

**NOTE: The next meeting will be on July 29<sup>th</sup>**

**Minutes of the meeting of  
The Bimetallic Question  
June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010**

**Date of next meeting**

Thursday, July 29<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  
Second Stain”**  
prepared by Carol Abramson

**Minutes** of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, June 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2010 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

**Present:** Carol Abramson, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Susan Fitch, David Kellett, Elliott Newman, Erica Penner, Denis Pothier, Lawrence Reich, Arlene Scher, Kate Wardell (guest), Ronnie Zilman

**Regrets:** Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Stanley Baker, Wilfrid de Freitas, Geoff Dowd, David Dowse, Mietek Padowicz, Naomi Padowicz

**CALL TO ORDER:**

Acting Sovereign Paul Billette called the meeting to order at 6:30.

## ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Dion and the Belmonts, Quills and Quires, Triumph and Despair)

### 1. The Numbers Game

As can be seen in the “Present” summary above, a mere 14 individuals graced the rolling tables of the Westmount Reading Room for our latest meeting. While this left lots of room for us to spread out, it was sad at the same time. Stanley Baker was under the weather, while the mother of Mietek Padowicz had suffered a medical crisis and was in hospital. We wish a strong recovery to all concerned.

The absence of Chris Herten-Greaven was sorely noted, as there was a distinct lack of pâté in the room.

### 2. New Member

Denis Pothier, a first-time attendee at our last meeting, has officially joined our ranks. Denis is semi-retired and is quite interested in the exploits of Sherlock Holmes. Like a number of us, his sensibility to the canon was raised by the Granada television series starring Jeremy Brett. Denis is about to acquire his first collection of the canon. While we recommended the Doubleday two-volume set for normal, unassuming everyday casual wear, others among us were pushing the fancier, annotated Klingner publication.

Denis mentioned he is reading a book, *Watching the English*, by Kate Fox, an anthropologist. She renders a modern-day treatment of what makes the English unique.

In order to introduce ourselves to Denis, we took turns describing our various psychic and psychotic states regarding Sherlock Holmes, and how we fell into this ~~den of iniquity~~ interesting and rewarding group of passionate and lively individuals.

### 3. How Long Is Long Enough?

Some time within the past two months, a series of e-mails buzzing with great concern began circulating in Montreal. As the frequency of their transmission gathered momentum, it became apparent to those involved that these would be no ordinary e-mails. As the messages grew in complexity, and hopped continents, these communications took on the personae of organic art – that is, a construct of the mind, sometimes involving the hands, onto which its creators added pieces of themselves and thrilled as the monster grew, to a format unrecognizable from its original version. Some of us who were participating in these messages may have widened our eyes in concern that these notes were taking on a mind of their own; but nay, we needn't have worried. These missives had assumed the guise of a friendly monster with a benevolent intention. The long, razor-sharp claws of the beast were intended for scratching time into the fertile ground of our bi-monthly meetings. These were friendly, manicured claws; the kind you would have if you were a good shepherd watching your flocks by night and who cared about your appearance while waiting for a sign on the hillside.

The next consideration was the monster's breath. This was a caring monster which had to set parameters of several sorts and for many occasions, and in the solitude of his contemplation, needed to figure out what “decorum” meant. The monster often gargled with ice water in order to mitigate the searing flames of its fiery breath. Remembering that this monster was the invention of the individuals circulating the e-mails, it became necessary to define what in the world they were talking about.

Brevity, of course. What better way to confront brevity head-on than by skirting the issue?

Brevity of presentations, toasts, Show-and-Tell offerings, reminiscences, and the rest of it.

How to get messages across at our bimonthly meetings while keeping the audience engaged. No need to retell *The Gormenghast Trilogy* when all that's needed is a simple toast to The Master.

The monster posed the exigency as a question: Need we spend more than three minutes toasting anything? Nay, forsooth, fair Monster. Surely (not Shirley), thou has reason in thy bones.

Henceforth, we should be targeting a three-minute limit on our toasts.

Thou shalt extol The Master and His Minions for up to 180 seconds. Max.

Any more than that is not extolling. It is the thing that cannot utter its name.

This is the Word of the Monster, and It has spoken.

This also includes items of business, interest, and gentle transaction under our Show and Tell category.

Keeping to a time limit will give us the opportunity to tease the audience. This means that when you make a toast or introduce an item of interest, you will have a chance to present the information within three minutes. Offer us the most interesting and provocative points so that we may move to the edge of our seat in eager anticipation of the rest of your delivery. When the sands of time run out (as you know they always do), it will be up to the members to ask you questions that will enable you to expand on your subject. This will keep us keen and engaged, and may promote further exploration of the topic.

What happens when you have a topic that you have researched, is interesting, and you realize will take more than three minutes to present? Simple. Call Wilfrid de Freitas (at 514-935-9581) in advance of the meeting and bounce your idea off him. If he knows that you need a bit of time to expound, he'll consult the monster and make the judgment call. It might be a question of juggling other items on our meeting agenda to make room for your contribution.

We would simply need to know in advance what you are planning so that you will have the opportunity to present it, while we allow ourselves time to deal with the rest of the evening's entertainment and business.

#### **4. Retoasting**

A few higher-class restaurants in the Montreal area attribute the excellence of their French fries to refrying. It's a little bit like regifting, but it takes place on a stovetop, in a pot of boiling oil, and not on a table top with wrapping paper, ribbons, and Scotch tape. Refrying is the gentle art of preparing your fries the day before, then tossing them into scalding oil when they are ordered by the salivating and trusting patron. Pete's Smoked Meat is one such establishment that has perfected the art of refrying. It is located in a little-known culinary Mecca off Montreal's West Island. When you see the Dairy Queen, turn left. Bring Maalox.

A subtler, more aesthetic redoing of a work of art is now in the works, and has been for some time. Mark Alberstat, a Haligonian (one nose, two ears, etc.) the newish editor of *Canadian Holmes* will be including a recent toast delivered to our Society by Stanley Baker. This is *retoasting* at its finest.

Published three times per year, *Canadian Holmes* reaches an audience of dozens, if not scores, and invites submissions from all those who may care to send in works of Sherlockian interest.

In the past, this periodical has included works by Patrick Campbell and others of our group.

*Canadian Holmes* is the official publication of the Bootmakers of Toronto. It can be accessed on the web through either of these keywords:

Canadian Holmes

The Bootmakers of Toronto

## 5. **First Toast – To the Master**

by Susan Fitch

If we were going to give out an award for the absolutely worst Sherlock Holmes film ever made, I wonder what we might call it? What would we call an award for the worst Sherlock Holmes film ever? Just provisionally, for discussion purposes here, may I suggest calling it “The Foggy Notion Award.”

I have a nominee for that imaginary award, but I would first like to say that we already know who deserves an award for their acting performances in the best Sherlock Holmes films ever made, and that would be Basil Rathbone and Jeremy Brett.

As a kid I could be found positively glued to the television screen whenever one of Basil Rathbone’s Sherlock Holmes films was being aired. Critics agree he was the first actor to portray accurately Holmes’s sheer energy and intellectual intensity when on a case. Millions of fans thrilled to his elegance, dry wit, and athleticism in the role, and for many women, including myself, there will always be a certain place in our hearts where Basil Rathbone remains *the* Sherlock Holmes.

Where Basil Rathbone gave us the best Sherlock Holmes portrayed in films made for the big screen, Jeremy Brett gave us the best Sherlock Holmes in productions created for television. The medium of television gave Jeremy a canvas to paint on that would accept the minutest brushstrokes of characterization, and he used it wisely and with great courage. Jeremy took chances. With his use of nuance and physicality he took great risks in the role, and in so doing gave us for the first time the complexity of Sherlock Holmes, the complete human being. In other words, he accomplished the impossible, and as is currently being proposed, no one deserves a “British Academy of Film and Television Arts Award” more than he.

But to return to the subject of worst-ever films, one nominee might be the 2009 American movie entitled *Sherlock Holmes*. While it was great fun as a Victorian romp, I also found it painful as an addition to the Holmes *oeuvre*. The obvious foggy notion here is that the film makers decided to give their lead character, Sherlock Holmes, a sending up. That approach may work well in a comedy spoof, but in what is really primarily an action adventure film, it’s less effective. Hopefully Robert Downey Jr.’s Sherlock Holmes will become less dysfunctional and less outrageous in any future releases.

There is, however, going back some years, a far, far, far worse Sherlock Holmes movie than the 2009 film. I would therefore like to nominate as recipient of the first ever (and completely imaginary) “Foggy Notion Award” the 1978 British film, *The Hound of the Baskervilles* starring Peter Cook as Sherlock Holmes and Dudley Moore as Dr. Watson. It is a true, honest straightforward comedy spoof, made before the advent of political

correctness, and guaranteed to offend absolutely everyone. Peter Cook's Holmes, feeling burnt-out and exhausted from too many overly routine and insufficiently challenging cases, rebels. He abandons Sir Henry and Watson at Baskerville Hall and heads back to London for a little independent rest and recreation.

What Sherlockians can love about this really terrible, and at times unbearably gross, film is its marvellous British cast, which includes Joan Greenwood, Penelope Keith, Prunella Scales, Terry-Thomas, and Kenneth Williams ... and not to mention a wonderful Irish Wolfhound ... all doing their best (or worst!) to send up Sherlock Holmes and his world.

The Master is a film veteran. From the first Sherlock Holmes films ever made, silent films, and then on to the era of black and white talkies, through to the first Technicolor film productions, to the invention of television, and continuing to today's videos and DVDs, Sherlock Holmes has been there for their inception, and has played a big part of all of them.

Some of the worst Sherlock Holmes film adaptations can make it seem like Holmes is tumbling down a sort of Reichenbach Falls of media representations. It seems like the real Sherlock Holmes may be lost forever. I know I've feared that. Yet Sherlock Holmes survives.

Our friend and colleague comes back to us, Holmes returns; and putting away his disguise he stands before us gently teasing us for ever having feared for his safety.

Ladies and Gentlemen of the Society, let us raise our glasses to the Master!

## 6. **Paul Billette and the Long Arm of the Post-Sherlockian Law**

On a recent trip to Paris which also happened to be not long ago, Paul Billette was taken to the airport police depot because his Canadian passport had expired. He was fingerprinted, became a guest of the police hotel, and was freed after a few hours. He was issued a "safe conduct" pass so that he could remain in Paris. The usual conditions applied: he had to promise not to blow up the Eiffel Tower, and not to eat the flowers in some of the parks. In order to be allowed to leave France and re-enter Canada, he had to go to the Canadian embassy and get the necessary documents.

While in Paris, Paul met people from the French Sherlockian society. One of these was Bernard Hudain, author of seven books. The Parisian Sherlockians had just returned from a Baskervilles tour in Devon. They do this kind of thing from time to time. It's instead of being British.

## 7. **More Beeton Around the Bush**

Roger Burrows conveyed a message from our Sovereign, Wilfrid de Freitas, who was currently in London. As an antiquarian bookseller (one must always remember to complete the "antiquarian" phrase), Wilfrid frequently travels throughout North America and to England to ply his trade. He recently came across a rather old *Beeton's Annual* with Arthur Conan Doyle's signature in it. Here is his e-mail to us:

*Just received a handsome 4pp. colour folder from Sotheby's, advertising an 1887 Beeton's Christmas Annual as "One of only two known inscribed copies of the very first [as opposed to just the first? Ed.] Sherlock Holmes story." The inscription in ACD's hand reads "This is the very first independant [sic] book of mine which ever was published. Arthur Conan Doyle. Jan 9/14". There's that irritating very again, plus the spelling mistake: most unlike ACD, if*

*I may so observe. This item is part of their July 15 semi-annual Literature sale but obviously warrants special treatment, hence the separate folder; the estimate is £250,000 - £400,000. Thank goodness it's after we leave here, otherwise I might be tempted (ha!) Wilfrid*

**8. The Mind Can Be a Lonely Place**

From the “Astonish and Alienate Your Friends” department, David Kellett threw us a brain teaser from *Mind Trap*:

Which two letters forming an English word, may be added to in order to create three more English words?

he  
her  
hero  
heroine

**9. Come Fly With Me**

Frank Sinatra fans might appreciate this one. Or not. Marie Burrows tells us that according to an article entitled “Sniffing Out the Dead” in the *Ottawa Citizen*, police in Germany have trained a vulture named Sherlock to love the smell of dead human flesh so that he will home in on hard-to-find bodies in rural and mountainous places. Marie suggested the police might have considered using Watson or Lestrade, although they would have had to learn to fly first.

**10. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson**

by Mac Belfer

“This is an unexpected pleasure, Dr. Watson.”

Watson looked up, surprise on his face.

“You seem to know my name, Dr. Freud, yet we have not previously met, nor have I contacted your office for an appointment for which I humbly beg your pardon. It was an impulse, a spur-of-the-moment decision which I am already beginning to regret.”

“Nonsense, Dr. Watson. You picked a good day for this appointment. I am not busy this morning. As to recognizing you, you are far too modest, sir. Who in London would not recognize Dr. Watson, the friend, companion, and associate of the illustrious Mr. Holmes? Both of you have been in all the London papers. I have read your stories of “The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes,” in which you so bravely participated, with a great deal of pleasure and had hoped to meet you one day. So you see, no apologies are necessary. Now that you are here, please sit down and tell me the reason for your coming to see me.”

Watson sat down feeling uncomfortable. Finally he managed to speak.

“Well,” he began, “you have partly put your finger on it already. As you say, I assist Holmes in my humble way. He is my best friend, also my mentor. He has one of the best brains you can find anywhere, and I mean anywhere. I admire him enormously and there is the rub. He makes me feel inadequate. For example: he sees a client coming toward our house.

“‘Well, Watson,’ he says, ‘what do you make of this fellow?’

“‘Well, he walks slowly, so he’s tired. Also, he dresses slovenly.’

“Excellent, my dear Watson. Anything else?’

“I take another sharp look. ‘No, I can see nothing else of importance.’

“He smiles his rather condescending, superior smile.

“My dear Watson, there is a great deal more to see. Observe. You see his boots. They are army boots. That tells me he is recently discharged from the army. He makes his own meal of mashed potatoes. You can see some of the dribble on his waistcoat. As you said, he is slovenly dressed. His waistcoat is buttoned the wrong way. He made his own meal which means he lives alone now but was previously married and has been recently divorced.’

“I was flabbergasted.

“Smugly, he says, ‘It was also there for you to see, Watson. But you must learn to observe minutely. Nothing must escape your scrutiny.’

“It turned out he was right in every detail. You see, Dr. Freud, it always, at first, looks miraculous. But then, he explains it. It seems so simple. Why did I not see it as well? And that makes me feel inadequate.”

Dr. Freud was about to say something, but Watson stopped him.

“There is one more thing that disturbs me. It’s the way the newspapers write about me. Some are kind, but some are vicious and see me as a bumbling idiot rather than a helpful associate. That depresses me and has made me lose confidence in myself.”

Dr. Freud looked at Watson for some time. Finally, he spoke.

“I am glad you have come to see me, Dr. Watson. This situation, if continued and not dealt with, in time could lead to a serious depression. Now let us come to the important issue and ask you this: when a patient comes to your house, does Mr. Holmes examine him?”

“Of course not. He is not a doctor.”

“Rightly so! He does not have your expertise in medicine, as you have no expertise in detection. So you see, you have no reason to feel inadequate. You can admire but not feel diminished by somebody else’s qualities.”

“Dr. Freud, I am beholden to you. You have made me see things from an entirely different perspective and have helped me deal with a problem that has begun to affect my life and threatened to ruin a great friendship. I am profoundly grateful to you.”

“Not at all, Dr. Watson. I am delighted to have been of help.”

A toast to Dr. Watson!

## **11. The Bootmaker Experience**

Marie and Roger Burrows, who live in Ottawa, attended a couple of meetings of the Bootmakers, the Toronto-based Sherlockian society, prior to joining The Bimetallic Question.

Paul Billette asked them how the Bootmakers conducted their meetings. The response was:

Meetings are held monthly in the City of Toronto’s reference library, in the auditorium. The meetings usually attracted about 40 people per meeting. The program was generally more structured than those of The Bimetallic Question, more formal. There was always a story-

of-the-month with a quiz. The quiz was always prepared by the same team that composed the quiz for every meeting. A couple of members provided lyrics apposite to the story, set to well-known tunes, and performed them with keyboard accompaniment. People presented items of interest, as in our Show and Tell feature, but typically as a formal presentation, often with slides or overheads. For example, someone prepared a presentation on Edwardian jewellery. Another feature were refreshments (prepared by Mrs. Hudson), optionally available at a cost of around \$5 per meeting. The Burrows' general impression of these meetings, because of their formality, presenter-audience format, and lack of interaction among attendees, was that they were more like a symposium.

## 12. **Sherlock in Paris, Germany, Russia, and the US**

Based on his recent trip to Paris, Paul Billette discovered that the Sherlockian meetings there have no agenda, but the attendees come in costume. They know the canon, and could pass a test on it. They read it only in French. There is no single "official" French translation of the canon.

The Parisian Sherlockian society "interprets" places where Sherlock Holmes may have gone in France. They embark on tours to those places.

The French Sherlockians were surprised that we conduct our own meetings in English.

Mac Belfer rented a Sherlock Holmes movie made in Germany in the 1930s. He considers it an excellent production, probably with Jewish actors and director.

Roger Burrows pointed out that there is a Russian TV series of Sherlock Holmes. He added that briefly in the 1950s, US television featured a series with the actor Ronald Howard playing Sherlock Holmes (in non-Canonical tales).

## 13. **Quiz - Results**

Story: "The Adventure of the Missing Three-Quarter", prepared by Roger Burrows.

Possible total: 65 + 4 bonus points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Carol Abramson	57	Book: <i>The Case File of Sherlock Holmes</i>
2.	Erica Penner	39½	Double audio cassette of BBC Sherlock Holmes
3.	Kate Wardell	36½	Victorian paper clip

The next quiz, based on "The Adventure of the Second Stain", will be prepared by Carol Abramson.

## 14. **Let's Discuss This, Shall We?**

Roger Burrows found the story to be simple. He liked some of Sherlock Holmes's tongue-in-cheek dialogue, and he noted that some of the themes echoed Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's personal experience. His wife was dying/had died of consumption; his father had been placed in an asylum; and Doyle himself was having a platonic relationship with a woman who would become his wife.

In addition, let's not forget that SACD was, after all, a physician. He would have been no stranger to disease, and the social safety net that deals with illness.



**15. Third Toast – To Mrs. Hudson**

by Erica Penner

This toast comes to us in the form of eight pages of quotations by Mrs. Martha Hudson (Mrs. Hudson's Diary) on Twitter. For more, go to: <http://twitter.com/mrshudsonsdiary>

Here are a few examples:

80. Dr. Watson was saying that such drugs wear off quite quickly and must be given over quite a period of time. You'd need an inside man.
81. Overheard while serving breakfast, Mr. Holmes seems to have a theory that Shurston's being drugged and isn't really mad at all.
86. Scrapbooks and stout sticks seem such a flimsy defense against all the dark deeds in the shadows.
87. I feel uneasy every time they go out into the crime-ridden streets, let alone when dark things come here to them.
91. I had to warn her about the dangers of ending up in a home for unmarried mothers. I don't know if it sank in.
92. Apparently she was put off men for life, although I did say that perhaps if it was Lord Hugh it'd be different, and she blushed!

**Third-and-a-half toast, by Ron Zilman:**

In the sleight-of-brain of misinformation for which we are occasionally notorious, Ron also prepared a toast to Mrs. Hudson. Also gleaned from the internet, it is available for your perusal, posted somewhere under Sherlock Holmes – Characters – John H Watson MD – Archive for September, 2009 – Our worthy landlady, Mrs Hudson – 25<sup>th</sup> September – By The Good Doctor

**16. Fourth Toast – To the Woman**

by Paul Billette

In this *impromptu* toast, Paul points out the compelling features of Irene Adler, "The Woman," who became the protagonist in a series of mysteries by Texan Carol Nelson Douglas.

**17. Suit Up, Gents!**

We had a discussion on Sherlockian suits as interpreted in illustrations in *Collier's* magazine, and the Pagetian renditions in *The Strand*. *Collier's* showed a more modern presentation of attire, while the Paget illustrations were decidedly more Victorian.

**18. Put Your Thinking Caps On**

Although Wilfrid de Freitas is travelling and can't be with us at a few of our meetings, he sent an e-mail encouraging our members to prepare and submit papers at our meetings. Indeed, we always welcome such expressions of passion and scholarship. If you are planning to present such an endeavour to the Society, please contact Wilfrid in advance so we can schedule you in. Unless we know in advance, you will necessarily be limited to the new standard of a three-minute presentation (and questions and discussion, which can still add up). This is so we can fit in everyone who wants to contribute to our meetings.

**19. Fifth Toast – To the Society**

by Carol Abramson

Fellowship can be defined as affiliation, friendship, camaraderie, and companionship. All of these words work within the context of this society. We come together with a common interest, and work together towards a common goal. Our shared fascination with the adventures contained within the Canon, as well as with the characters in each of these stories, allows us to meet regularly with fascinating people whose lives touch ours in no other way. Together we discuss, debate, imbibe, and partake. We study each case, deliberating over the finer points of Holmes's life, questioning the motives of each crime, and learning the intricacies of the deductive method. We do this in good company, and good fellowship.

To the Society!

**20. The Bimetallic Grey Matter Award**

Paul Billette explained to the newcomers why we keep score of the winners of our quizzes. This is because we offer an annual trophy. Big winners in the past have been David Kellett and more recently Carol Abramson. Prizes and accolades are disbursed at our annual dinner, which is partially costumed and always fun.

**21. When in Paris**

Paul Billette talked about the quality and pricing of food at bistros in Paris. He said that one could have a very exquisite meal at an out-of-the-way bistro at mid-day for a fraction of the price one would pay in the evening. Furthermore, with the proliferation of fine chefs and the popularization of gourmet cuisine, it is the norm to find some of the finest chefs at work in smaller bistros.

**22. Please Note Date Change for Our Next Meeting**

Our next meeting will take place one week earlier than normal, on **Thursday, July 29** at the usual time, 6:30 p.m., at the usual place at the Westmount Library. This change has been made to accommodate summer travelling plans of several members.

See you there!

**23. Future Toasts**

- To The Master - Roger Burrows
- To Dr. Watson - Paul Billette
- To The Woman - Marie Burrows
- To Mrs. Hudson - Elliott Newman
- To The Society - David Kellett

**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, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 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>