

MINUTES
of the meeting
of the
BIMETALLIC QUESTION
February 5, 2009

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, April 2nd, 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 Stock-broker’s Clerk”
prepared by
Carol Abramson

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, February 5th, 2009 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Stanley Baker, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, Irène Degharersaïg, David Dowse, Chris Herten-Greaven, Solange Himelfarb, David Kellest, Lars Lovkvist, Anita Miller, Elliott Newman, Mietek Padowicz, Judith Philpott, Arlene Scher, Cheryl Sourkes, Heather Wileman-Brown, Ronnie Zilman

Regrets: Erica Penner

Those of you gleaning the Minutes of our Society’s last meeting will notice a particularly creative (*frustrated, actually*) treatment of the names of the some of the attendees in the “Present” section preceding this note. This is because some of the names as written on the attendance sheet were difficult to read. We want to be your alibi for these special Thursday nights, and we cannot do so unless we can read your name properly. The law is very clear on this point. If you feel a burst of anonymity or flourish of extra-planetary activity coming on, please print your name so our Lowly Scribe can get through this major hurdle and still have enough strength to continue writing the Minutes.

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called promptly to order at 6:30 by Wilfrid de Freitas.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating M and M, Burns and Allen, Bugs and Elmer, Buda and Pest)

1. **Welcome Back**

We were pleased indeed to see the return of an old member, Mietek Padowicz, who in the process of rediscovering what's truly important along the path of life, has put the BmQ right up there.

2. **First Toast – To the Master**

by David Dowse

David read a poem by Gary Alan Ruse:

What if, God forbid, Sherlock Holmes had never lived?

What's that, you say, sir? Had Holmes never lived?
That sad speculation I'll not soon forgive!
How boring would be the library's tomes,
If not for the adventures of old Sherlock Holmes.
Moriarty's schemes would have succeeded unmet
Had Holmes not stopped them, don't forget!
The good Dr. Watson, whose roommate was he,
Would have quietly faded into obscurity.
And sadly also, I'll solemnly intone
Would have followed unemployment for Basil Rathbone!
So go away, sir, with your awful rhetorica.
Sherlock Holmes lives! Thank God (and Victoria).

David informed us that this had been a toast offered by Annie Jones, taken from an issue of *The Bohemian Scandal Sheet*, edited by Rev. Ben Wood

3. **Welcome, Welcome**

The society is delighted to welcome its two newest members, Judith Philpott and Chris Herten-Greaven.

4. **The Shadow Knows**

Ronnie Zilman showed us a Sherlockian book, *The Shadow of Reichenbach Falls* by John R. King.

(Is this Laurie King, after the operation?)

5. **In One Ear ...**

Lars Lovkvist, also a new member of the society, showed us a compact disk (audio) of most of the canon's stories, presented by several different readers. It is a Libra Vox recording, costs less than \$10, and you can download it free on the internet.

6. Goodbye, Mr. Chips

Now that the Liberton Bank House, home of the young Arthur Conan Doyle when it was known as Undershaw, has been spared demolition and is a school for a handful of special needs students of the Dunedin school district in this Edinburgh suburb, a decision was made to chop down the ancient sycamore tree on the property. Since Elliott Newman, a BmQ member, likes to make pens out of wood, he e-mailed the only known address for the school, and asked if he might get a small block of wood from the tree upon which SACD undoubtedly climbed as a young boy. The absence of any answer over the past month gives your Lowly Scribe no cause for hope. He fears that the tree has been reduced to sawdust, chips, and firewood. *Sic transit Gloria mundi.*

7. Photo Ops

David Kellett announced that he had 40 photos from our dinner. One of these was an authentic-looking period piece of Jack Anderson which David printed in a sepia tone and set in a wood frame whose colour and pattern matched the background of the photo. A lovely, harmonious treatment, David. In addition, David proposed a toast to Jack for his two years as sovereign and his “yeoman service.” Hear, hear.

8. Now you hear it, now you don't

During our annual dinner, David Kellett had spoken with Dr. Joe Schwartz about Houdini. They will be taping another such conversation and it will air on Dr. Joe's radio program. Its relevance to us is that SACD and Houdini had exchanged correspondence regarding spiritualism.

9. Victorian Salmon Visits Westmount Library, Does Not Leave

Chris Herten-Greaven used a Victorian cookbook to make a salmon-and-parsley pâté. He then used a car to transport it to our meeting where we got to sample this generous offering.

Cheryl Sourkes also brought in a Victorian offering (more on that later).

They were delicious, and endless.

Thank you both for your culinary generosity. Feel free to make a tradition of it.

10. Rate the Granada Series

Several meetings ago, Patrick Campbell had shown us a rating system to help us in scoring the individual programs of Granada's *Sherlock Holmes* series with Jeremy Brett. This followed David Kellett's generous gift of a free set to anyone who wanted one. Several of us are the proud owners of such a set, and Patrick thought this would be an excellent opportunity to see what we thought of the various segments in the series. To date, we have not responded. Patrick's offer is still open, and he is desirous of hearing from us on this subject. You don't need to view the entire series. Patrick would like to know what you think of whatever shows you do watch. The rating system is in a past issue of our Minutes.

11. SACD's Eclectic Interests

SACD was obsessed with spiritualism and was also interested in the military. He wrote an eight-volume set on World War I, based on interviews with officers in France and Flanders.

Patrick showed us a thin book on the army, *Great Britain and the Next Great War*.

12. Going for Bolingbroke

Patrick and his West-Island crew are building a life-sized Bolingbroke twin-engine bomber. It should be ready in about 20 years. Time flies. So will the Bolingbroke.

13. Vowels and Diphthongs

The imagery pertaining to Victorian topless joints (if they had any) has to be complex. We know that today (according to informed sources, since how would your Lowly Scribe know?) that there is music in topless joints. How else could the exotic *danseuses* do their thing with their thong on? Let's extend the metaphor, if you will. Back in SACD's day (not that he would know anything about this either, mind you), IF there were topless joints, we might imagine the music's being supplied by a solo violinist. With a bow (bō), Cheryl Sourkes. He would be off to the side, sliding his bow up and down the strings so the performer with the topless things would have something to dance to. In terms of the canonical story, "His Last Bow," we are fairly certain that the "bow" referred to is pronounced similarly to the "ou" diphthong in "pronounced" and identically to the verbal response we utter upon striking our thumbnail with a hammer, to wit, "ow." In this case, "bow" becomes in its broad sense a kinaesthetic expression of obeisance to a figure of acknowledged superiority, or a response to expressed appreciation. It should be noted that this "bowing" (pronounced as the "ou" diphthong) takes place with its performer, legs stiff, knees together, feet flat on the ground, shoes preferably polished, and bending at the waist *always facing* the recipient of the bow. The angle of the bow depends upon the proficiency of one's chiropractor, osteopath, or Japanese back-walker. To bow facing away from the person, personage, or persons who are the intended object of the bow would be considered an insult. However, the rules about bowing at a topless joint are more flexible. The exotic *danseuse* is permitted – nay, encouraged – to bow away from the audience or target of reverence, from time to time, and often with feet apart, so that the diphthong may find its optimal expression. It is only in the case of very old *danseuses* that we would impose the "final bow," and again, in this day and age, never the violin's appurtenance, but the diphthong. Cheryl, we sincerely hope this addresses your concern satisfactorily.

14. Pipe Dreams

Wilfrid de Freitas said that Arnie Jones had donated the pipe and our trophy for quiz winner of the year.

15. Rachel, Rachel

Stanley Baker, who was present, thanked Rachel Alkallay, who was absent, for her role in discovering the Montefiore Club as the home of our annual dinner. Stanley said he had a wonderful time. Rachel was speechless.

16. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Mac Belfer

We only know of Homes
Through Watson.
Without Watson
There is no Holmes.
Is he a friend,
Or a bumpkin we deride?
No matter.
The game is afoot.
It is you who must decide.

I give you Dr. Watson

17. The Salmon's Out of the Bag

Chris Herten-Greaven showed us *Arabella Boxer's Book of English Food*. Was this where he had uncovered that ingenious recipe for that divine Salmon Pâté? It was salmon, wasn't it? Chris?

18. A fifteen-year-old Alibi

Wilfrid de Freitas recalled that in 1994, members of the BmQ had gone down to Vermont as volunteers in Vermont ETV's annual fund-raising drive. He asked if anyone was interested this time around. A few weeks after our meeting, Wilfrid sent out an e-mail informing us that the volunteer roster was full for now. They also serve who sit and watch TV.

19. You Can Make Book on This

Wilfrid de Freitas shared a couple of contemporary Sherlockian books. They are: *The Adventures of Arthur Conan Doyle*, by Russell Miller, and *Wilde About Holmes*, by Milo Yelesiyevich

20. Third Toast – to The Woman

by Elliott Newman

Ophelia. Irene Adler.

The doomed would-be lover. The survivor.

Ophelia, the character.

Irene Adler, the actress, the diva.

True, Doyle's literary model for Irene Adler was more Moll Flanders than Jane Austen's Emma. His real-life role model was more than likely Lola Montez, the mistress of Mad King Ludwig of Bavaria.

There are various tentacles connecting Irene Adler with the real and the fictional.

For example, the Lola Montez person may have been connected with King Ludwig around the time of his engagement to Princess Sophie, sister of the queen of Austria in 1867. All was going well until Ludwig cast his eye upon one Richard Hornig, a blond-haired, blue-eyed groom at the stables at Ludwig's Berg

castle. Dick and Lud began seeing a lot of each other, and that spelled the end of the king's engagement to Sophie. Although the motives are obviously different, can we not see a parallel between the king's dumping Irene Adler, and Ludwig's dismissal of Princess Sophie?

Back to Ophelia.

We can conjecture productively about Polonius's daughter's influence on the shaping of *The Woman*, if only as in terms of polarity.

Like Irene Adler, Ophelia was larger than life.

Unlike *The Woman*, Ophelia descended into madness.

Ophelia's lover Hamlet was unworthy of her, and abusive, as was Adler's king unworthy of Irene Adler.

Ophelia's histrionics, while excessive and phlegmatic, are the stuff of which theatre is made.

Adler's muted words at the end of the first story in which she appears, "A Scandal in Bohemia," have a force that resonates as theatre, and certainly bring the curtain down.

Hamlet's utterance, "Man delights not me," may have been a red herring to divert us from the oft-repeated suspicion that Hamlet's utterance should have been, "Woman delights not me," placing him on an orientation plane with King Ludwig.

Ophelia. Irene.

One a character, the other as real as Sherlock Holmes.

Fiction. Life.

I missed her obituary too.

Dear Society, I give you ... *The Woman*.

21. Quiz – Results

"His Last Bow" prepared by Marie Burrows.

Possible total: 50

Winners were:

| Rank | Name | Score | Prize |
|------|----------------------|-------|----------------------------|
| 1. | Carol Abramson | 44 | Literary Moleskin Notebook |
| 2. | Chris Herten-Greaven | 37½ | Victorian Spring Clip |
| 3. | Patrick Campbell | 37 | Stickies Organizer |

The next quiz will be prepared by Carol Abramson, and based on "The Stock-broker's Clerk".

This evening is the first time in the society's history that a quiz cover was in colour, with a Pagetian Sherlock Holmes in David Dowse's smoking jacket, holding a pipe and examining a scrap of paper.

22. Fourth Toast – to Mrs. Hudson

A moving, extemporized experience.

23. When a Clot Is a Good Thing

Cheryl Sourkes asked us to name the music that was playing on the portable stereo at the end of the meeting. It was “Spring,” from Vivaldi’s *Four Seasons*. She hazarded that Sherlock Holmes might have played it on his violin (with his bow). Cheryl also informed us that this evening she had been serving us “cream” tea, so-named for the clotted Devon cream that goes on the scone along with jam. She also served Walker’s shortbread cookies in honour of Mrs. Hudson who was Scottish.

We toasted Cheryl for her generous contribution to our meeting.

Wilfrid repeated his thanks to Cheryl and Chris.

24. Inconsistencies in His Last Bow

Wilfrid de Freitas noted a number of inconsistencies in this week’s story. There were a number of agents in the narrative, not all of them named. Different volumes had slight discrepancies.

25. Fifth Toast – to The Society

by Chris Herten-Greaven

This evening it is my pleasure to deliver the toast to the Society, of which it could probably be said that somewhere a group of members is meeting on most days, so that to paraphrase many a history teacher, the sun never sets, for long anyway, on our society.

But what is it that our Society most enhances in our minds? Basically two things: memory and imagination; two resources that are in short supply in the educational systems of today. Both need to be exercised regularly, and they are not. So it falls to groups like ours to make sure that these voids are filled regularly, as at our bi-monthly meetings. We should always be Sherlockian in making sure that the stable door is closed before the horse decides to make a break for it. Or, in tribute to those involved in derring-do with the Master, as in tonight’s mystery/quiz: *Wir sollten versichern daß dem Brunnen entdeckt sei bevor das Kind hinein fällt.*

Gentlemen, Ladies: fellow Sherlockians ... the Society: *der Verein*

26. Future Toasts

| | | |
|----------------|---|------------------|
| To The Master | - | Mietek Padowicz |
| To Dr. Watson | - | Jack Anderson |
| To The Woman | - | Maureen Anderson |
| To Mrs. Hudson | - | Roger Burrows |
| To The Society | - | Ronnie Zilman |

27. Mystery and Imagination

How many of us have had in our possession at one time or another the ancient paperback of Edgar Allan Poe’s *Tales of Mystery and Imagination* with the cover showing a line sketch of his wraithlike haunted face and a smaller illustration of

some cloaked figure chasing across the rooftops of Paris, as in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue”? I slept inches from that book through most of my childhood and teen-aged years. Let’s hear it for osmosis.

As Chris Herten-Greaven has suggested in this meeting’s “Toast to the Society,” we crave imagination. If we don’t display it naturally, it needs to be taught to us. As a teacher, I can tell you, one doesn’t teach imagination, but schools nevertheless need to cultivate it in their students. It is not a learned skill. However, teachers can find the key to unlock the door to it.

Which key? Which door? It depends on the day, the time, the place, the need. The teacher’s patient leading and shepherding the flock through the gates of wonder. The explanations, making connections. Playing the crowd. Applying the fulcrum and the catapult to the most resistant minds, the most entrenched personalities. Selling possibility to spirits mired in the deadly slough of conviction.

Everything old is new again. A few days ago in Middlebury, Vt I picked up a book printed in 1941, and smelling like it came from Abe Lincoln’s Illinois log cabin a hundred years before that. It’s entitled *25 Modern Stories of Mystery and Imagination*, edited by Phil Strong. It’s part of the “Other Worlds” series, Garden City, New York: Garden City Publishing Co., Inc. It has avoided the mice, and even the telltale rancid door of mildew. We’ll keep it dry, and it will survive.

The book is more about the supernatural and coincidence than about the detective and solving cases. Except for H.P. Lovecraft and Mark Schorer, you’ve never heard of the contributors. But it teaches us something that touches on what Chris has said. It’s a reiteration of the classical suspension of disbelief:

The enjoyment of such stories as these rests on one’s acceptance of an initial law which is completely irrational but which is put down in a calm and matter-of-fact manner as an obvious circumstance which you must accept if you are to play the game and have any fun out of it. - p. 6

As a teacher, I will say that acceptance and openness to experience and ideas are the basis of learning. And some memory too, of course. After this comes the question that brings us through those gates. Now, what is that question? – L.S.

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, April 2nd, 2009, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend; it’s a gasogene!

For the latest society news or updates on our history, please go to:

www.bimetallicquestion.org