

**Minutes  
of the meeting  
of  
The Bimetallic Question  
April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009**

**Date of next meeting**

The next meeting will take place on  
Thursday, June 4<sup>th</sup>, 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 Six Napoleons”**  
prepared by  
Roger Burrows

**Minutes** of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, April 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2009 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

**Present:** Carol Abramson, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Irène Degtiarevskaja, David Dowse, Chris Herten-Greaven, David Kellett, Thomasine Mawhood, Elliott Newman, Joan O'Malley, Mietek Padowicz, Naomi Padowicz, Erica Penner, Kathryn Radford, Heather Wileman-Brown, Ron Zilman

**Regrets:** Rachel Alkallay, Wilfrid de Freitas (his knee has been rebuilt and he is incapacitated due to the walker – Johnny Walker), Geoff Dowd, Arlene Scher

**CALL TO ORDER:**

The meeting was called promptly to order at 6:35 by Jack Anderson.

## ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Song and Sixpence, Howdy and Summerfallwinterspring, Jake and the Kid, Barrymore and Sir Henry)

### 1. **How Not to Choke on the Cheese Dip Psychometric Grip**

Chris Herten-Greaven has regaled us again with a gourmet's *entrée* into what might be nearing the 200<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Bimetallic Question. Chris provided a most delectable artichoke and cheese dip that doubled as a diagnostic tool in determining which of us are attention-deficit. It was hard to follow the proceedings with those distracting aromas wafting cross the moor-like topography of the library's oak tables.

### 2. **Jack's Okay**

To the background music provided by our chorus of quiet chomping on crackers and artichoke/cheese dip, Jack Anderson told us that he now believes in a Supreme Being, and that She has been looking out for him. Recently, Jack was stopped at an overpass when his minivan was rear-ended by a tractor-trailer. The force of the collision caused Jack's eyeglass lenses to pop out of their frames; his seat sheared off its retaining bolts; his earpiece tumbled out of his ear and onto the back seat; broken glass littered the van, the result of shattered windows; he was sore and bruised; and he got a concussion.

We wish him a complete recovery and further less dramatic and apocalyptic insight into the nature of the Supreme Being.

### 3. **First Toast – To the Master**

by Mietek Padowicz

Tonight as the G20 leaders go their separate ways, we can consider the influence and weight brought to bear on world issues discussed by Gordon Brown, Nicolas Sarkozy *et al*, by older and wiser minds in times gone by.

While great minds think alike, they seldom operate in a vacuum. Even the inscrutable and brilliant Sherlock Holmes needed to call upon his brother Mycroft in order to reveal the great importance of the Navy, India, Canada and the Bimetallic Question to the British Government, and by extension, the World.

We assume Mycroft was the architect and sole member of the highly secret committee charged to study the matter. But if Dr. Watson was a sounding board to Sherlock Holmes, why could not Sherlock Holmes serve as one to his own "smarter" brother? It is clear that this was not the only time the two would have worked to influence Imperial policy or decide matters of importance in times of great peril. As the more sociable and mobile of the two, Sherlock was the logical, trusted consultant to be called upon by Her Majesty's Government in this or any urgent matter.

As well, in view of Holmes's vast personal fortune as alluded to in the Watson stories, we understand how he could afford himself the luxury of choosing his amusements with great deliberation, at times passing on well-paying but pedestrian cases in favour of less remunerative but interesting ones. This speaks of a man used to applying his mind to matters as complex as national monetary policy and its effect on trade as well as world peace and stability.

Since Holmes still lives, he could in fact be of service to Her Majesty to this day. I have seen reports in the *Guardian* and the *Telegraph* not more than a few weeks old, of a most secretive and respected British personage who leaves his bees in Sussex several times a year, to advise the International Monetary Fund, when he's not actively decrypting secret communications at MI5.

TO THE GREAT PROBLEM SOLVER  
TO THE GREAT ANALYST  
TO THE MASTER!

#### 4. **David's Rucksack**

There have been many occasions when David Kellett has kept us enthralled and informed with anecdotes of his travels, scientific experiments, snooker, individuals, groups, and other eclectic items. This evening was no exception.

David began with a summary of how his sore tooth resulted in a one-and-one-half-hour extraction.

He gave away another framed picture, this time to Maureen Anderson.

He presented someone called "Lowly Scribe" with a gleaming black Underwood typewriter from the 1920s, and in excellent working order. This is not a dollar store replica. It is the real deal, and it is a museum piece. Lowly Scribe peeks at it in the basement, from where he works on his computer. Now the Lowly Scribe's mascot, the big black-and-chrome machine currently sits proudly and vigilantly atop a number of boxes of books, keeping them from flying away. Lowly Scribe has seen the Underwood glow in the dark. Then, slowly, the keys begin to depress as if under the invisible spirit-fingers of its operators of long ago who poured their business letters and their hearts into it, and the chubby fingers of their children and grandchildren who would gleefully clamber up onto creaky oak swivel chairs, and prod their jam-stained fingers onto the keys. Lowly Scribe, so easily given to flights of sheer fantasy, would claim this is real: the typewriter is infested with the echoes, emotions, and stories of all who have touched it and shared their spirits with it. It is powerful, so much more than simple history. It is the typewriter that ate Manhattan and may have spewed out *Washington Square*. Thank you again, David.

And David continued on, this time about Sir Arthur Conan Doyle and spiritualism. Along the way he told us that a yegg was a "cracksman" or safecracker.

SACD became friendly with Harry Houdini. However, they had a rough go when Houdini tried to convince SACD that mediums were illusionists who were certainly not communicating with the dead. This is not what SACD wanted to hear and they parted company. Stubbornly bent on an esoteric course, SACD attempted to communicate with his wife after her death, through a medium. How delighted and triumphant he must have been when she signed an affidavit from beyond the grave that attested to the authenticity of these contacts. (*Observers have it that she used a vintage Waterman provided by our own society member, David Dowse, to sign the document. It doesn't matter that the model of pen hadn't been invented yet. Fiction expects us to suspend our disbelief. What? You didn't not believe any of this? Excellent. The Society has for you a Brooklyn Bridge in wonderful working order. You will find it to be quite a conversation piece at parties on your next hull-less yacht. We're offering discounts on both of these this week.*)

David informed us that SACD's photo of fairies was proved to be doctored and fake. We are grateful to David for building up our resistance to a complete emotional collapse by exposing us to less outlandish claims of the supernatural before baring to us the jarring revelation of the fairies in the photo.

Next, Houdini's death. In supremely fine physical condition, Harry Houdini had boasted that his abdomen could withstand the strongest of punches: this he did by preparing himself both mentally and physically before the blow. He was in Montreal when a McGill University student, Jocelyn Gordon Whitehead, punched him in the stomach without warning, rupturing something that would have preferred to remain intact. Houdini died several days later of peritonitis. Whitehead is buried in an unmarked grave in Hawthorndale Cemetery, in Montreal's East End. While the story of Houdini's end is potentially fascinating, was it not unusual for a university student to end up in an unmarked grave? Consider that a student at McGill nearly a century ago must have been connected with some social or financial privilege. What happened to this individual? Yes, there is a story here.

## 5. **Don't Forget to Breathe**

We had been talking, from time to time, morbid bunch that we are, of people regaining consciousness when buried in their coffins, and then suffocating to death in the cramped and silent tomb of their final nightmare. This led us to talk about the old string-around-the-finger ploy. It was the custom in some cases, before embalming was introduced, to make sure you were really dead, to tie a string around the finger of a cadaver, allow the string to run out of the coffin, up through the earth, and to a bell above the grave. Under normal circumstances, cooperative bells either tinkle or gong. But is this really possible with the chime of the dead? Forget that in most cases the string would snap if pulled, the cemetery keeper was deeper in his cups than five fathom down, a gale was blowing in, and there was a noisy Bar-Mitzvah of *rijstaeffel* going on somewhere nearby. The antidote to this embarrassing life-after-interment situation in the Montreal General Hospital, a long time ago, according to Joan O'Malley, was to roll the bodies (on gurneys) to a special room on the third floor, and let them lie there for twenty-four hours. If they twitched, or got up, they failed the game and were kicked out of the program. Those who could truly remain immobile, or "lethargic" as Joan explained, passed with flying colours, and got sent on to the funeral director of their family's choice. Since these unenthusiastic patients were certified "dead," we assume they didn't get the string around the finger, and they had to remember they were dead all on their own. Can you imagine how much money the bereaved families saved on string just by having the hospital let the loved ones lie around for twenty-four hours? Lowly Scribe is not Scottish, but he can well appreciate the value of thrift in this matter.

## 6. **Making Book**

Heather Wileman-Brown brought in three books to have us look at.

The first (or second, or third) was *The Country Diary of an Edwardian Lady* by Edith Holden.

The other two (in whatever order) were not noted by Lowly Scribe who was exploring yet another lacuna in the vast cosmos of his inarticulable concerns.

**7. The Skullcap**

Mietek Padowicz showed us a *kippah* (Hebrew word) or *yarmulke* (Yiddish word) which had been Colin Semel's and which he had received for his own wedding. It is wonderful to remember dear friends. Thank you, Mietek.

**8. Non-erotic Oil**

Chris Herten-Greaven showed us how oil can be removed from Hungarian stamps in a secret process. If you have any Hungarian stamps from which you would like to have the oil removed, please see Chris.

**9. The Mysterious Disappearance of Amelia Earhart**

Chris Herten-Greaven introduced us to a book dealing with the disappearance of the intrepid aviatrix on July 2, 1937 as she was scheduled for a landing in the area of the then-Japanese-controlled Marshall Islands. This recent book was written by Mike Campbell with Thomas E. Devine. For more information, Google: Amelia Earhart Marshall Islands.

**10. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson**

by Jack Anderson

*Jack provided us with an entertaining conceit written by Ahmed A. Khan, entitled Dr. Watson's Secret Diary. It begins with, "Sherlock Holmes. How I hate that name ..."*

*For more, go to:*

*<http://www.sun oasis.com/drwatson.html>*

**11. Quiz – Results**

"The Stockbroker's Clerk" prepared by Carol Abramson.

Possible total: 99

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Roger Burrows	93	Book
2.	Marie Burrows	89	Book
3.	Patrick Campbell	76	Book

The next quiz, based on "The Adventure of the Six Napoleons", will be prepared by Roger Burrows.

**12. Things That Went Clop in the Night**

Patrick Campbell described the world of Sherlock Holmes, some of the more famous societies, and the journals they produce.

He also cited the Sherlock Holmes Society of London, and the Baker Street Irregulars of New York as two of the oldest Sherlockian societies in the world.

London produces *The Sherlock Holmes Journal*, while New York issues *The Baker Street Journal*, founded by Edgar W. Smith, and continued by Julian Wolff. Have you read it? It's a howl(l).

Originally there were no women allowed in the New York group, so the women formed their own society known as The Adventuresses of Sherlock Holmes. Their journal is *The Serpentine Muse*, its title providing a play on “Mews” or lane, from “A Scandal in Bohemia.” This publication incorporates *The ASH Newsletter*, edited by Evelyn Herzog. (Patrick has the complete set.)

There is also The Arthur Conan Doyle Society (now located in Ashcroft, BC).

The Toronto society is known as the “Bookmakers.” Its journal is *Canadian Holmes*.

There are two newer Sherlockian societies in England:

The Franco-Midland Hardware Company, based in the Midlands, was founded by P.L. Weller in 1990. Their secretary is known as The Stockbroker’s Clerk. Each year it publishes another pamphlet named after a Sherlock Holmes story. In addition, there is a quarterly newsletter, *The New Baker Street Pillar Box* (formerly *The Baker Street Pillar Box*).

The Musgraves (formerly The Northern Musgraves) society, founded in 1987, is located in the north of England.

Christopher Roden founded The Arthur Conan Doyle Society in Grasmere, England (in the Lake District, Wordsworth country).

### **13. Third Toast – to the Woman**

by Maureen Anderson

I would just like to mention how strikingly perfect the symbolism of holding up a glass seems to me. We hold it there, brimming, shining, and untouched.

So much optimism for everything which is to come, for the fun yet to be had, for the possibilities which await!

Unbeknownst to Holmes, he let a woman in. The barriers he set were no match for a woman, so clever, a match for Holmes’s intellect not to mention his passion.

Does Holmes view Irena Adler with a sparkle in his eyes? Yes, as we know, a faint smile has touched his lips as he glances at the photo of THE WOMAN.

Let’s raise our glasses to THE WOMAN!

### **14. Fourth Toast – to Mrs. Hudson**

by Roger Burrows

Given the nature of the stories, there are a good number of mysterious people in the Canon. But one of the most mysterious is, as in Poe’s “Purloined letter,” in plain sight. I’m referring of course to Mrs. Hudson. Although she appears in fourteen stories (only Holmes and Watson appear in more), we know very little about her. Most things we think we know about her are the product of radio, television, and cinematic scriptwriters. When we go back to the Canon, we discover that neither her first name nor her nationality is mentioned. We don’t know her age; we don’t even know if she was (or actually had been) married.

But what we do know is more significant than those cold facts. We know that she had a great, somewhat motherly affection for Holmes, combined with awe. By taking him in as a lodger, despite the “atmosphere of danger and violence which

hung around him,” she provided the kind of stable home life that Holmes needed in order to pursue his chosen profession. And she provided that home for practically his entire professional life.

So let’s raise a toast to that paragon among landladies, the mysterious Mrs. Hudson!

## 15. **Fifth Toast – to the Society**

by Ron Zilman

*Esteemed Sherlockians: Ron has provided us with a printout of the following, which has been gleaned, plagiarized, and editorialized from information available on the Internet at*

*<http://members.cox.net/sherlock1/grand.htm>*

*and reinterpreted by your very own and humble L.S.*

*Submitted to the web by Jody Baker (Inspector Baynes), Chattanooga, TN)*

The idea for any Sherlockian society began with Father Ronald Knox who presented a “pseudo-scholarly satire upon a ponderous, exegetical style of scholastic writing.” (L.S. notes that we of the BmQ have been infected with this “Sherlockismus” virus as can be heard in our delightful, salubrious, and informative toasts.)

Christopher Morley, an erudite man of letters involved in publishing on both sides of the Atlantic, was impressed with the Knox view. He is generally credited with founding the Sherlockian cult.

If Christopher Morley’s name is familiar to us, it should be. Probably we have all owned, at one time or another, the Doubleday edition (two volumes) of the Canon. Morley provided the preface, entitled “In Memoriam Sherlock Holmes.” It may have been written in the 1930s.

From the lengthy and intertwining information that Ron has provided us, let’s look at something entitled “First Morley Principle:”

*Have fun, above all else, have fun; and take neither yourself, nor anyone, seriously.*

*From his desk as editor of The Saturday Review of Literature and wielding his pen along the avenues of “The Bowling Green,” Christopher Morley was able to stimulate superior intellects of the time to join him in his rollicking frolics and his mischievous good fun.*

*Early on, Morley embraced the cause of playful frivolity in making comments on the Writings; and he recognized Father Knox’s “Studies in the Literature of Sherlock Holmes” for the lampoon that it was intended to be: “The device of pretending to analyze matters of amusement with full severity is the best way to reproach those who approach the highest subjects with too literal a mind. This new frolic in criticism was welcome at once ...” (The Standard Doyle Company, by Steven Rothman. Subtitle: Christopher Morley on Sherlock Holmes. 1990, Fordham University Press, pp. 6-7)*

Ladies and Gentlemen,

To the Society!

**16. Sherlockian Societies**

If you're lonely, if you're blue  
and you don't know what to do  
give a twiggle, twoggle a nicety  
by googling Sherlockian.net: Societies.  
There you will find some anti-blue Blau,  
easement for your mind, information that will wow  
you, with links to other Sherlockians  
both formal and *ad hoc-ians*.

**17. Future Toasts**

To The Master	-	Albert Aikman
To Dr. Watson	-	Rachel Alkallay
To The Woman	-	Stanley Baker
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Erica Penner
To The Society	-	Patrick Campbell

**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 4<sup>th</sup>, 2009, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend; it's a gasogene! Has anybody noticed this invitation?

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

*<http://www.bimetallicquestion.org>*