

**Minutes of the meeting of  
The Bimetallic Question  
July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**Date of next meeting**

Thursday, October 7<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 Hound of the Baskervilles”**  
(multiple choice)  
prepared by Roger Burrows

**Minutes** of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, July 29<sup>th</sup>, 2010 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

**Present:** Carol Abramson, Stanley Baker, Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Wilfrid de Freitas, David Dowse, Susan Fitch, Chris Herten-Greaven, David Kellett, Lars Lovkvist, Elliott Newman, Mietek Padowicz, Naomi Padowicz, Arlene Scher

**Regrets:** Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Geoff Dowd, Patrick Campbell

**CALL TO ORDER:**

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

## ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Simon and Garfunkel, Dos and Don'ts, Kibbles 'n Bits)

### 1. Freebies

Wilfrid de Freitas cleaned out part of his basement where he has a treasure-trove of books and related tools of his trade as a seasoned antiquarian bookseller. As part of this cleansing ritual, he brought numerous artefacts to our Sherlockian table, and orchestrated a drawing in which the rules were simple: You do or don't get to keep what you have or haven't won. Some of these exciting books were quite delicious and this is why we were reminded of a puppy's being trained to balance a cookie on the end of its nose. The item we could have won was nearly as desirable as that which we might have won. The dust settled and on an unsteady keel, we proceeded to item #2 of the meeting's invigorating agenda.

### 2. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by David Kellett

*That's right, folks. In keeping with the tone established at the outset, we began our toasts at the end in order to end at the beginning. Everyone could play. Eventually we got the gist of it, and survived the experience as long as we walked out backwards at the end of the meeting.*

In the latest edition of Elliott's (probably T.S. Eliot, the poet) wonderful, insightful minutes, there was considerable discussion as to what constitutes a toast. I was always of the opinion that, just like the quiz, the content was, according to whoever was giving it, exactly what they said it was. I myself am guilty of the occasional lapse into wilful or innocent obfuscation. I gave what I thought was a good presentation on what's been done with the Irene Adler persona, beyond the canon. But the Monster is right. These lengthy perorations were more in the nature of discussions of ideas, rather than formal canonical toasts. So if that's the way it's going to be, I've just wasted a chunk of my precious three minutes in arguing the case. You want a formal "Toast to the Society?" All right then; here it is. Are you ready? Listen up. It's brief and I have something I want to say.

Sherlock Holmes is a brilliant literary creation as is evidenced by its enormous and wide-ranging popularity at the time it was published, and our enduring fascination with it more than a century later. The Society provides a framework for a group of widely diverse people with one common interest: to meet and greet, to speak of cabbages and kings, to hark back to a more genteel era, and to marvel at the intellectual prowess and derring-do of our hero. I have been a member for eight years now. I contributed what I could, and I took what I could get. I have enjoyed the experience immensely. Since this is my last chance to do so, I would like to thank you all for putting up with me. I am keenly aware of what an unbelievable "pain in the ass" I can be. But, just as Irene Adler's familiarity with male costume led to Holmes's undoing, some of you clever Sherlockians, through observation and deduction, were able to see through my "straightest man in the world" costume and "rough trade" persona, leading you to realize that there was someone in there. Someone worth knowing. As a result I have been rewarded with innumerable kindnesses and pleasures on so many different levels. Time forbids detailing it, but you know who you are, and I thank you "each and everyone."

But what of the future? In an age of rapidly proliferating diversions that promise instant gratification, things can seem so terribly quaint. The membership is greying, and young blood is scarce. One by one we die away. But the numbers do not matter. For so long as one person, just one, knows of the times and deeds of Sherlock Holmes, and feels for it, feels it in his heart's core, then "the game is still afoot." For the nonce, WE are the keepers of the flame and, I believe, we do it very well.

Ladies and Gentlemen: I give you "The Bimetallic Question."

... three minutes on the nose (mutter aside)

### 3. **Belching and Worse**

Once again Chris Herten-Greaven regaled us with pâté (two kinds, this time), cheddar cheese, and crackers which promoted a telekinetic messaging system involving significant raising of eyebrows, jerking and tilting of heads, silent movement of lower jaws, sliding of plates, outstretching of arms, and activity of digestive systems.

A special thank-you to Chris for these many offerings over the past years. Not only must he be a uniquely nurturing individual who wants to see us well-fed, but for a dentist to provide *soft* foods – well, this is unique and obviously, quite contrary to self-interest. From someone plying his trade among the holes, pains, and crooked things growing in the mouths of the nation, would not one expect acts of kindness to contain Swedish Ikea meatballs with pebbles at their core? peanut brittle? jawbreakers? Macintosh toffee? beef jerky? But nay, this is not Chris's way. You have been kind. We appreciate.

### 4. **Get on with the Show**

Mietek Padowicz shared with us a critique he wrote on the British production of *A Study in Pink*, a modern-day take-off of *A Study in Scarlet*, the beginning of what we hope will be a new Sherlockian series created by Steven Moffat and Mark Gatiss. Updated to current scientific and communications standards, Sherlock Holmes adapts well to 21<sup>st</sup>-century London. According to Mietek, "It's a mystery in the style of Spooks and Midsomer mixed together. A gentle dose of humour and some wonderful use of special effects that aid exposition and demonstrate the methods of deduction as practiced by our hero ... These are the same people we know and love, just in 2010."

The three shows that have been produced thus far have garnered exceptionally high audience numbers in the UK: 7-8 million. The BBC has ordered 10 more episodes on top of the original three. You can find them on the internet.

Despite the modern setting, there is a strong Edwardian flavour to the ambiance.

Marie Burrows told us that the first of the three shows already recorded will be broadcast on PBS, Sunday, October 24<sup>th</sup>, at 9:00 p.m.

To read more from Mietek, log onto:

<http://scurvytoon.blogspot.com/>

## 5. **Sherlock Holmes: The Man and His Worlds**

The Baker Street Breakfast Club, the scion society of Bennington, Vermont, hosted a fascinating and, as we observed, highly successful Sherlockian symposium on the grounds of Bennington College. The setting was ideal, since most of the proceedings could be held in the “Usdan” building which houses the college’s creative and performing arts activities. Main sessions were held in a small auditorium, which was sufficient for the 100+ invitees and guests.

The Bimetallicans in attendance were Raj and Paul Billette, and Eva and Elliott Newman.

The symposium was extremely well-organized, and seemed to go off without a hitch. It was set up by a committee which appeared to have worked long and hard. There were panel discussions followed by receptions, followed by lectures and presentations which sometimes went on concurrently.

Probably by coincidence, a number of presentations zeroed in on the canonical novel, *The Valley of Fear*, a complex fiction based on the real-life Molly Maguires of Pennsylvania’s 19<sup>th</sup> century coal mining district. The expertise of the presenters and the items they touched on made their lectures fascinating and compelling. Each night there were screenings of rather ancient Sherlockian films, canonical and pastiche. These rolled on until two and three in the morning.

The composition and calibre of the presenters was another gluttonous treat. There was a preponderance of university types both among the presenters and guests. Quite a few were or had been professors of Literature, and hailed from as far away as Nova Scotia, Ohio, Texas, and points in between. A few Torontonians and Ottawavians (or however they prefer to be called) were there, as were Peter Blau, the Sherlockian guru from Virginia, and Stephen Doyle, publisher of *The Baker Street Journal* and author of *Sherlock Holmes for Dummies* (not to be confused with *The Idiot’s Guide* ...).

Truly interesting people who are doing creative and productive things with their lives in the area of Sherlockiana were there, including Lindsay Faye, a very young woman who has published two mystery novels and spoke on the Sherlockian process. Also lively and impressive were Tracy Mack and Michael Citrin, a husband-and-wife team who have written a series of Sherlockian pastiche novels for children.

We slept in the rather Spartan dormitories. There was no air conditioning in these buildings, so your Lowly Scribe and his most agreeable wife drove to a local Home Depot, almost beside the campus, and purchased a \$20 fan which did the trick rather nicely. It whirred silently, and once night fell, it ushered in the somewhat cooler, fresher mountain air into our clambake-of-a-room. This worked well until the skunk.

The Sherlockian week-end was held in conjunction with the “Season of Mystery” which took place in and around Bennington. Indeed, the Sherlockian symposium was the jumping-off point for the season. In town, there were posters in shop windows, and bookstores and general window space throughout the shopping district showed Sherlockian and detective paraphernalia, as well as mystery motifs. If you think the local Sherlockian Breakfast Club was responsible for all this mayhem, you are right. Just about all of the memorabilia on public display came from their collections, and they coordinated the “Season of Mystery”. The

high (and we mean “high”) point of this week-end was the mystery treasure hunt which invited participants to solve the “Case of the Missing Baby Moose,” a delightfully tiled moose with a unicorn’s spiral pronged painlessly into its forehead. The winner of the hunt located the mooselet atop the 300-foot (more or less) Bennington Monument – easier climbing for a young moose than for some of the more sedentary types who attended the symposium. Other features of the “Mystery Summer” at Bennington included a whodunit (more of a wot’s happening?) play very capably performed by local amateurs.

If acquisition is your game, you would have been in heaven at this symposium. A very large hall was converted into a bookstore, with displays of artwork by the artist-in-residence of the BSI, and items and books for sale by societies and private individuals. Everyone was ready to autograph anything.

For meals, we repaired to the college cafeteria whose very friendly staff assured us we wouldn’t be poisoned, and we would actually like the grub. They were largely right. There were one or two dishes that defied logic or reasonable identification, but mainly the food was more than palatable. After a couple of mornings when we commonly acknowledged that the coffee they provided was sapping our will to live, we were pointed to a coffee machine “around the corner.” Although it was almost in Connecticut, it was worth the air fare. Once we had the secret coffee we were in much better shape to greet the day and offer a weak smile to each other. The banquet, also in that building, offered as good food as could be found at any banquet in those United States of America.

We also learned that in order to become a BSI (Baker Street Irregulars, New York) member, you have to be invited. It does no good to whine, they laugh at pleading, and they consider crying into the back of a BSI hand before kissing it, to be in very poor taste. This knowledge only increased the awe inspired by members of that society in us (we who know nothing). Probably, the BSI may consider itself the apex of the acme of Sherlockian societies in North America, second only to The Bimetallic Question, of course. In order to be invited into membership, you need to have founded a viable and active scion society, and/or have contributed in some significant way to the lore of the character under the deerstalker.

Sally Sugarman, a BSI member and the leader of The Baker Street Breakfast Club (your Lowly Scribe forgets the nomenclature they use in their hierarchy of executives), suggested that we of The Bimetallic Question should hold the next symposium. This seems like very hard work, folks. There are those among us who may have prepared one in the past, just before yours truly joined the society, so ... there it is. It probably takes years to prepare a symposium; we’ll reap a lot of credit, and unless we have young, energetic people to participate with us, we’ll all need blood transfusions.

All the presentations were interesting, if not captivating. Every presenter, if not an active specialist on that topic, had at least done enough work to carry the ball convincingly and add to our understanding of the canon, the period, the pastiches, and the competition in the genre, then and since. For your Lowly Scribe, the symposium brought SH to life and featured him in dimensions heretofore unimagined. Skilled eyes evoked imagery, keen minds drew parallels, and passionate hearts shared their ardour. We also rekindled relationships and made new friends.

## 6. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Elliott Newman

“Women are never to be trusted, not even the best of them.”  
Thus spake Mr. Sherlock Holmes, forgetting one essential item:  
The gentle Mrs. Hudson, in the flat beneath,  
Suffering the bullet-holes above the mantel-piece.

What error of judgment, or cantankerous mood  
Would prompt our Sherlock to be so rude?  
Was he high? Morose? Impatiently borderline?  
What wrinkled the perfection of his nose so aquiline?

And you, Mrs. Hudson: Are you petite?  
Are you never surly?  
Have you even once added disquiet  
To the Holmesian hurly-burly?

How clearly did our idiosyncratic sleuth  
Land exactly on the truth  
When he acknowledged your “stately tread”  
In “A Study in Scarlet” with sudden clarity of head.

And how unlike our acolyte of misogyny  
To praise your idea of cuisinery  
In contradictory and parenthetical mention,  
For with his keenness of mind, that was his intention.

And the genius you displayed in “The Empty House”  
When you moved the lifesaving bust without even the aid of a mouse.  
And so dear friends, with assistance from the Encyclopaedia of Bunson,  
I give you one and all, our stalwart Mrs. Hudson.

## 7. When you're bored

Paul Billette pointed out that the *Westmount Examiner* has placed our society on a list of things to do in Westmount.

Your Lowly Scribe was reminded that Île Perrot, home of Pete's Smoked Meat, is *not* on the West Island of Montreal, but rather, off the island because it is on another island. Your scribe cannot even claim poetic license, and cannot account for this oversight. *Scribe pennitente*.

## 8. More pastiche

Roger Burrows showed us a recently-published novella, *Sherlock Holmes at Sidney Sussex College*. The college is at Cambridge. The booklet is written by R.J. Chorley.

**9. David does the Big Apple**

David Dowse recently visited New York City with his wife and two daughters. He splintered off with one of the daughters and participated in a treasure hunt led by actors. "You are plunged into a dire plot to distribute 'airline tickets' to schizophrenic characters in lower New York." The actors were crazy, the mission bizarre, and fun was had.

**10. I have another bridge for you**

Wilfrid de Freitas warned us about a woman on crutches who stands in front of downtown hospitals, asking for \$20 for a taxi, to get home. Five years ago when she began this routine, she was living in St-Henri. Now she's on Upper Belmont. Check out the five o'clock limo.

**11. Anything is quicker than the pen**

Regarding the woman's begging in #10 above, Chris Herten-Greaven gave us a brilliant – um – yes ...

Well, that's just the point, isn't it?

He gave us the word that defines the kind of play of words in the following line, and of course, your LS got caught up in something else and, there you go.

Here's the line: "putting all your begs in one askit"

What's the word?

**12. We have a couple of more bridge listings**

Mac Belfer recalls a chap who said he was heir to the King Solomon Mines, and was offering to sell shares.

Wilfrid de Freitas heard about someone in London who was going to sell the Ritz Hotel. He was paid £1,000,000 but was caught.

**13. They repaired to the watchmaker's, whereupon they got their watches repaired**

Chris Herten-Greaven suggested we start a column entitled "Odds and Sods" where we list miscellaneous information about where to take things that need repair. Chris, this is an inspiring idea. There are so many things needing to be fixed nowadays. We know that physicians shouldn't heal themselves, so they could use this list too.

**14. David Kellett and the Second Milverton**

David Kellett said that in the Granada presentation of *The Second Stain*, some dialogue was taken from the canonical story, "Charles Augustus Milverton."

**15. The best-laid plans**

Wilfrid de Freitas informed us of the fate of the 1887 Beeton's Christmas Annual he had written to us about from England, with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's signature in it. It had been expected to be sold at auction for as high as £400,000 ... but it didn't sell.

## 16. Victoria's Secret

Carol Abramson invited everyone to a Victorian tea party to be held on Saturday, August 21<sup>st</sup>, beginning at 4pm. Period costume is encouraged (but not mandatory).

Editorial report:

The home of Carol and Jacob Abramson provided a distinctly Victorian setting for Afternoon Tea on Saturday August 21<sup>st</sup>. The dining room table and buffet fairly groaned with Victorian goodies, flowers (including gorgeous yellow roses) and shining silverware. Mrs. Hudson would have stood in awe, if only she had been able to attend. Close to two dozen Bimetallicans and friends were greeted at the door by an authentic Victorian maid who led the guests to the hosts in the parlour. After a group photo (come to the next meeting to see David Kellett's fine photographic efforts or check our website in the near future), everyone joined in for sandwiches, cakes, squares, fruit, tea (no less than four different kinds), etc, etc, etc,.... Several notable Victorians were in attendance, including Mrs. (Maureen Anderson) Brown and her partner, Mr. (Jack Anderson) Brown. On behalf of The Bimetallic Question, Wilfrid thanked Carol and Jacob for a most enjoyable event and expressed the hope that "someone" would volunteer for next summer's event.

## 17. Third Toast – to the Woman

by Marie Burrows

At the time I attended my first Sherlock Holmes Society meeting in Ottawa at the Canadian Press Club, I had read only one Sherlock Holmes adventure, namely "The Hound of the Baskervilles". So when a member of Capital Holmes proposed a toast to *the* woman, my reaction was "Who's she?" Later, I attended a couple of meetings of The Bootmakers of Toronto where toasts to *the* woman seemed to be a regular occurrence. My reaction was "What's special about her? There are lots of women in the Canon and the only other woman to get a special toast is Mrs. Hudson". Even I knew that Mrs. Hudson was Holmes's landlady.

A few years later, on October 11, 2007, I attended my first meeting of The Bimetallic Question. Once again, *the* woman was toasted. I said to myself "She must be really special. Everybody toasts her." David Kellett won the quiz that night and decreed that he would base the next quiz on *A Scandal in Bohemia*. I said to myself: "Wow! I'll finally get to know *the* woman."

The adventure itself is exciting. Holmes dresses up like a drunken groom as well as a nonconformist clergyman while the King of Bohemia hides behind a mask when he visits Holmes. Irene Adler, *the* woman, is beautiful, well dressed, talented, and smart. She's also financially independent, a rarity in those days. Furthermore, Adler has found a husband who loves her. But most importantly, she outwits the King who jilted her and dresses *in drag* to confront the greatest consulting detective in London. After reading *A Scandal in Bohemia*, my reaction is "Wow! **That** woman. What a woman! No wonder that Sherlockians everywhere sing her praises."

Please raise your glasses now to *the* woman.



**18. The sound of one toast dropping**

Wilfrid asked for volunteers for next meeting's toasts.

Yes. Ahem. See later.

**19. Quiz - Results**

Story: "The Adventure of the Second Stain", prepared by Carol Abramson.

Possible total: 100 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Roger Burrows	98	Games
2.	Marie Burrows	90½	Games
3.	David Kellett	85	Games

The next quiz, based on "The Hound of the Baskervilles", will be prepared by Roger Burrows, who promises a strictly multiple-choice version.

**20. Second Toast – to Dr. Watson**

by Paul Billette

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!

Let it be known, O good people of The Bimetallic Question that I rise in praise of and to toast the celebrated man of letters, Dr. John Watson. As a young man, while searching for lodgings, Dr. Watson's serendipitous encounter with one Sherlock Holmes, a budding consulting detective at the time, led to sharing rooms at 221B Baker Street; a very fortuitous event, you must agree.

The dominant Holmes conscripted the pliable Dr. Watson into helping him with the solving of the multitude of cases which came his way. In the process, although trained as a medical man, Dr. Watson found that he had an ability for the craft of writing. In so doing, he has done more than any other writer to form our image of Victorian London.

Following Holmes all over Greater London, Dr. Watson was unusually precise in his London locations, only occasionally disguising a site. However, many times he gave enough clues to help us find these "hidden" locations. And how do I know that, you may ask? It is because Thomas Bruce Wheeler in *Finding Sherlock's London*, says so. Following in the footsteps of Homer and Suetonius, these literary ancestors of our lowly scribe have contributed to a better understanding of his surroundings for generations to come.

Ladies and Gentlemen, raise your glasses in a toast to Dr. Watson, a fine observer of the mores of his time, and the author of a canon of works justly revered through the ages to our own era and most probably for many more to come.

**21. Thoughts and Ruminations on “The Adventure of the Second Stain”**

Wilfrid: The plot was contrived.

In *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, there is no mention of world affairs as an influence on the events in the story.

Holmes’s approach was not influenced by the woman’s good looks.

Roger: Holmes says the murder can’t be a coincidence, but it was.

SACD: One of my ten best.

**22. First Toast – to the Master**

by Roger Burrows

A Sherlockian of my acquaintance once described Sherlock Holmes as a kind of Victorian Superman. That set me to wondering how far you could take this comparison. Certainly they both have secret identities (Clark Kent and Sigerson) and apparently superhuman powers. They both have arch enemies (Lex Luthor and Professor Moriarty), and both dedicate their lives to the fight against crime.

However, the parallels do fall down in some areas. For example, Superman has no Watson (unless you include Lois Lane, but I don’t think we want to go there).

So I would like to suggest another superhero — Batman. Batman, Robin, and Alfred are akin to Holmes, Watson and Mrs. Hudson. Holmes has Inspector Lestrade; Batman has Commissioner Gordon. Holmes has his “five small refuges in different parts of London”; Batman has his cave. Admittedly, Batman has several arch-enemies, but that’s inflation for you. And if you need one more piece of evidence to convince you, they both wear capes!

Ladies and gentleman, I give you the original superhero, the Master, Mr. Sherlock Holmes!

**23. Jeremy Brett Rules!**

Wilfrid de Freitas informed us that there is a petition circulating around England to make Jeremy Brett (posthumously) a Fellow of the British Arts Council. We have no doubt this movement will succeed. Brett will employ supernatural acting skills when he accepts his speech.

**24. Next Meeting’s Toast Presenters**

To the Master	-	Mietek Padowicz
To Dr. Watson	-	Chris Herten-Greaven
To the Woman	-	David Dowse
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Mac Belfer
To the Society	-	Arlene Scher

**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 7<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>