

Minutes of the meeting of
The Bimetallic Question
April 7th, 2011

Date of next meeting

Thursday, June 2nd, 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 Study in Scarlet (Part 1)”
prepared by Patrick Campbell

Minutes of the meeting of THE BIMETALLIC QUESTION held on Thursday, April 7th, 2011 at the Westmount Library (Westmount Room), 4574 Sherbrooke Street West, Westmount, Quebec.

Present: Carol Abramson, Jack Anderson, Maureen Anderson, Florence Belfer (guest), Mac Belfer, Paul Billette, Marie Burrows, Roger Burrows, Patrick Campbell, Louise Corda, Nitika Dosaj, David Dowse, Edward Herba (guest), Tom Holmes, Raf Jans (guest), David Kellett, Malcolm McRae, Elliott Newman, Lawrence Reich, Arlene Scher, Ron Zilman

Regrets: Ann Elbourne, Wilfrid de Freitas, Chris Herten-Greaven, Joan O'Malley, Erica Penner

CALL TO ORDER:

The meeting was called to order promptly at 6:30 by Sovereign Ron Zilman.

ITEMS OF BUSINESS AND GENTLE TRANSACTION

(Incorporating Birds and Bees, Lollipops and Roses, Stan and Ollie)

1. First Toast – To the Master

by Chris Herten-Greaven
read by Marie Burrows

The ever-daunting task to think of a fitting tribute to the Master; he who with the simplest of odds-and-ends can deduce from a maze of facts and figures a simple solution. Or a solution in many parts.

We are still baffled as to how he does it, until he explains how he tied together the loose ends – elementary, my dear Watson!!

Despite all our present-day tests and techniques, those who are in charge of criminal investigation would do well to read and frequently refer to The Canon.

Ladies and Gentlemen, please raise your glasses and toast The Master!

2. Feeding the Mind and Staying out of Trouble

As we move upwards and onwards in our tireless quest for Spring and Summer entertainment, our scouts have come up with the following:

- a) A guided tour through the Montreal Museum of Fine Arts' guest exhibition of "The Warrior Emperor and China's Terracotta Army". This is being organized by Paul Billette and coordinated with the museum.
- b) A walking tour of Old Montreal was proposed. It would include visits to sites of famous or infamous crimes. When, where, and how this will take place is a mystery.
- c) The "What Building Stones Tell Us" walking tour. Paul will talk to Joan O'Malley about the possibility of repeating this most enjoyable and informative guided stroll along McTavish and Sherbrooke streets. Joan organized this tour for us once before. The tour points out the limestone facades of old mansions and elegant buildings, drawing us in close to the imprints of crustacean and other fossils in the stone which came from quarries in the St. Lawrence Valley, south of Montreal.
- d) Victorian bowling and variations thereof. This included gathering at a bowling alley to play in Victorian or other attire. Some form of attire will be compulsory. Those not inclined to sporting Victorian dress may elect to bring generous supplies of the Vicar's sticky buns, and taking a few nibbles before inserting their digits into the holes of the ball. The mystery motif of this event would be to find out if Jack Anderson is going to wear a kilt, and to negotiate the obvious Bimetallic Question if he does.
- e) Shakespeare in the Park preceded by a Sherlockian Bar-B-Q. Every summer, Shakespearean theatre visits Westmount Park in one form or another. For those with their own lawn chairs, a generous supply of insect repellent (believe your Lowly Scribe!) and a sufficient quantity of wine coolers, the thespian presentations are passable. The Sherlockian Bar-B-Q will up the ante with the application of heat to meat, and in some cases, seitan and tofu products showing parallel scorch marks. More of this anon.

3. Whither the Society?

In the previous minutes, David Dowse and Elliott Newman put forward a snapshot of the BmQ today, as well as a number of discussion points, with the aim of finding ways for the BmQ to attract more members. Wilfrid de Freitas made a written response to these; in his absence, Roger Burrows read Wilfrid's comments (and added one of his own), as follows:

- Snapshot
 - Meetings follow the same formula: Show and Tell, Toasts, Quiz

Wilfrid: New ingredients to our meetings would be welcome; who's willing to step up and introduce them? Meanwhile, don't throw out the baby with the bath-water. About the quiz: should we be having it at every meeting? I notice as soon as it's announced quite a few people get up and leave for a seventh inning stretch, or whatever it's called.
 - Oral/visual/tactile tradition (non-electronic)

Wilfrid: Electronic is good, but virtual. Tactile is better.
 - Some reluctant toast-makers, volunteers sometimes need to be prodded

Wilfrid: Agree; this is a constant problem for the Sovereign, and it shouldn't be. Should we consider reducing the number of toasts? If there were only, say, two (SH and Dr. W) might there be more competition or eager volunteers to propose same?

Roger: What about two toasts per meeting: SH and anyone else from the Canon, at the toaster's choice?
 - Difficult to get people to share the load: a few people do most of the work

Wilfrid: This is almost always the case with such Societies as ours; has anyone found a way around it?
- Discussion points
 - Programming – Meetings – deciding what new types of activities to have at our regularly-scheduled meetings. This will also review the structure of our meetings and our quizzes, etc.

Wilfrid: We have Show and Tell and Reminiscences/Reports and I think these are very popular; almost everyone joins in and we learn a lot about what's been going on and what's coming up, etc. Since our inception I've been trying to introduce some sort of formal discussion about the story following the quiz and when it's happened it's been well received, to the extent that we've sometimes not left enough time for everyone to have their say.
 - Electronics – how to implement audio and visual presentation (films, segments, etc.) at our meetings, etc.

Wilfrid: Whoa! I'm still trying to figure out how to use a cell phone!

- Membership

Wilfrid: Do we want to increase it? Given the physical constraints of our meeting facility, if/when we have more than about 20 attendees, some people have to sit away from the table and, consequently, feel “left out” (they just leave the meeting). We (might) have to change the present arrangement to something like theatre style ... I’m ambivalent on this point.

- Scholarship – keep track of the latest (and older) works on SACD and the canon.

Wilfrid: Doesn’t each person do this according to their taste anyway?

- Scholarship (attracting students) – This, as well as well as electronics might be of interest to younger members who are attending high school and university. We might consider offering to reach out to student populations who wish to set up Sherlockian clubs in their institutions, and have them join ours as a way to get started

Wilfrid: This would be a major and worthwhile project: who would undertake it?

- Advertising – Getting the word out there

Wilfrid: The library has a sheet with our meeting dates in a glass case. A more sharply defined version has been printed and posted.

Elliott: A publicity committee (remember the notion of involving people according to their interests) should bring in new faces. Several years ago, I created a rudimentary flyer that was put up in book store windows in the West Island, Westmount, and downtown. It brought in new people, possibly even new members. Blurbs about the Society in the Westmount and Montreal press usually bring in new people. Wouldn’t we like a Stanley surrogate, a Recruiter-at-Arms?

- Scion Connection – researching and keeping us informed of what other Sherlockian societies are doing around the world ... also developing a strategy for keeping in contact with them, and to use some of their approaches to attracting and keeping members

Wilfrid: Any volunteers? Also, I think we’re just about the right size; if we could encourage more active participation from the members we do have, I think we’d have a pretty vibrant Society

- Pastiche updates – keeping tabs on the latest publications and reporting them to our meetings

Wilfrid: Speaking personally, I’m not interested in pastiches.

Wilfrid’s summary: while I agree with most of what’s been proposed, let’s approach things gradually – perhaps introducing one or two innovations a year and seeing if they work. If they take off, we can up this number, but let’s not go off in too many directions at once and dilute our efforts.

4. Letter from a Friend

In response to our query concerning constructive ideas, programs, and structures to help update our Society, Patrick Campbell wrote the following letter:

The minutes of the BmQ meeting of 3 February 2011 included a supplement entitled: "Toward a New Society, expanding the Bimetallic Question" which asks for ideas leading to future events.

May I offer two such.

- 1) Two of the most delightful and successful events of the past years were the two Victorian Garden Parties held out in Hudson where virtually everyone attended in Victorian dress, with that of the ladies being particularly noteworthy. Indoors we were served a selection of Victorian food, straight from Mrs. Beeton's kitchen, and outdoors we had a sort of treasure hunt, music, and a scratch game of cricket that proved most amusing. There was also, as I remember, some sort of singsong and I'm sure a search for the written account of the event will suggest other activities. Cost was negligible. I'm sure we could locate a suitable venue.
- 2) Another event would be one with two main objectives, other than the requirement that the event be unabashedly Sherlockian.

The first requirement would be to undertake an event that would directly involve a number of our members and entertain the non-performers. The second requirement would be that the costs and the prior preparation would be at a minimum. What I am suggesting is an unrehearsed play reading. Some years ago, Mr. McCall of the Centaur called together a meeting with the aim of having one or more plays written for production at the Centaur ... I happened to be one of those invited. My offering was a Sherlockian pastiche entitled *Tides of Wight* which was subsequently published in 1999 in two formats: hard cover (ISBN 1-55246-062-2) and Play script (ISBN 1-55246-221-8).

The cast includes 16 speaking parts and 7 walk-on parts, plus chorus. There are four acts in thirteen scenes, but it is deliberately written to require little or no furnishings, costumes or sets.

All we would require would be some chairs for our members who will constitute the audience, and an area for the performers who would move forward as required. We would require 10 sets of the play script, which I could supply, and there would be no need for rehearsals, as the performers would simply read their parts while standing, or sitting, before the audience. Performers would be supplied with the typescript beforehand to familiarize them with the sequence of the play.

There are speaking parts for a number of men, several women and two bright female children, and, in some cases, a reader can cover more than one character.

No need for props but it would be useful if the lighting could be dimmed on occasion.

Some knowledge of Ratzegger's *Eleven Distinct Parts* (See Monsignor's Knox's *Essays in Satire* Chapter 5) would be instructive, but not necessary.

Copies of the hard cover book are available on request from the undersigned.

The lack of props and sets is not a problem as each set is described to the audience by chorus before each scene, and imagination serves thereafter.

The play has never been presented to the public on stage completely although some scenes were presented as a play reading by a theatre company in Hudson, Quebec some years ago.

I see this as a special event, and not at the Westmount Library, as any decent size location would serve.

Patrick Campbell M. Bt.,

26 March 2011

5. Second Toast – To Dr. Watson

by Marie Burrows

Just over a year ago, *The Adventure of Charles Augustus Milverton* was the subject of the evening's quiz. While Sherlock Holmes and Milverton naturally seemed to attract the most attention, I was particularly struck by the actions of Dr. Watson.

Moments after declaring that Holmes has gone too far with his insincere marriage proposal to Milverton's housemaid, Watson risks his reputation and career to join Holmes in a night of disguise, break and enter, and theft. "Morally justifiable, though technically criminal," indeed!

Watson jumps into the adventure with gusto, suggesting the use of black silk masks which he makes himself. Holmes, often reluctant to compliment his friend and co-conspirator, comments that Watson has a "strong natural turn for this sort of thing."

On the way to Milverton's home at Appledore Towers, Watson joins Holmes in wearing dress-clothes so that the pair appear as theatre-goers on their way home. Watson carries a larger frame than Holmes and such attire would certainly make it more difficult to carry out the quick escape required later in the evening.

Eventually, Holmes and Watson arrive at the scene of the crime and don their masks. Here, Watson may well have saved the case when he notices that the outer door to Milverton's study is neither locked nor bolted. Obviously, Watson designed the masks so effectively that his vision remained unimpeded even under less than ideal lighting conditions.

Wearing theatre attire and a silk face covering and, perhaps, still feeling the effects of his war wounds, Watson scales a six-foot wall and then runs for two miles. Quite an initiation to Holmes' world of disguise.

I know of at least one other adventure where Watson pretends to be someone he is not. In *His Last Bow*, Watson appears as a heavily-built, elderly chauffeur with a grey moustache – a look probably easy to achieve after 32 years of partnership with Sherlock Holmes.

Please raise your glasses to Dr. John H. Watson, an infrequent but effective master of disguise.

6. The Center of the Crux of the Heart of the Matter

In a brief discussion around elements of our bimonthly meetings which work well, someone opined that our quiz is central to each meeting. Someone else suggested that the meetings were an opportunity to escape the rigid formality of our daily jobs. Other voices were heard to whisper that we are a quirky lot.

Your Lowly Scribe, with a fountain pen up each nostril and another corked elsewhere, had no idea what they were talking about. He finds everyone quite normal and is prepared to attest to this at any time.

7. Third Toast – To the Woman

by Carol Abramson

Irene Adler ... woman of mystery ... of whom, as it is written in *A Scandal in Bohemia*, “eclipses and predominates the whole of her sex,” was young, beautiful, bright, talented, and charming. A noted diva and adventuress, she captivated royalty. By her late twenties, she had already retired from a successful operatic career, and was well known in many countries. Quite a history ...

Discarded by a King for not being of his own station, Irene used a little blackmail to remind him of her former place in his life. Holmes was set on her trail, only first to find himself a witness at Irene’s wedding, and then discover himself outsmarted by a woman in drag who saucily wished him, “Good night, Mr. Sherlock Holmes.”

Upon his appearance at her home the next morning, Holmes discovered Irene and her new husband had skipped the country, leaving behind her photograph (which eventually wound up as one of Holmes’s prized possessions) and a letter addressed to Sherlock stating that the King was safe from her and she had married “a better man than he.” Irene’s cleverness stayed with Holmes forever. After all, “The Woman,” as he referred to her after the case was the only woman able to best Sherlock Holmes at his own game.

It is my opinion that Irene Adler would be proud to discover that since her retirement from public life, she has gone on to serve as a character in many novels, television shows, comic books, movies, and even, manga (Japanese comics).

And to all Sherlockians everywhere, she will be forever enshrined as – The Woman!

To The Woman!

8. Quiz – Results

Story: *The Problem of Thor Bridge* prepared by Roger Burrows.

Possible total: 50 points

Winners were:

Rank	Name	Score	Prize
1.	Patrick Campbell	45	Holmes pastiche by June Thompson
2.	David Kellett	44	BBC audio cassette & CD of <i>Thor Bridge</i>
3.	Lawrence Reich	40	Paperback of <i>The Lost World</i>

The next quiz, based on *A Study in Scarlet (Part 1)*, will be prepared by Patrick Campbell.

9. Discussion on the Story and Interesting Asides

There are questions of credibility and expediency.

Carol Abramson has trouble believing there were so many scratches on the bridge.

Patrick was staying in England with a rabbi who was teaching him about Russian stamps. (We could tell this from the Cyrillic glue on Patrick's finger-tips and his newly-acquired skill in reading from right to left.)

Patrick cited a letter he had received from Isaac Asimov. He also recounted Asimov's chagrin at being named "The Incredible Worm" when he was inducted in the Baker Street Irregulars. He took this as an anti-Semitic gesture because it reminded him that when the Israelites were slaves, the Romans had them use a metal worm to split rocks.

Roger Burrows noted that, according to both versions of *The Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, the story was taken from an actual case on the continent. A man had flashed money in a pub, and was later found dead. The initial assessment was that he had been murdered, but the detective noticed a mark on the wooden bridge where the man had died, and ordered the river to be dragged, whereupon a weighted gun was found. Further investigation revealed that he had been in financial difficulties and his insurance would not have compensated his beneficiaries for suicide.

10. Fourth Toast – To Mrs. Hudson

by Maureen Anderson

A Pastime with Mrs. Hudson

A remarkable landlady who invites, protects and forgives,
A grudge she does but not hold.
Her long-suffering would shame most, from what I have been told.
After all, there are standards one must keep!

For her pastime and ours, the game is afoot.
Conan Doyle as set her life in motion, forever to live with unknown perils;
for Mrs. Hudson is a remarkable character that we all love,
A landlady, and woman - like no other.

Imagine the conversations at tea. Is there a bee in her bonnet? No, not she.
Invited guests partake in scones and scandals, spread with accounts of buttery
justice,
for a true account she will give, both of the scandal and of Mr. Holmes.
Would her guests permit their residents with such liberties?

After all, who would Mrs. Hudson be, had she not let to Mr. Sherlock Holmes?
They both must have some liberties, of goodly and/or dark pastimes;
For this is what makes their relationship live in our minds.
Sherlock's company as a lodger then is best for she,
As all thoughts and fancies are there for her to detect as well.
What will Mr. Holmes do to my residence next?

Sherlock Holmes tries Mrs. Hudson's patience, like no other; however he is company for Mrs. Hudson, an honest man and virtuous, while Mrs. Hudson looks the other way with regards to his unspeakable vices, A man who journeys on occasion, but who always returns to Mrs. Hudson,

A woman of **M**ODESTY
 REFINEMENT
 SPECIAL QUALITIES

A woman with **H**UMILITY
 UNDERSTANDING
a sweet **D**ISPOSITION
a woman who has a **S**TATELY TREAD
with **O**UTSTANDING QUALITIES
a woman who is **N**ICE

Please raise your glasses to a remarkable woman and a kind landlady of 221B Baker Street.

11. Jack's Books

Here is some info from Jack Anderson as a follow-up to the February meeting.

For those who were interested in the book *Familiar London: Memories of Times Past* which Jack brought to our February Show and Tell, here are the details:

Book number #139523 @ \$12.99

Available from Hampstead House Books Ltd., 80 Doncaster Ave., Thornhill, Ont. L3T 7S3. Web site: www.hhbooks.com.

Hampstead House sell remaindered books, many of them British, at reasonable prices. They can send you a free catalogue, which Jack believes they publish 6 times a year.

12. Fifth Toast – To the Society

by David Dowse

In this impromptu toast, David Dowse reminded us briefly that nearly a third of a century ago, The Bimetallic Question was founded in Montreal by Wilfrid de Freitas and David himself. What follows is an enlargement of David's toast, for the enlightenment of our newer members. Perhaps in the future, we will be in a position to provide our readers and members with a more complete story of the events leading up to the creation of our society.

The gestation period of the society took place over several months during which Wilfrid and David traveled up the road to Toronto to attend meetings of that city's Sherlockian society, The Bootmakers. As the poets know, passion can wane when stretched beyond its reasonable limits, which in this case could mean driving on Highway #401 more than once every 10 years. Before that could happen, the two pioneers decided that in order to keep the flames of dedication hopping, a home-grown Sherlockian society would be in order. Thus, from inauspicious beginnings, our own organization emerged. We are not sure who was the Mama and who was the Papa, but between Wilfrid and David, the child was born. Next, it needed a name. Something unique, something that would connect the Canon with Canada.

The answer was not long in coming, for lo! and behold, in “The Bruce-Partington Plans,” Holmes explains that Mycroft has a key position in the British Government and gives the following example: if a minister needed information on a point that concerned the Navy, India, *Canada*, and the *bi-metallic question*, only Mycroft could say how each affected the other.

Since the bi-metallic question concerns whether it is possible to have currencies of two different metals in circulation at the same time (e.g. gold and silver), may we attribute the creation of Canada’s toonie to Sir Arthur Conan Doyle? Not very likely. Today, and for a long time past, Canada’ coins have of necessity been comprised of one or more metals giving rise to the conviction in our Society that the country is one big bimetallic – and even trimetallic – question.

13. Next Meeting’s Toast Presenters

To the Master	-	Nitika Dosaj
To Dr. Watson	-	Paul Billette
To the Woman	-	Roger Burrows
To Mrs. Hudson	-	Wilfrid de Freitas
To the Society	-	David Dowse

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 2nd, 2011, 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>