that despite inclement weather, enough Sherlockian die-hards had been sufficiently motivated to brave the elements in order to attend the meeting. With all these *corpi dilecti vivaecque* eagerly ensconced upon our *posteriori in situ*, the games were about to begin!

### 2. **The Campbells Have Been**

Patrick Campbell went back to Baker Street, and brought back a treasure-trove of programmes, pamphlets, and flyers related to the wonders seen there, including museums, plays, and points of interest that transported us instantly to the era of Victoria and Albert.

### 3. **It Seemed Like a Good Idea at the Time**

Anita Miller asked: Why did Sir Arthur Conan Doyle turn Sherlock Holmes into a cocaine addict?

Answers from our group of perfectly responsible adults:

David Kellett: It's a natural product and it sharpened Sherlock Holmes's mind, as well as adding a dimension to his personality. In "The Sign of Four," he needed it to stimulate mental activity. It's not a character flaw; it's part of the A-type "driven" personality.

Jack Anderson: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle may have met people who were addicted.

David Dowse: It was a natural habit, in keeping with the bohemian lifestyle of Sherlock Holmes.

Joan O'Malley: Doyle was himself unorthodox. He was a phrenologist, an occultist. Subjecting Holmes to cocaine addiction would have been another expression of Doyle's exploration of unorthodox behavior.

### 4. **This Strand Stands without the Use of Hands**

Roger Burrows let us see, touch, feel, hold, and examine an 1891 hard-bound collection of *Strand* magazine. Truly, a life-altering experience. Thank you, Roger.

### 5. **A New Krone Minus the Old Warts**

If we were to wager a queen's ransom that you didn't know Krone was the brand name of a very expensive line of hand writing instruments, we would probably win. David Dowse showed us the current magazine-format annual catalog of The Fountain Pen Hospital on Warren Street in New York City. On the outside back cover is a full-page advertisement featuring a limited-edition Krone fountain pen with a Sherlock Holmes motif. Everything is gold, hand-painted, sculpted,

laquered, gleaming, glowing, radiating, and oozing. It's an instant museum piece designed to fit between thumb and forefinger. It's almost a travesty to fill it with ink. With a sticker price of over \$10,000, this baby will not leave the showroom for the driveway of your Lowly Scribe any time soon. The Krone company seems to be limping after Mont Blanc which has expertly diluted the former prestige and quality of its own brand by stumbling upon the notion of creating a pen in honor of famous writers in the literature of various languages and firing them into stores in malls around the world. This rather successful marketing ploy is catering to the upper end of the pen market occupied to a large degree by indecorously conspicuous consumers who like to collect pricey toys, then put them away in drawers. These beautiful pieces of art also serve to open the doors to a mass market that is showing increasing interest in filling its pockets with ink. While most of us cannot visualize spending thousands, or even hundreds of dollars on a pen, these artistic gems may entice us to think beyond the Bic when next we lay pen to paper and discover the well has run dry.

What's the relevance of all of this to the world of Sherlock Holmes? Well may you ask. A generation or more ago, with the advent of the Personal Computer, doomsayers were prophesying the end of the fountain pen. Ironically, even as they were equipping their businesses, home offices, and children's bedrooms with little Macs, they were rushing into pen shops to snap up collections and assortments of fountain pens which they felt would soon be disappearing forever. Never underestimate the fear of loss as a leading motivator of consumer activity. However, a strange thing happened, not unforeseen by savvy marketing people. While an educated marketplace recognized the potential of computers to change the way we do just about everything, they also realized that computers have no soul, no spirit, no sensitivity. Yes, they have art programs, and they can serve up calligraphic smorgasbords in seconds. And while we have become dependent on these machines for work, information, communication, entertainment, skill-building, and education, AND while we can even carry them in a briefcase or a pocket, something is missing. Perhaps it is a vacuum created by the cold efficiency of their electronic precision, the minimalist sameness of their characters, their frigid indifference to the user, our mode of expression that dictates who we are, our aspiration to connect with an aesthetic we can call our own.

To survive this lack, we must perforce go back to a bygone time, before the first computer chip was even a mote of a gleam in Bill Gates's granddaddy's eye. We need to harken back to a time before telephones, and light on the *escritoire* of handwritten invitations rendered in generous scrawls and tell-tale flourishes, or intaglios well thought-out over the march of years, of intrigue through an inked note upon which a young maid's honor teetered. We need to place ourselves in a time when hardened rubber, in a variety of colors, encased a contoured, gold-plated nib; when the only way to describe the activity of feeding ink was to liken it to the life-force of the human anatomy – the *capillary* design of an ink feeder is compared with the action of thin, yet essential blood vessels in our body. The pen, thus, is life itself in a way that no computer can – or should – ever be.

Can it not be that when we take pen in hand, we add – without surgery – a palpable prosthetic that extends the range of activity while conforming to the function of our own body? Its undemanding, unwhirring, non-electronic, yielding, silent, flowing, forgiving nature allows us to express our own thoughts, dreams, exigencies, and imaginings, and beckons to us to discover our spirit – or at very least, the avenue to express that spirit. This curious tube can be all things to all people. It invites us to carry it everywhere and reminds us to carry our nature with us everywhere too. This is the gift of the pen and the allure, promise, and quiet pact it reseals with us every time we pick it up. The next time you walk by a Krone, a Mont Blanc, a Waterman, a Sheaffer, or any fine or near-fine writing instrument, take a pause. Let your mind travel back to the streets of London, to gas lamps, the thick fog that wove and transported ten thousand hair-raising tales, to the oak or yew desk, the pot, the stylus, the blotter beside your right hand. May your imagination soar. May you connect with the ages that have written the tale of your essence, with the myriad stories that surround us, richer than the glistering of jewels. This is only part of what a pen can do.

**6. From Krone to Half-Crown**

Wilfrid deFreitas brought in a number of items that intrigued us. They included:

- a half-crown, 1896
- “221B Baker Street” – a tin of pipe tobacco, “Carefully blended for FDB Cigar by Tobaksfabrikker, Danmark”
- “Sherlock Holmes” tobacco, made by Peterson, another Danish company. This one was made up of Brazilian and Mysore tobaccos.

If your Lowly Scribe were still smoking his collection of pipes, he would have enjoined Wilfrid to look the other way while “borrowing” some of the contents of these tins for what would promise to be an epochal smoke!

**7. The Streets of London**

Jack Anderson shared a reprint of a very old street guide and map of London.

**8. I Am Not Now, Nor Have I Ever Been ...**

Rachel Alkallay reported on the BmQ’s visit to the RCMP’s Westmount headquarters. The tour was led by Officer Serge Bertrand. He covered such subjects as: fingerprints, footprints, and tire treads. Our delegation was shown the short-term holding cells. These are not designed for overnight guests. Patrick Campbell pointed out that it is now routine for the police to take a print of the outside of the hand, since in a good number of cases, the “perps” are apt to brush up against an object with the side of the hand. We assume that this print has been accepted to be as infallible as fingerprints. Stanley Baker observed that the cells are bisexual in that they can have men and women side-by-side. (Good work, Stanley!). Rachel also reported that Officer Bertrand doesn’t watch CSI programs. We hope that the RCMP will soon rectify this oversight. We quake to ask if he reads about the exploits of TWGCD before retiring at night. Horrors!

9. **First Toast – To the Master**

By Wilfrid deFreitas

“My dear Mister Sherlock Holmes: You really did it very well.”

Coming from Irene Adler, herself a trained actress, this was high praise indeed and just one more compliment, if one were needed, to Holmes’s genius as an actor – yet another talent in the long list of skills he brought to his chosen profession as the world’s first consulting detective.

In addition to the two examples of Holmes’s acting ability mentioned in tonight’s adventure, there are numerous others in the Canon: Captain Basil in “Black Peter,” the wooing plumber Escott in “Charles Augustus Milverton,” the elderly bibliophile in “The Empty House,” the Italian priest in “The Final Problem,” and, in a reversal of the situation in this evening’s adventure, the old woman in “The Mazarin Stone.”

Perhaps, though, the Scotland Yard detective Athelney Jones sums up Holmes’s acting talents best in “The Sign of Four” when he says, “You would have made an actor, and a rare one.”

Ladies and gentlemen, I give you Altamont, the Irish-American spy in “His Last Bow,” otherwise known as Sherlock Holmes.

10. **I Bid Thee a Full Sovereign**

David Kellett showed us a printout of an 1888 Queen Victoria full sovereign he had bid for in e-bay. He didn’t get it, but he has the paper, which is easier to frame.

11. **Pop Goes the Icon**

Kathryn Radford gave us a pop quiz on Christmas icons.

Anne Chebchenko won first prize – a matchbook from Sherlock’s restaurant on Sheppard.

12. **The Return of the Klingoners**

Jack Anderson offered Volumes I (One) and II (Two) of Klinger’s paperback annotated SH for about \$11.00 for the set. Presented as an intelligent alternative to the Baring-Gould version, Jack pointed out that it does not in any way incorporate Baring-Gould. Apparently, there is a Volume III (Three) available in hardcover (at hardcover prices). The Vols. (Volumes) I (One) and II (Two) are still widely available at discounted prices, both as paperbacks and in hardcover. However, now that there is a third volume to the annotated set incorporating the novels, and we don’t know if it will be available (ever) in paperback, this may pose a problem to owners of the two-volume paperback set, particularly when those individuals, being somewhat obsessive in nature, and believing in uniformity and balance upon bookshelves above all else, will ask their spiritual advisors: “How can I possibly live with a set that has two paperbacks and a hardback? How? Shall I position the newest volume between the two paperbacks, so that the set reads: I – III – II? This will also break up SH’s silhouette on the spine, half of which is on Vol. (Volume) I (One), with the other half being on Volume (Vol.) II (Two).” Can we not provide some serious emotional support for these BmQ members at our next meeting by researching the availability of Vol. (Volume) III (Three) in paperback beforehand?

**13. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson**

by Stanley Baker

Dr. John Hamish Watson was born on August 7, 1852. Before he became Holmes' chronicler of all four novels and 52 of 56 short stories, he had served in the Second Anglo-Afghan War in 1878-1880. It is reported that he saw service in Kandahar, which is in the news nearly every day. There is some dispute over this, as his supposed regiment never there. As with Holmes, his death has never been reported in *The Times*, so presumably, Watson must also still be alive. Possibly, he is back with the Army Medical Corps with the allied troops gallantly fighting in Afghanistan today. I therefore think it appropriate that this noble man, who sometimes acted as a foil to Holmes, but is responsible for narrating his adventures, may now be with Canadian forces overseas, be toasted at this auspicious Bimetallic gathering this evening.

Raise your glasses – to Dr. Watson

(Stanley also introduced new guests to our meeting.)

**14. The Annual Dinner**

Jack Anderson and Wilfrid deFreitas passed around the menus from the Vieux Port restaurant (\$37.50) and the Montefiore Club (\$43). An open vote decided the venue in favor of the Montefiore.

Our proposed speaker is Stephan Blackman, an officer with the Montreal Police Force, and trainer at le sureté du Québec. Mr. Blackman has a Black Belt, and is with the Flying Squad.

(Hot News Flash: Mr. Blackman was unavoidably shunted elsewhere and we had to find another speaker. We were extremely fortunate in securing William Weintraub, an accomplished writer and filmmaker. Please see the final pages of these minutes for tidbits of our Annual Dinner.)

**15. Third Toast – To Mrs. Hudson**

by Rachel Alkallay

In toasting Mrs. Hudson, Rachel informed us that the indomitable proprietress of 221B Baker Street would be supervising the kitchen at the Montefiore Club for the evening of our Annual dinner.

**16. Quiz – Results**

“A Scandal in Bohemia” prepared by David Kellett.

David said he'd prepared the story before; redoing it enabled him to fix his mistakes. He said he thought his test was quite good. Stanley rejoined with, “I think that's for us to judge.” They were both right.

Possible total:            77+ points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Roger Burrows	70.5	(Not noted – sorry)
2.	Marie Burrows	68.47	“
3.	Carol Abramson	64.5	“

The next quiz will be based on “The Adventure of the Dancing Men,” prepared by Roger Burrows.

**17. Quiz Fallout**

Regarding “A Scandal in Bohemia,” David Kellett observed that if the king’s men had shown up the next morning, Irene Adler would have been under no obligation to surrender the photo. So why would SH have indicated that she might not have any right to hold onto her property?

No one knew for sure, so we proceeded on to #17.

**18. Fourth Toast – To The Woman**

by David Kellett

**19. A Hare with Smaller Ears**

Wilfrid showed us a pastel of Jonathan Hare. SH was compared with the famous actor of the day.

We were also shown a large sketch of the magnificent Langham Hotel, where the king was staying in the story.

**20. “Ah, You Live Forever When You Write a Line of Two” – Leonard Cohen**

Our own Patrick Campbell was quoted on page 23 of Klinger’s annotated SH. Congratulations, Patrick.

**21. Irregular Photo**

Someone (Wilfrid?) showed us a black-and-white glossy photo of the annual banquet of the Baker Street Irregulars of New York City. Very formal. Very posh. Very big turnout.

**22. Future Toasts**

To The Master	Carol Abramson
To Dr. Watson	Roger Burrows
To The Woman	Marie Burrows
To Mrs. Hudson	Joan O’Malley
To The Society	David Kellett

**23. Fifth Toast – To The Woman**

by Patrick Campbell

For over a quarter of a century we have met to celebrate the life of The Master – only two have survived the full term of our Society – and others have fallen by the way. But the total membership and the attendance at our meetings remain essentially stable. This is surprising when one considers the number of alternatives available, and the perils that surround us.

To you, the survivors, I say Well Done – so please raise your glasses to the Bimetallic Question. To us, it is THE 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, December 6<sup>th</sup>, 2007, at 6:30 p.m.

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to [www.bimetallicquestion.org](http://www.bimetallicquestion.org)

*For a summary of  
our annual dinner,  
P.T.O.  
→→→→→*



*The Annual Dinner*  
*of the Bimetallic Question, January 19, 2008*

Summary

1. Burp.
2. Ah.
3. Amazing.
4. Organizers, you outdid yourselves. The ambiance was *non-pareil*; the food; against all odds, was exquisite; the service was impeccable; the microphone worked; the pipes didn't freeze; the meeting flowed seamlessly from one topic/ speaker/activity to the next; everything captured and held our interest; William Weintraub, our guest speaker, was a treasure-trove of information, creativity, wisdom, humor, and entertainment; the costumes worked; and the toasts were exceptional. Here are excerpts from a few of them:
  - "... Holmes by his own admission is not a sociable individual. Despite that, his relationship with Watson is one of the great friendships in history ... Holmes (is) ... the most perfect reasoning and observing machine that the world has seen, one of the most untidy men that ever drove a fellow-lodger to distraction, but also a great heart as well as a great brain."  
- Roger Burrows, "To the Master"
  - "Ours is truly a democratic society. We embrace all who share a love of the Master and an admiration for his biographer ... Our members are among the most dedicated individuals ... Among us are exceptional individuals who go well beyond the proverbial duty to be of service to their fellow members."  
- Paul Billette, "To the Society"
  - "Sherlock Holmes ... lights a pipe of the rough shag tobacco that he so adores and settles into his favorite chair. He takes down his Stradivarius and creates music. Perhaps he plays something that he once heard her sing. And when he's done and has the proper mood, he takes his photograph and he stares at it. then; borne on a cloud of tobacco smoke, and a wave of the eidetic (vividly recalled) memory that music can bring, he uses his unique powers of concentration to summon her from the half-veiled nostalgia of memory. HE SUMMONS HER ... HE SUMMONS HER ... and for **HIM**, **SHE** is there ... **THE** woman."  
- David Kellett, "To the Woman"
  - "... even if you do not appear regularly in each of the fifty-six stories and the four novels, you are nevertheless present there, in spite of his changing mood, his great disorder, and his eccentricities. Because you belong to him forever, Mrs. Hudson, you are 'his' landlady."  
- Arlene Scher, "To Mrs. Hudson"

