

Message from Wilfrid

Well I've gone and done it again! Susan and I are going to the UK on May 25th which means I won't be here for our next meeting on June 3rd. Our Florin — Treasurer, for those of you who've forgotten — Paul Billette has volunteered to run the meeting so please give him your full support. Looking ahead to our August 5th meeting I'm going to be away yet again but since I would like to attend at least a couple of meetings this year in my capacity of Sovereign, I've taken the liberty of bringing the date forward one week to July 29th. Looking even further ahead, there are clouds on my horizon for the October meeting but nothing definite has yet been fixed. The good news (well, for me anyway) is that unless something comes up business-wise, I should be here for the December meeting.

While I have your attention, I'd like to bring up the subject of toasts. Sometimes newer members may be dissuaded from giving a toast because they think it must be erudite and full of original Sherlockian research (in fact, if you have something like that, we encourage you to give us some advance notice and present it as a paper instead!). To all our members: don't be shy about volunteering. Short toasts, say 2 or 3 minutes, are preferred (and are much appreciated by those taking minutes!). We hope that you'll consider volunteering at the next meeting.

Minutes of the meeting of The Bimetallic Question April 1st, 2010

Date of next meeting

Thursday, June 3rd, 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
Missing Three-Quarter”**
prepared by Roger Burrows

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, April 1st, 2010 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Rachel Alkallay, Maureen Anderson, Stanley Baker, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, David Dowse, Renée Edwards, Susan Fitch, Chris Herten-Greaven, David Kellett, Roy Mercado, Mietek Padowicz, Naomi Padowicz, Erica Penner, Denis Pothier, Lawrence Reich, Arlene Scher, Ronnie Zilman

Regrets: Jack Anderson, Wilfrid de Freitas, Elliott Newman, Kathryn Radford, Carole Rocklin

CALL TO ORDER:

Acting Sovereign Stanley Baker called the meeting to order at 6:30.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Matzoh and Caramel, Oy and Vey, Larry and one of the Daryls)

1. Food for the Sherlockian Soul

Doubtless, we are moving in the direction of chicken soup. This meeting was presided over by Matzoh and Caramel, as well as Chocolates and Almonds, thanks to Mietek and Naomi Padowicz. Apricot squares made from matzoh meal (don't ask), as well as chocolate chip cookies were brought in by Carol Abramson. All this coincided with the Jewish holiday of Passover in which there was much wandering in the desert and eating of flat cookies (causing indisposition of the digestive process which is why G-d in His wisdom, set the scene in the desert). The Scribes (forebears of your own L.S.), later claimed these round, flat things to be manna from heaven, yet another miracle.

2. Pumping up the volume

Patrick congratulated and thanked all contributors to the minutes from the last meeting since he could not hear the toasts, and he was able to read up on what he had missed. If we all enunciate and project when we deliver our toasts, together we can do this. Somehow there was unanimous approval. (Please go directly to #3 below for an explanation of the possible lack of clarity in this item.)

3. Demystifying the *non sequiturs*

One of life's little challenges is to write minutes of our meetings while pretending one was actually there taking notes. Actually, David Dowse was there, and was kind enough to take immaculate notes with lots of detail. There was the occasionally cryptic message that, while captivating to your Lowly Scribe, sailed right past his left ear and into space. We did omit the word "BARK" appearing in upper case after the Padowicz platter notations described in #1 above. Your obedient Lowly Scribe, ever the animal lover, ascertained that this word referred to the sound uttered by canines as a standard form of communication. Since the context was food, your L.S. further determined that this four-letter word must have had something to do with Sherlockians having to make vocal noises while sitting up, elbows in, hands dangling in front of chests, while waiting to be thrown

a tidbit around the meeting table. Thus, it is obvious that, in the interests of good taste, “BARK” was necessarily omitted from the minutes. The next obscure although valuable bit of notation appeared in Patrick Campbell’s thank-you (passed with unanimous approval) about writing comments and toasts into the minutes. This is in #2 above. We are delighted to provide a living memory in this fashion for all our meetings.

4. Pardon Me, Do You Scribble?

We were told that the plural of *scriptorium* is *scriptoria*. In general, Latin nouns ending in “um” in the nominative case are neutral in gender, and their plurals are formed by removing the gender suffix and adding “a.”

5. The What and Who of the Matter

As a follow-up to the lively presentation on Doctor Who by Naomi and Mietek Padowicz in February, Marie Burrows informed us that the author of Doctor Who is writing a Sherlock Holmes story.

6. First Toast – To the Master

by Chris Herten-Greaven

Ladies and Gentlemen, it is my honour and privilege this evening to propose the toast to the Master:

What can be said by your obedient servant about the Master which has not already been said? I thought maybe a new approach would be in order (how many others have used the same line?), so I borrowed unashamedly from a previous toast to the master by my fellow Sherlockian Mietek, who theorized as to how we, nowadays, with the world’s information literally at our fingertips, can on occasion appear so uninformed (I was going to say dumb), whereas he, the Master, usually appeared so omniscient and brilliant. Most of this goes back to basic education, and exercise of memory and imagination: that which was expected to be known by even those of humble economic means.

Someone of Sherlock Holmes’s character, and his alter ego, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, were not only *expected* to have an extensive education (i.e. general knowledge), but also to know where and how to expand it. Railway and other timetables; weights, measures and distances; simple tools and instruments were all expected to be second nature to someone like Holmes. Reference books, dictionaries and the like were certainly available at libraries if you could not afford your own; if you were *well read*, this meant, among other things, that you knew where to find information or whom to ask about it. Simple rules of mathematics were probably too mundane to be worthy of mention.

To give you a few examples of sources in print in Conan Doyle’s time:

- *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*
- *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 12-volume edition
- *Mrs. Beaton’s Home Organizer*
- *Pears’ Cyclopaedia*

There were even master reference books in French, e.g. *Memento Larousse – 20 ouvrages en un!* in case one was uncertain whether poor old Inspector Lestrade also had fair access to such information.

Where and how Sherlock Holmes acquired his wealth of information is still an open question; that he *had* the information is unquestionable!

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

7. Our Bi-monthly Visitor(s)

Renée Edwards was introduced to the club this month by Stanley Baker. She has been a Sherlock Holmes fan since infancy.

Our other guest, Denis Pothier, found us on the internet and decided to join us for the evening.

8. Making William Mary

Mietek Padowicz shared photos of old members and old friends at a Sherlockian conference at William and Mary College in North Carolina. He also produced snapshots of Sherlockian picnics and dinners of yore. If anyone can figure out how to make William Mary, they are invited to share the magic at our next meeting. Clue: think of “making” as a gerund.

9. What Oft Was Thought But Ne'er So Well Expressed

More was offered on how to describe a group (collection) of animals. In addition to the words discussed at the meeting, your Lowly Scribe, by way of *partial* atonement for having missed the meeting, bolstered the collection of nouns:

a business of ferrets	an exaltation of larks	a murder of crows
a mumble of moles	a parliament of owls	a gaggle of geese
a mutation of thrushes	a shrewdness of apes	a gang of elks
a skulk of foxes	a knot of toads	a pod of whales
a fesnying* of ferrets	a clowder of cats	a crash of rhinoceroses
an anthology of prostitutes	a pride of lions	a siege of heron
a caravan of camels	a cowardice of curs	a desert of lapwings

and, finally, a dopping of ducks (but only when they're diving).

In addition, “covey” can apply to partridges, pheasants, quail, and grouse (never “grice”), and probably not ducks, although “Coveyduck” is a surname.

We were initially disturbed to see “a chowder of cats,” and were relieved to note that the “h” had in fact been changed to an “l.” We understand the term may have originated in Hong Kong harbour where cats proliferate and clams do not.

Wikipedia, under “List of collective nouns by collective term” has hundreds of such words. Commit them to memory. Amaze your friends at parties. Lose your friends instantly!

* “Fesnying” is a strange word, and may come from “feigning” or pretending. Your L.S. remembers the “es” construction when studying works in Middle English (he didn't study, he slept) when “demesne” evolved over the centuries to “domain.” “Fesnying” may allude to the devious or tricky nature of the ferret.

10. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Ronnie Zilman

Ronnie's toast is an encyclopaedic enumeration of the wives of Watson, provided in a web download of a presentation at the annual Dayton Arthur Conan Doyle Symposium, March 9, 2002 by Brad Keefauver. It is condensed, truncated, and reproduced here in part.

The ladies love Dr. Watson.

He has that “shy but rugged” thing going for him. He has seen war service and suffering in his past, yet he still stumbles over his words when left alone with a dainty young governess like Mary Morstan. He is a trusting, caring, and often unappreciated friend to Sherlock Holmes for at least three decades. He is very verbal, as is evidenced in his writings, and he has a keen eye for fashion, as also evidenced in his writings.

Dr. Watson had six wives. Here they are in order of appearance:

- Lucy Ferrier appeared in the ACD play, *The Angels of Darkness*.
- Nora Creina, married in 1886.
- Miss Morrison from “The Crooked Man,” and according to Keefauver, “a virtual clone of Mary Morstan.” Watson may have tumbled into her arms after a brief dalliance with Lady Hilda Trelawney who herself may have been one reason why Watson drifted out of his marriage to Nora Creina.
- Flora Millar, in 1888, after Holmes and Watson helped her beat a murder rap.
- Mary Morstan in late Spring 1889, although Watson met her in September 1888; they remained married until her death in 1894.
- Mrs. Hudson, in 1903.

All except Mary Morstan are conjectural.

To Dr. Watson!

For your very own copy of the complete article, go to:

http://www.sherlockpeoria.net/Who_is_Sherlock/WatsonsWives.html

11. Flash! Maureen Spooned, David Unrepentant!

David Kellett has given his spoon collection to Maureen Anderson. Maureen and Jack have many lovely cats, and it is felt that these spoons might be of some use.

12. “Book Case – Paul Billette”

The reference to “Book Case – Paul Billette” is a cryptic one. It appears at the top of David Dowse’s immaculately-presented notes presented in block lettering with a (probably) vintage fountain pen, in blue-black ink that is closer to blue. Those of you who were there will understand.

Similarly, “1904 Singer Sewing Machine.” – If your L.S. were to assume that these items were up for grabs, we might start a second Louisiana Land Rush. Rather, we feel that David was practicing calligraphy and these were the letters that fell into place.

13. Sophisticated Fare to Offset Passover Tribulations

Chris Herten-Greaven brought pâté, quail, and guinea fowl along with cheddar cheese and crackers. We understand that the first item would have passed detection by the library police, but wouldn't the quail and guinea fowl have set up clucking, cheeping, and squawking, especially when being chased up and down the reading room?

14. Toronto and California

Patrick mentioned the Bootmakers of Toronto's publication, *Canadian Holmes*. Someone offered thanks to Mr. Joel Silver of Silver Pictures, Burbank, California, for letting us see his movie, *The Adventure of the Norwood Builder*. Your L.S. astutely noted that Mr. Silver's name was not on our attendees' list, and concluded that the thank-you must have been sent telepathically.

15. Third Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Stanley Baker

One of the great assets in Holmes's life was to have Mrs. Hudson as his landlady. She was caring, devoted, and above all, tolerant of his erratic behaviour. His violin playing, receiving strange visitors at all hours, his sometimes being disguised, pipe-smoking and cocaine using (these latter two are no-nos today) were not everyone's cup of tea. In fact, Watson described Holmes as the worst tenant in London. Mrs. Hudson had a "queenly tread," and was "a very good cook." She was Scottish.

She is usually portrayed as an elderly woman, though she might have been middle-aged, or even quite young, and we know nothing about Mr. Hudson. In one story, her first name is Martha. In another, it is Marie. She is also referred to as Mrs. Turner. Were they Doyle's errors?

There was also speculation that Holmes and Mrs. Hudson were lovers and for their trysts in hotels, she used the name of Mrs. Turner (though there was ample opportunity for "hanky-panky" between them at 221B). Whatever their relationship, she was certainly very fond of Holmes. Whether Holmes ever succumbed to the desires of the flesh is debatable. In our last quiz on "Charles Augustus Milverton," one of David Kellett's questions was: did he do "it" with the chambermaid, to whom he was engaged? The correct answer was "we do not know."

I am curious about the origin of the word "landlady" – any ideas? But, I now ask you to raise your glasses and drink a toast to a person we would all like to have as our landlady – Mrs. Hudson.

16. MEETING DATE CHANGE

Wilfrid de Freitas requested that, rather than meeting on the first Thursday of August, we gather instead on THURSDAY, JULY 29, since he will be traveling in August. Please put this new date in your agendas.

17. The Wolf, the Door, and Our Bank Account

Our finances are sound, with \$1400 in the bank, and no payables. With more than \$1000 on deposit, we enjoy free banking services with TD Bank.

18. Bennington College Sherlockian Conference

Just a reminder that if you plan to attend, get your applications in soon. Details are in last meeting's minutes.

19. Author! Author!

Mietek & Naomi will be fleshing out their recent presentation to the Society on Doctor Who and Sherlock Holmes, for publication in *Canadian Holmes*.

20. The Extended Minutes

There was some discussion on whether to put the Society's Minutes on our web site, as well as continuing to produce and mail hard copy. The consensus was to do both.

21. Nostalgia

Stanley passed out old photos. They didn't weigh much, so no one was hurt.

22. David and Dr. Joe

David Kellett appeared on Dr. Joe Schwarcz's radio show where they discussed Houdini, magic, and other phenomena.

23. Quiz - Results

Story: "A Case of Identity" prepared by Marie Burrows

Possible total: 76 points

Memorable quote: "My God, the quiz is longer than the story!" — David Kellett

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Roger Burrows	74	Magnetic bookmarks
2.	Carol Abramson	67½	Book: <i>The Improbable Adventures of Sherlock Holmes</i>
=3.	David Kellett (won prize on coin toss)	50	Double audio cassette of BBC Sherlock Holmes
=3.	Lawrence Reich	50	

The next quiz, based on "The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter", will be prepared by Roger Burrows.

24. Quiz Story - Insights

Mary Sutherland of the story wore large hats in the manner of the real-life Georgina Cavendish, Duchess of Devonshire, and wife of the Fifth Duke of Devonshire. The style is captured in the Gainsborough portrait of the duchess, where it resembles a parachute, a small house, or an upside-down boat. The Paget caricature of Mary Sutherland depicts a much more reasonably scaled-back headpiece, one that could accommodate two parental squabs and twenty four eggs in their own flower garden.

25. Mail Service

Patrick noted that Holmes would write a letter to Windibank, and that Holmes would receive a reply to it the next afternoon. This demonstrates the amazing mail service in England at the time.

26. Fourth Toast – To the Woman

by David Kellett

(Text missing – content summarized by David Dowse)

David Kellett delivered a new take on Irene Adler.

27. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by Roger Burrows

Why do we read Sherlock Holmes? Or perhaps I should say, why do we re-read Sherlock Holmes? Not for the plots (at least after the first time), although there are some quite ingenious ones in the Canon.

One reason is the re-creation of a time and a place. The stories provide a vivid picture of Victorian England, particularly London. The fogs, the horse-drawn carriages, the class system, the backdrop of Empire.

But even more, I submit, we read them for the record of a friendship. The friendship of Holmes and Watson lasted over 40 years, from their first meeting at St. Bart's in 1881, until some time in the 1920s when Watson recorded his last case. As with any friendship, there were setbacks, but the friendship endured.

The Bimetallic Question has not yet lasted quite that long, although it is well on the way. By joining with others in our society, we form our own community of friends to celebrate that other friendship of a century ago.

My friends, I give you The Society.

28. The British Detection Club

In a country where the natives like their eggs soft and their mattresses hard, it would be useless to look for a hard-boiled detective in the first-ever anthology of the British Detection Club, *The Detection Collection (2005)*. Celebrating the 75th anniversary of the society this collection is as far from the American style of detective thriller as Venus is from Mars. New England is not England, and the rustic villages with thatched roofs, ancient graveyards and Roman coins scant centimetres beneath the surface of the land convey an atmosphere unlike that of the great and fast-paced United States of America. England is the home of Shakespeare, Jane Austen, the Bröntes, D.H. Lawrence, Thomas Hardy, E.M. Forster, Virginia Woolf, and others. They endowed a tradition of moral nicety, with breakouts achieved by Lawrence, and Woolf. Not surprisingly, both D.H. Lawrence and Sir Arthur Conan Doyle made it to the New World, and their writing was much better for it. The current collection, under the editorship of Simon Brett, also the club's president, includes a Who's Who of mainly establishment writers, those who have been invited into the society when a vacancy has appeared. P.D. James and Colin Dexter are two of the more recent authors to have been included. The volume is a fair representation of the distinctly flavourful and formalized literary tradition of the Mother Country.

29. All That Being Said ...

Sherlock Holmes for Dummies is now available.

30. Future Toasts

To The Master	-	Susan Fitch
To Dr. Watson	-	Mac Belfer
To The Woman	-	Erica Penner
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Ronnie Zilman
To The Society	-	Carol Abramson

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 3rd, 2010, 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>