

Minutes
of the meeting
of
The Bimetallic Question
August 6th, 2009

Date of next meeting

The next meeting will take place on
Thursday, October 1st, at 6:30 p.m. at:
The Westmount Public Library
(Westmount Room)
4574 Sherbrooke Street West
Westmount, Quebec

The Quiz at the next meeting

**A scorching review of the complete
Canon**
prepared by David Kellett

Minutes of the MEETING of the BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, August 6th, 2009 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Wilfrid de Freitas, Geoff Dowd, Sarah Dowd (guest), David Dowse, Ann Elbourne, Susan Fitch (guest), Chris Herten-Greaven, Solange Himelfarb, David Kellett, Lars Lovkvist, Elliott Newman, Mietek Padowicz, Kathryn Radford, Carole Rocklin, Arlene Scher, Heather Wileman-Brown, Ron Zilman

Regrets: Rachel Alkallay, Stanley Baker, Roy Mercado, Naomi Padowicz, Bernard Robaire

CALL TO ORDER:

Wilfrid de Freitas called the meeting to order promptly at 6:30.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Sugar and Spice, Roy and Dale, and Flecks and Tones)

1. **We're not crackers**

Chris Herten-Greaven provided the sustenance of sanity by providing crackers. This was topped with divine pâté, which he also supplied. At the same time David Dowse presented us with a particular type of lemon/blueberry *phfwoomph* cake (so-called because of the tendency to cram more of this item into the mouth than the mouth can reasonably accommodate, and then attempting to speak), and an exotic chocolate/banana cheesecake, both compliments of his wife, Guylaine. Thank you all so much.

This is why we have been able to maintain a high attendance at our meetings.

2. **First Toast – To the Master**

by Chris Herten-Greaven

It is my pleasant task for this evening to propose a toast to the Master: a daunting task for those of us who are bound to less lofty flights of imagination, inference, detection, and derring-do. These qualities are particularly impressive when one considers how he did, on occasion, flit from real life to the almost supernatural. We know, for example, that the Master's creator was, in his real-life retirement years called upon to help in solving the Edalji case, the waters being not a little muddied by the racial overtones and discrimination of the times. A final question remains: was there a real-life persona for the image of the Master? It appears that there was, in the person of one William Gillette, an American actor, who had enjoyed much success in one of Conan Doyle's plays in New York. He visited ACD in England and astonished him as a real-life personification of the Master as he descended from his carriage. Someone he had only imagined to that point, had come suddenly to life.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please raise your glasses to the Master!

3. **Insight into Sherlock**

Mietek Padowicz read from the foreword of the book *Profile by Gaslight*, ed. Edgar Smith, on the subject of what the ideal Sherlock Holmes should be.

4. **What Will They Think of Next?**

Heather Wileman-Brown showed us a small notebook with a pen that unclasps the book when the pen is slipped out of its niche. Would anyone like to contrive a murder-mystery around this prop *à la* something we stare at, but do not see?

5. **Picture This**

Paul Billette passed around copies of the pictures he'd taken at the barbeque at the home of Susan and Wilfrid de Freitas. One and all heartily thanked Susan and Wilfrid for their generous hospitality and the enjoyable time they had. Thank you again, and thank you, Paul, for the pictures.

6. Groovin' to the Beat of Light Metal

Jeff Dowd showed us an old lapel pin from the Bimetallic Question. We oohed and aahed appropriately, that is to say, within acceptable limits.

Items of nostalgia such as these take us back to a time when we were younger, our brain cells were more profuse, and perhaps – hate to say it – our imaginations were closer to the edge of something wild and exciting. Now we know more. And while we are not jaundiced by the certainty, baggage, and weight of our years, we do tend to act with some restraint. Memorabilia such as this are evocative of youth and long ago. Even now we can reconstruct a past in our image, according to our needs.

Consider this a pitch for us to create something evocative of who we are as a society: a lively, occasionally jocose, always engaging and warm group of friends and acquaintances having some undefined connection with a longstanding icon that has taken on more than the simple trappings of mortality, has and continues to fire our imaginations with the anarchy of dreams and the grandeur of back lanes and country estates, and elevates us when we step into the hall of our making at the Westmount Public Library.

Shall we strike a medallion? Create a pewter mug? Build something evocative of our society and our shared passion?

Please think about this and bring your ideas to our next meeting.

7. Still Going Strong

Mietek Padowicz showed us a production still from the movie *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes* starring Basil Rathbone, Nigel Bruce, and Ida Lupino.

8. Hold That Tiger

Tigers seem to be looming large in our group. Following the presentation of several books on man-eating tigers to the group (including the ancient paperback *Man-Eaters of the Kumaon*), Chris Herten-Greaven showed us another book dealing with tigers menacing workers on a railroad line in India, *The Man Eaters of Tsavo*.

We're building a profile here. We may see, but are we observing a connection among man-eating tigers, crackers and pâté, and dentistry?

9. The Stamp of Approval

Marie Burrows announced that the Royal Mail in England is issuing a block of 10 commemorative stamps of famous Britons, one of whom is Sir Arthur Conan Doyle. We were able to look at the series.

10. British Columbia Goes Sherlockian

Roger Burrows showed us a book, *The Baker Street File*, published originally in 1997 by Calabash Press of B.C. It is a compilation of quotations from the Canon that illustrate the characters of Holmes, Watson, and Mrs. Hudson, as well as the interior & exterior of 221B. The creators of the Granada television series compiled the original so that the behind-the-scenes crew (prop buyers, costume designers etc) would be able to create an authentic Sherlockian atmosphere.

11. More Holmesiana

Mietek Padowicz showed a souvenir book, *Decorated Mr. Holmes*, by Michael Harrison.

12. More Nostalgia

David Dowse showed a mini street sign of Baker Street on enamelled metal. He also showed a promotional poster for the neo-Sherlockian movie, *Murder by Decree*. This poster was brought to the very first meeting of the Bimetallic Question, nearly a third of a century ago, at the home of David Dowse.

13. Nix on the Boycott

David Kellett reminded us about the upcoming Sherlock Holmes movie due for release this Christmas. The film stars Robert Downey, Jr. in the role of Sherlock Holmes. During a previous meeting, members of our society weighed in on the quality and relevance of the film in terms of its faithfulness to the image and spirit of TWGCD, based on previews of the film,. The verdict was that it cannot measure up to the standards of verisimilitude established in the Jeremy Brett series, in other films, and in the canon itself. Therefore, we should not attend the movie.

Elliott Newman pointed out that from what he had seen, SH was being repackaged as a superhero in this film. We see him jumping out of a third-storey window, into the River Thames. There are action scenes offering movement faster than the eye can see. There are violence, explosions, noises, visual devices, and speed that we associate with movies involving superheroes.

In view of this, Elliott wondered aloud not if it was appropriate to present SH in this way, but whether the image of SH – our icon and hero – could survive the demands of a superhero. In other words, how would TWGCD fare on trails where Superman, Batman, Darkman, Spiderman, Wonder Woman, and Pumba had gone before? Elliott thought he would do just fine.

Jack Anderson supported the surmise about the nature and intent of the film and said that he had read that the producers were envisioning a series of superhero films involving non-superhero characters.

See you at the movies.

14. Second Toast – To Doctor Watson

by Mietek Padowicz

A quick description of the man from Jack Tracy:

He was “Reckoned fleet of foot.”

Held his own “in many a struggle.”

Quite handsome.

Familiar with the men’s code of honour and discretion.

Gifted with a natural “zeal and flat-footedness on the ground.”

A person on whom Holmes could “thoroughly rely.”

And finally, Holmes himself says to him: “It is at the hour of action I turn to you.”

When you feel the need for action and a mate to share the danger and the adventure, surely Dr. John Hamish Watson of at least two wives is your man!

To Dr. Watson!

15. The Mysterious Word

At the last meeting, Wilfrid de Freitas had invited our members to come up with a mystery word or phrase from the Canon. The word or phrase was to be clearly linked to a specific story, and those present would try to identify the story in question.

Most of the hundreds of thousands of words in the canon were mysteriously absent. Here are a few that made it to our table:

“phosphorus” – *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

“Canadian Pacific Railroad” – “Black Peter”

“wax” – “The Empty House”

“British Birds” – “The Empty House”

“valetudinarian” – “The Sign of Four” (According to *Webster’s*, the word means: one whose chief concern is his invalidism)

“clay” – “The Red-Headed League” – *The Hound of the Baskervilles* – “The Three Students”

“paralysed Spaniel” – “The Sussex Vampire”

“non-barking dog” – “Silver Blaze”

“fire” – “The Devil’s Foot” – “A Scandal in Bohemia” – “The Norwood Builder”

“Uriah” – reference to Uriah and Bathsheba in “The Crooked Man”

“smoke” – “A Case of Identity” – “A Scandal in Bohemia”

“oyster” – “The Dying Detective”

“flags” – “The Dancing Men” – *The Hound of the Baskervilles*

“Norbury” – “The Yellow Face”

“paint” – “The Retired Colourman”

“Pompey” – the dog in “The Missing Three-Quarter”

16. Third Toast – To the Woman

by Roger Burrows

The Serpentine-Mews declares that she is the daintiest thing under a bonnet on this planet. Watson (as usual) mentions her beauty and her “superb figure.” But what distinguishes Irene Adler from many other attractive women in the Canon is her independence and quick-wittedness. She is a prime example of the “new woman,” a feminist ideal that appeared in late 19th century literature, in plays by George Bernard Shaw, and Henrik Ibsen, among others.

As such, she is a worthy opponent for Holmes and, by beating him at his own game, forces him to acknowledge her as an equal. As Watson records: “... when he speaks of Irene Adler ... it is always under the honourable title of *the* woman.”

Ladies and Gentlemen, please raise your glasses to Irene Adler – ***the*** Woman!

17. Not Sean Connery

One of our informed members announced that the “shikari” referred to in “The Empty House” means “old hunter.”

18. Who Wrote What?

Wilfrid de Freitas told us about an excellent reference book on SH and the Canon, entitled *Encyclopedia Sherlockiana*, written by Jack Tracy. Actually, Wilfrid’s information was an elision of two similar books by two different authors. Despite this confusion, he is still correct.

Here are the real clues:

Encyclopedia Sherlockiana is written by Matthew E. Bunson, foreword by John Bennett Shaw, B.S.I., S.H.S., pub: Macmillan, 1994.

The *Ultimate Sherlock Holmes Encyclopedia* is written by Jack Tracy. (Random House: 1977) It was originally published as *The Encyclopaedia Sherlockiana*.

Lowly Scribe went hunting for Wilfrid's recommendation at The Strand bookstore in New York shortly after our August (and august) meeting. He found both volumes, in mint condition, with dust jackets. The Bunson book is autographed in a beautiful, flowing hand, "To Jane, with kindest regards, Matthew B."

Alas, alas, Jane dumped the book and your L.S. picked it up for ten bucks.

SIC ARGENTUM ARS VINCIT.

Wilfrid opined that the Tracy book might be available on the web.

19. The Letterman Annals

Mietek Padowicz asked if we could create a list of the 10 most essential SH stories. Any takers?

20. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Carol Rocklin

We took turns reading a poem that Carole brought in, entitled "The Adventure of the Dying Detective," written by John McDonnell in 1913. Here are a few of the many verses from this delightful poem, set at a banquet at which Mrs. Hudson is one of the guests:

Mrs. Hudson: "My famous lodger's most untidy,
Plays music at the oddest hours,
Fired bullets indoors just last Friday.
Yet I'm in awe of his thinking powers."

...

Mrs. Hudson: "His famous 221B dwelling
Attracts the worst and best of men.
What stories climb up stairs for telling,
Then clomp their way back down again!"

...

A guest: "Your patience is a noble offering.
Perhaps this sounds absurd, but I'm
Thinking, but for your long-suffering,
Your tenant might have turned to crime!"

Narrative: As this set off considerable laughing,
The duke had brandy poured out neat,
Proposing a toast for general quaffing:
"To Mrs. Hudson of Baker Street!"

21. Quiz – Results

“The Adventure of the Abbey Grange” prepared by Carol Abramson.

Possible total: 63

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	David Kellett	60	Book: <i>SACD: A Life in Letters</i>
2.	Sarah Dowd	59	Book: <i>The Great Stink</i>
3.	Marie Burrows	58½	Book: <i>Sudoku puzzles</i>

The next quiz, based on the entire Canon, will be prepared by David Kellett.

22. We Began with Crackers; We’re Ending with Crocker

David Kellett said that in his version of the story (“Abbey Grange”), all references to “Crocker” were spelled with a “ck.” Other versions he had consulted had only a “k.”

David said, “I like this story because it sums up the whole deal about Sherlock Holmes. He keeps thinking on the train about the glasses ... and he goes back over it, and solves the mystery.”

He cited the story as “an exercise of the mind in logic and reason.”

Following this, the group dived into a spirited discussion on the story.

23. The Play’s the Thing

Patrick Campbell recalled that when he was sovereign, our group did readings from the texts of a number of Sherlock Holmes plays. Wilfrid asked Patrick to pick a play with as many parts as possible for the next meeting.

24. Fifth Toast – to the Society

by Paul Billette

Since its auspicious founding in 1979, the society has kept the flame of the master’s brilliance alive in Montreal.

The society brings together like-minded individuals who pursue scholarship and research on the works of the master and of his biographer.

Our society offers its members, through its continuously scholarly – even at times humorous – quizzes the opportunity to deepen our knowledge of the master’s cerebral works.

The eminent scholars among us graciously share with their fellows their deep knowledge of the world’s greatest sleuth and succeed in rendering simply elementary, a perceived nebulous situation.

To our society, which provides us with the companionship of great individuals.

25. In the Manner to Which We Have Become Accustomed ...

Wilfrid mentioned that we should start thinking in terms of our annual dinner, since there are only two more meetings before the event.

The consensus was in favour of returning to the Montefiore Club where we have enjoyed several recent successful dinners. Suggested dates were January 16 and 23, Saturday nights, with a probability of January 23.

Wilfrid will get in touch with Rachel Alkallay who has connections with the facility and will make arrangements.

26. When You Want a Book to Bomb

Patrick Campbell showed us a Baedeker Travel Guide of England, 7th edition. He informed us that the Germans used the travel book to help them decide which areas of England to bomb.

For example, if the Luftwaffe, in their bunker, decided, "Let's go for *pizza*" (in German), this could have had dire consequences for that part of England that offered pizza. (The use of "*pizza*" is in no way intended as a racial or ethnic slur. We might just as easily have substituted "*won ton*," "*kreplach*," "*perogis*," "*goulash*," or "*bangers and knishes*.")

Patrick read the Baedeker directions on how to get from London to Dover.

27. Future Toasts

To The Master	-	Marie Burrows
To Dr. Watson	-	Carol Abramson
To The Woman	-	Sarah Dowd
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Ron Zilman
To The Society	-	Roger Burrows

An Invitation

You are cordially invited to submit an essay, article, or reminiscence on what being a Sherlockian means to you. It can be up to 250 words on any aspect of the topic.

To help get you started, consider any of the following:

- *why you decided to join*
- *what you have learned about the canon and yourself*
- *how it has changed your world (at home, when you travel)*
 - *the people you have met*
 - *your ability to read literature differently*
- *any resulting broadening of your tastes and interests*
 - *more ... lots more!*

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 1st, 2009, at 6:30 p.m. Bring a friend.

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

<http://www.bimetallicquestion.org>